

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

BELONGING-IN-DIFFERENCE: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN
ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BELONGING-IN-DIFFERENCE:
NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY IN ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

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Through the critical discourse analysis of Anglophone Caribbean literature as a polyrhythmic performance, this research sets out to examine the claim that, in a world in a state of constant flux, emerging Caribbean voices are offering a challenging perspective on how to negotiate identity away from the binary constructs of centre and margin. It argues that the Caribbean writer, as a self-conscious producer of alternative discourses, offers an innovative and transcultural vision of the self.

This research consists of three stages which integrate critical discourse and literary analysis with colonial/postcolonial and socio-cultural theories. Firstly, it investigates the power of language as an operation of discourse through which to apprehend reality within a binary system of representation. It then examines how the concept of discourse, as a site of contestation and meaning, enables the elaboration of a Caribbean counter-discourse. Finally, it explores the role, within the Caribbean text, of literary techniques such as narrative fragmentation, irony, dialogism, intertextuality, ambivalence and the carnivalesque to challenge, disrupt the established order and offer new perspectives of being.

My study of Anglophone Caribbean texts highlights the power of language and the authority of the 'book' as subtle, insidious tools of domination and colonisation. It also demonstrates how, by allowing hitherto marginalised voices to write themselves into being, Caribbean writers enable linear narratives and monolithic visions of reality to be contested and other perspectives of understanding and of meaning to be uncovered. It exposes the plurality and the interweaving of discourses in the Caribbean text as a liberating, dynamic force which enables new subject positions and realities to emerge along the lines of similarity and difference.

At a time when the issue of identity is one of the central problems in the world today, the research argues that this celebration of the plural, the fluid and the ambivalent offers new ways of being away from the stultifying perspective of essentialist forms.

Key words: Caribbean Literature, Language as discourse, negotiating identity, transculturality, postcoloniality, Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, Andrea Levy

BELONGING-IN-DIFFERENCE: Negotiating Identity in Anglophone Caribbean Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

I
must be given words to shape my name
to the syllables of trees
I
must be given words to refashion futures
like a healer's hand...
It is not
it is not
it is not enough
to be pause, to be hole
to be void, to be silent
to be semicolon, to be semicolony

Edward Brathwaite (1967: 224-225)

Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed, I become centred. What I've thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be the representative modern experience! This is coming home with a vengeance!... I have been puzzled by the fact that young black people in London today are marginalized, fragmented, unenfranchized, disadvantaged and dispersed. And yet, they look as if they own the territory. Somehow, they too, in spite of everything, are centred, in place, without much material support, it's true, but nevertheless, they occupy a new kind of space at the centre.

Stuart Hall, 1987: 44

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my
tongue
from the root of the old
one
A new one has sprung

Grace Nichols (1992:87)

1.1 The Caribbean novel as polyrhythmic performance

The Caribbean, Lamming states, is unique in the sense that it is essentially a 'historical phenomenon', in which peoples from a variety of linguistic, geographical and cultural backgrounds were forced into contact and made to find new ways of relating, of working out interconnections among themselves (2011). This is a view also taken up years earlier by C.L.R James who emphasises that, more than any other group in the world, the peoples of the Caribbean are 'constructed by history' (1969: 46). It is a history haunted by the ghostly figure of Columbus, whose 'scraping, rusted anchor' has left in its wake a Caribbean self with 'locked teeth' and a 'sore on his shin still unhealed' (Walcott, 1990: 9-10). The explorer's mistaken 'discovery' of the West Indies unleashed the ruthless annihilation of an entire indigenous population, the trauma of the Middle Passage, the atrocities of slavery on the Plantation, the tragedy of the severance from ancestral lands and traditions and the imposition of an alien language and culture. Since that brutal encounter, the story of the Caribbean and of its peoples has been one of flux, of movement, of plurality of discourses. This has also placed matters of language, belonging and identity at the centre of the preoccupations of the writers of the Caribbean diaspora who, as Gikandi argues, are 'forced to redefine themselves in relation to this moment' (1992: 3). In his study of Caribbean literature, *Writing in Limbo*, Gikandi sets out to examine the anxiety and ambivalence such an event has engendered in Caribbean writers and to chart their attempts at representing and resisting a European narrative of history 'inaugurated by Columbus and the modern moment' (2).

Whilst matters of Caribbean dislocation and displacement have thus received much attention in the field of literary post-colonial studies, little consideration has as yet been given to Hall's contention that Caribbean people have an 'important message for the world about how to negotiate identity' (Hall, 1995: 4). This is of particular relevance since, with the resurgence of questions of ethnicity and of nationalism, the issue of identity is one of the central problems that the world faces today. This study sets out to interrogate such a gap and explore, as its main research question, how, within the context of Britain today, the Anglophone Caribbean literary text can offer a liberating and transformative paradigm of identity away from what are, for Harris, the 'monolithic callouses and complacencies' of the Western

articulation (1981: 44). In order to address such a question, I set out to investigate, within the context of the Anglophone Caribbean novel, a number of what I consider to be closely related issues:

1. How, through the power of the imagination, a Caribbean narrative of a hitherto silenced past challenges the Western articulation and what role it plays, if any, in the recovery of a Caribbean voice and sense of self.
2. The power of language, seen from the perspective of an operation of discourse, as a tool of enslavement, of liberation and of transformation.
3. How the use of cross-rhythms, of interweaving of narratives and discourses, of crossing of borders at the heart of the Anglophone Caribbean novel challenges an essentialist, traditional vision of reality and identity. How this enables a transcultural perspective on identity to be envisioned.

Benitez-Rojo uses Chaos theory to explain the apparent paradox that, he believes, characterizes the 'Caribbean cultural machine' (1996:18). On the one hand, we are offered the image of a meta-archipelago in a state of total disorder, 'saturated in messages', with no obvious boundaries or centre (4). On the other hand, he argues, chaos, within the context of its new scientific perspective, its new 'way of reading the concepts of chance and necessity, of particularity and universality', implies some sort of order, of basic patterns in the form of 'dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally' (2). In the 'repeating island' of the Caribbean, polyrhythm, Benitez-Rojo argues, seems to best define this 'certain way' of being of the 'Peoples of the Sea'. Such a vision highlights a move away from the traditional, antagonistic binary oppositions of centre and margin, of a Western 'power machine' versus a Caribbean 'resistance machine' (28). It suggests instead an interweaving of influences, of perspectives, of currents and of relations, for every machine, Benitez-Rojo contends, is a 'conjunction of machines coupled together' (6).¹ As rhythms are 'cut through by other rhythms, which are cut by still other rhythms' (18), new

¹ He uses here Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of the machine which, he writes, can be pictured 'in terms of flow and interruption' (1992:6).

connections are made which open upon ‘unexpected corridors’ (3).² The Caribbean then becomes a place of possibility where, through the medium of polyrhythm, artistic improvisation - in the form of writing, dance and music – offers the opportunity for submerged histories to be given a voice and for the ‘blind violence’ engendered by ‘slavery, despotic colonialism, and the Plantation’ to be defused (23). Polyrhythmic performance becomes the site of contestation of the order and control, of fixed meanings which the Empire has tried to impose upon the heterogeneous Caribbean. It offers a new perspective in which ‘difference’ in the shape of ‘a critical coexistence of rhythms’ is to be seen as a dynamic, and not a debilitating or an inhibiting force:

This is why the Caribbean text, to transcend its own cloister, must avail itself of these models in search of roots that might lead, at least symbolically, to an extratextual point of social nonviolence and psychic reconstitution of the Self. The routes, iridescent and transitory as a rainbow, cross at all points the network of binary dynamics extended by the West. The result is a text that speaks of a polyrhythmic ensemble whose central binary rhythm is decentered when the performer (writer/reader) and the text try to escape ‘in a certain kind of way’ (Benitez-Rojo, 1996: 28).

As the Caribbean’s presence is seen to cover ‘the map of the world history’s contingencies’, Benitez-Rojo argues that the time has come for a ‘rereading of the Caribbean’, since ‘the link that really counts is the one made by the Caribbean machine...to the vast collisions of races and cultures that humankind has seen’ (5). His main emphasis is on Hispanophone Caribbean texts, but it is the aim of this research to respond to his invitation from the standpoint of the Anglophone Caribbean text as polyrhythmic performance within the context of difference as highlighted above.

Torres-Vaillant, in his study of ‘Caribbean Poetics’, argues strongly for a homogeneous ‘regionally unified and coherent’ Caribbean literary aesthetics along the unifying tropes of language, religion and history that would bestow wholeness on the area (1997:xi; 37). Like Tobias Döring, I am critical of such a panoptic vision, which, as he argues, appears to be guilty of the same charge of essentialism that Said has levelled at the Orientalist project (Döring, 2002:13). It also fails, Döring further contends, to acknowledge the pressure of narrative which, as Said maintains, enables

² He gives the example of the cult of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre which can be viewed as essentially Cuban but also can be re-read, without negating the first reading, as ‘a meta-archipelagic text, a meeting or confluence of marine flowings that connect the Niger with the Mississippi, the China Sea with the Orinoco, the Parthenon with a fried food stand in an alley in Paramaribo’ (16).

other horizons, other fields of meaning and frames of reference to disturb the singular, essentialist vision (1978: 240). Döring stresses instead a Caribbean poetics 'engaged with a rhetoric of transfer and constant change', of 'open-ended cultural interaction' which he uses in his work to chart the 'intellectual lines that connect some Caribbean writing with English writing' (2002: 6). I share such a perspective but my aim in this research is to examine how, through the power of language as an operation of discourse, a re-imagining of a hitherto silenced Caribbean past, and an interweaving of discourses and a criss-crossings of narratives, the Anglophone Caribbean text sets out to challenge the notion of fixed and stable identities.

I am aware that my choice of Anglophone Caribbean texts to the exclusion of others will encounter the criticism of those who argue for the need of a wide-ranging spectrum of research, in a move away from the Euro-centric and English dominance of the field of postcolonial studies (Loomba, 1998: 255-258).³ It is a decision which has been strongly influenced by the interest I developed in such texts whilst working in the field of 'multicultural' education in Britain, and which was the inspiration for undertaking this research. At the same time, the specifics of the region should not be neglected and the question of the location of the field of study is open to debate. In support of such a perspective, I have taken note of the criticism levelled at the 'comprador intelligentsia'⁴, who stand accused of producing a globalising, homogenising discourse analysis which downplays local specificities as well as the plurality of colonial experiences. It fails to recognise or acknowledge, it is claimed, that the colonial experience and the opposition to Western hegemony are far from homogeneous throughout the colonised world. The danger of this universalising and of this rejection of cultural relativity is that it 'relocates the impulses for change as everywhere and nowhere' (Sangari, 1987: 183-4). In so doing, it risks silencing the native, local voice of resistance and disregarding the 'different historical formation of subjects and ways of seeing' (id).

My use of the term 'Caribbean' in preference to 'West Indian' throughout the thesis is dictated by its counter-hegemonic undertones since, Norman Girvan claims, the concept of Caribbean was 'reinvented' by 'native scholars as expressions of

³ See also Antor (2000).

⁴ Appiah (1991:348). He accuses post-colonial theorists of behaving like the post-colonial bourgeoisie in the economic field, like buyers (compradors) 'who specialised in the handling of foreign foods, produced nothing themselves, and were thus essentially parasitic' (explanation from 'An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory', Childs and Williams: 1997). See also Parry (1997: 3-21).

intellectual and political resistance' (2001:4).⁵ My choice of Britain as the location for the writers in this study has been on the one hand dictated by my own position in the country as outsider / insider and on the other hand echoes that of Stein's (2004: xv).⁶ He uses Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone' in which she stresses the 'interactive and improvisational dimensions of the colonial encounters' to emphasize how subjects are 'constituted in and by their relations to each other' (1992: 6-7). In this context, Stein argues, black Britain stands distinct from other post-colonial cultures in the sense that 'it lays claim to post-colonial and to British cultures' not outside but '*inside Britain*' (Stein, 2004: xv, emphasis in the text). This enables 'a new kind of space at the centre' to be imagined, as Hall asserts in one of the epigraphs in the research (1987: 44). Stein takes what he perceives as the transformative potential 'inscribed in and induced by' a black British Literature - which he relates to the Bildungsroman genre - as the platform from which to change the way 'we conceptualize black British literature', post-imperial British society and its cultural institutions (2004: xiii-xv). I use it as a way of inscribing my three main texts, *Crossing the River* by Caryl Phillips (1993), *Small Island* by Andrea Levy (2004), and *Disappearance* by David Dabydeen (1993), within Benitez-Rojo's vision of a polyrhythmic artistic performance, as a vision for alternative discourses of belonging and identity to those of the Western articulation. My aim is to examine the way in which all three novels allow us to consider how, through the interplay and the interweaving of British and Caribbean diasporan horizons, new realities and subject positions are allowed to emerge away from the binaries of centre and margin. I set out to explore how, as they celebrate ambiguity, that 'puzzling grey area', they remind us that 'those old loyalties and certainties are, in our modern world, subject to fluidity and transformation irrespective of what the authorities above us ... might have us believe' (Phillips, 2003: 3). In this way, I want to investigate how they attest to the destabilising and transformative power of narrative which, as Said writes, is:

the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision ... it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective,

⁵ See also Donnel and Lawson Welsh (1996:6) in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. They write that they have elected to use the 'term 'Caribbean' in preference to West Indian (a term used to differentiate former and current colonies) as it is more suggestive of a literature freed from the (re-) centring tendencies of a colonial and Commonwealth framework', a view with which I concur.

⁶ I was born and educated in France but after my university years, I have lived and worked professionally in the United Kingdom.

consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision'.⁷

Whilst the three texts follow in the Caribbean tradition of Lamming's *Water with Berries* and *The Emigrants* (1954) or Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), I look into the way that they offer us a discourse of alterity, no longer from the condition of exile and that of a 'writing back' to a European legacy, but from that of an entanglement, of an intertwining of narratives. It is my contention that such a perspective enables new notions of meaning and being to be imagined away from traditional, confining and essentialist forms.

I chose writers who could offer Caribbean-British perspectives of identity from differing cultural, gender and first / second generation standpoints. Caryl Phillips, described as a 'Master of Ambiguity' (Ledent, 2005) is a writer of mixed ancestry who, with his parents, migrated to England in 1958 at the age of four months from the small Caribbean of St Kitts. Central to his fiction is the exploration of belonging, identity and memory which pertain to the diasporic condition. The sense of displacement and ambivalence which haunts the Caribbean self, and which he has tried to capture throughout his work, is perhaps best illustrated at the beginning of *New World Order*. Whilst he acknowledges that Africa, the Caribbean, Britain and the United States are the 'ambiguous hand' that history has dealt him and that has made him, each of these places is at one and the same time a site of inclusion and of exclusion: 'I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place' (2001:1- 4). In a modern world in a constant state of flux and struggling to accommodate its rich mosaic of identities and cultures, fiction holds a special place, he claims. It is 'plurality in action' and, as it 'relishes ambiguity', it has both a destabilising and a transformative power, for it has the capacity to 'wrench us out of our ideological burrows and force us to engage with a world which is clumsily transforming itself' (Phillips, 2011:16).

David Dabydeen who, in 1969, arrived in England as an immigrant from Guyana at the age of fourteen, is another 'voice of the crossing' who also bears witness to the fluid, liberating, creative dimension of the Caribbean diaspora and

⁷ Said (1978: 240). See also Antor (1996: 83) who writes that literary texts engage us in 'a process of negotiation and renegotiation of old and new patterns and interpretations and thus make us aware of new ways of looking at as well as new ways of making sense of the contingent world' and that they 'involve us in intersubjective dialogue'.

identity.⁸ The ancestors who ‘lie like texts waiting to be written’ (Dabydeen, 1988: 14) are not the African slaves of the Middle Passage but those ‘coolies’ who crossed the *kala pani*⁹ into indentureship from India to the Caribbean to work on plantations after the abolition of slavery. Though keen to point out that echoes of the African experience resound throughout his vast body of work, a ‘continuum of slave and indenture experience’ (Birbalsingh, 1997:187), Dabydeen is also concerned that the Indian dimension in the Caribbean should not be ‘relegated to a footnote’ (1987: 10). Writing himself into the Caribbean-English textual landscape is a means to break out of the cycle of non-entity, obscurity and disappearance which haunts the Indo-Caribbean psyche in Guyana: ‘living in England, the landscape for me is a literary landscape ... The Guyana landscape ... has a terror, the terror of the unwritten’ (Dawes, 1997: 218).¹⁰ He wishes at the same time to insert ‘his blackness’ on the English literary scene (Binder, 1997: 164), delving deep into the fragmented archives of cultural memory, revising the myths, ‘tearing up the pages of Prospero’s magic book and re-pasting it in his own order, by his own method, and for his own purpose’ (Dabydeen, 1990: 28).

Andrea Levy was born in 1956 in England, of parents who were part of that first part of the new wave of immigrants from the Caribbean arriving in England on board SS Empire Windrush in 1948. Alienated in school from the world of the 19th century literature whose ‘codes’ she failed to comprehend, it was only in her mid-thirties that she understood, whilst reading *The Women’s Room* by Marilyn French, that a work of fiction can ‘change the way you see something or the way you feel’ (Levy, 2005a: 2). As she then started writing, all her work, Levy declares, has been as a voyage of discovery from her position as a black British-born woman, ‘both the child and the orphan of Empire’, in which she has tried to explore and understand herself and the rest of her fellow human beings (Greer, 2004: 4). Her writing is about the second-generation female protagonist’s search for a voice, an identity and a space within the England of her birth which all too often fails to acknowledge her presence. It has been a way to inscribe herself into the history of Britain, of ‘making the invisible visible and trying to put back into history the people who got left out of it’

⁸ See Dennis’s and Khan’s ‘Voices of the Crossing’ (2000).

⁹ The Kala Pani (black water) is a term associated with the Andamans, a colonial penal settlement in the Indian Ocean, a place where the enemies of the British Empire were severely punished. It symbolises exile, isolation, oppression, social ostracism and caste defilement. It was also seen as a source of dissolution of identity as crossing the ‘black water’ meant the end of the reincarnation cycle as the travellers found themselves cut off from the regenerating waters of the Ganges. British Guyana was the first Caribbean territory to receive indentured labour in 1938.

¹⁰ Dabydeen in Dawes (1997:218).

(Levy, 2005a: 4). As she writes in a thought-provoking essay in which she explores what is for her the painful question of identity:

When you look at family trees – anybody's family tree, people's individual stories, not the winner-takes-all- history of nations – the question of identity becomes very complicated. It would be nice and simple if we were all pure... Wouldn't it be nice if we could say that all Africans are black and all English are white?... But it is not like that. Any history book will tell you that England has never been an exclusive club, but rather a hybrid nation. The effects of the British Empire were personal as well as political. And as the sun has finally set on the Empire, we are now having to face up to all of these realities'...I am English. Born and bred...not born-and-bred-with-a-very-long-life-of-white-ancestors-directly-descended-from-Anglo-Saxons ... England is the only society I only know and truly understand...being English is my birthright. England is my home. An eccentric place where sometimes I love being English. (Levy, 2000: 4-5)

1.2 Similarity and continuity, difference and rupture

In a Caribbean world fractured by the ignominies of the history of conquests, of the Middle Passage, of slavery, of the dominance of the Western cultural power, the quest for identity, as I have already argued, has always been and continues to remain at the forefront of the preoccupations of Caribbean intellectuals, and one of the main subjects of Caribbean artistic production. It is defined by Fanon as a 'passionate research' for some 'splendid era' beyond 'self-contempt, resignation and abjuration' that would reconcile the peoples of the Caribbean in regard to themselves and to others (1967a: 169). Such a statement, Hall contends, prompts us to enquire into the nature of this research which, as he suggests, drives a new cinema of the Caribbean (1993: 224), but also, I shall argue, the Caribbean writing which is the subject of my study. Hall locates Caribbean identity at the intersection of three key processes which he describes as survival in the form of retention of old customs, assimilation, and Africa and modernity (1995:7).¹¹ He contends that, in spite of the enforced break from and silencing of African culture, some 'never pure' and often 'unrecognized' links to the African homeland have nevertheless survived and are to be found in oral traditions and in the rhythms, the rituals and all those forms of expressive culture which 'allowed men and women to survive the trauma of slavery'

¹¹ In an earlier essay, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Hall pursues the same theme, but writes instead, borrowing a metaphor from Césaire and Senghor, of three 'presences': 'Présence Africaine', 'Présence Européenne' and 'Présence Américaine' (1990: 230-237). I feel that the terms 'key processes' better reflect the sense of movement and transformation which is the crux of Hall's argument whereas the word 'présence' is, to my mind, more suggestive of a feeling of stasis.

(7). The power of such a reconnection to Africa, the ‘missing term’, to the ‘great Aporia’ at the heart of Caribbean self, lies, Hall maintains, in its ability to impose ‘an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation’ (1990: 224).

If there are points of similarity to be found within Caribbean identity, another of its hallmarks is also that of a profound discontinuity with the imposition of an alien culture, of other sets of knowledges and representations by the Western cultural power. Not only were the Caribbean peoples constructed as different and Other, as Said argues in *Orientalism*, but as consequent attempts on the part of the Caribbean colonised at imitation and assimilation fail, they were also made to see and experience themselves as Others (225). Excluded from all participation, ‘dissected’, ‘fixed’ by white eyes, ‘the only real eyes’ which ‘cut away slices of (their) reality’, as Fanon so powerfully demonstrates (1986:116), they can only feel a profound sense of alienation and despair, a splitting of the self. Crucially though for the purpose of this study, this experience of brutal rupture within the Caribbean self also requires that a redefinition, a ‘cultural revolution of identity’ be envisioned (Hall, 1995:9). No longer can it be viewed as a fixed essence which binds members of a group together and provides them with a strong sense of oneness, of plenitude and belonging. Instead, Caribbean identities, Hall asserts, have to be viewed within the context of a ‘dialogic relationship’ between a vector of similarity and continuity and that of difference and rupture (1990: 226-7). Identity, far from reasserting a forever immutable view of the past, now needs to be acknowledged as a shifting concept, a ‘positioning’, subject to the ‘play’ of history, culture and power, to be found not ‘outside but within representation’ (225; 237).

Nor could any study of Caribbean literature be complete without reference to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the Négritude movements whose role in reaffirming a Caribbean identity away from the vision imposed upon it by the imperial centre cannot be disregarded. Their advocacy of a spiritual and symbolic return to Africa, a celebration of its history, traditions and beliefs, and a pride in Black African identities has been the subject of much controversy and is addressed in various ways by the Caribbean writers in this research. Nevertheless, it is important to note that they were instrumental in stirring in the colonised from the African diaspora a desire to throw away the shackles of colonialism as they set out to challenge the claims of white superiority intrinsic to the colonial discourse, and out of this new-found knowledge, to reconstruct their shattered identities. Refuting the

charge of essentialism which has often been levelled at them, Hall maintains that they did assert their own voices, not from the position of a ‘marginal experience confined and immured in the past’, nor ‘outside or excluded from the discourse of modernity’ but from within ‘the heart of modernism itself’ (Hall, 1995:11). Most importantly for the purpose of this research, the early anti-imperialist stance taken by the writers of the Négritude movement performed, as Elleke Boehmer argues, a ‘double process of cleaving’ (1995: 105-6).¹² On the one hand, ‘a cleaving from’, whereby it is now possible for the oppressed colonised to imagine themselves moving away from the narrow definitions, the debilitating images of the colonialist discourse. On the other hand, a ‘cleaving to’ which allowed them, through texts, to make use of the power inherent in their mastery of the European language, to take control of their destiny and to release the self from the yoke of colonialist narrow definitions (id). Language thus becomes, as Wilde contends, ‘a way of releasing the self and thereby making the phenomenal world ... the scene of purposeful action’ (1981:99). It heralds another kind of modernity, a ‘vernacular modernity’, that of a hybrid culture, and the only way in which ‘Africa can be relived and rediscovered’, as Hall claims (1995: 11). It is a view of modernity in which all its participants need to move away from all forms of fixity, from the enslaving and silencing narratives of a single vision of history, and acknowledge instead the richness and complexity of their cultural heritage:

The diaspora experience is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference...Young black cultural practitioners and critics in Britain are increasingly coming to acknowledge and explore in their work this ‘diaspora aesthetic’ and its formations in the post-colonial experience (Hall, 1990: 235; emphasis in the text).

Within such a perspective, it is worth noting however, that, in a surprising omission for somebody who abhors all forms of exclusion, Hall fails to acknowledge the Indian presence as another vital constituent of Caribbean identity, as Dabydeen powerfully demonstrates in this study. Such an oversight seems to confirm concerns expressed by some scholars that the Caribbean might have ‘hitherto been heavily

¹² See also Foucault (1982: 36-37), who writes that such acts of dispersal open possibilities of ‘reanimating already existing themes, of rousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games’.

weighted towards the *African* elements of Caribbean experience and cultural inheritance' (Welsh, 1997: 31). Dabydeen himself argues that there appears to exist 'a kind of apartheid' which seems to contradict the claim of a rich tapestry of peoples and cultures which the Caribbean purports to be.¹³ Dabydeen's work, as we shall see in chapter five, is an attempt to redress what he believes is a disturbing and dangerous lacuna.

1.3 Belonging-in-difference¹⁴

This research also inscribes itself within a debate about 'the burden of representation' placed on Black British writers and the place of a black British literature in present-day Britain. In a provocative essay, the poet and critic Kwame Dawes argues that inherent in their position as hybrid subjects lies the danger that these writers are seen as abdicating from political commitment and abnegating social and moral responsibility towards their Black counterparts in British society. Dawes interrogates present-day Black British literature and castigates some young, black British writers for having turned their back on a history which, he feels, has 'served to shape what they are doing now' (2005: 280). He faults them for having eschewed 'the myth as a framing device' which, he believes, would return them 'to an essential order, a kind of primordial sense of self' (269-270). He is particularly critical of writers such as Fred d'Aguiar and Caryl Phillips for their reluctance to 'tie' themselves to a small segment of a deeply marginalised black British populace. He accuses them of choosing instead to create 'an international, transcultural Blackness that is part of a grand illusion of Pan-Atlantic existence', and of 'world-wearing their rootlessness with grace and cleverness' (265). He is also very dismissive of novelists such as Andrea Levy who, he feels, have become fixated on the 'homeness of Britain' (266). He faults her for failing to demonstrate, to his mind, any sense of

¹³ Dabydeen in an interview with Dawes (1997: 203). His remarks were prompted, he relates, by an encounter between one of his students and Brathwaite in which the poet had expressed the view that 'the Asian presence has to make itself felt' for, he had continued, 'they cannot sit and, you know, be invisible and non-contributing'.

¹⁴ I borrowed this expression, which I also use for the title of my research, from Stuart Scott who, in his essay on Stuart Hall's 'dialogic' ethics, argues about the importance of Hall's message for the 'Dark Times' in which we live. All of Hall's work, he asserts, is '*founded in and shaped by* responsiveness to alterity, to the opacities of otherness, and to the unavoidable risks and ineluctable uncertainties haunting any dialogical encounter, and any hope of belonging-in-difference' (2005:2; emphasis in the text). I feel that this best describes the ambitions of the writers studied in my research.

connectedness to her Caribbean or African heritage, but for choosing instead to seek to ‘redefine the national character of Britain’ and her place within it (266-7):

Ignoring that tradition amounts to a rather foolhardy assumption that western cultural norms are not as pervasive, dominating, and eventually insidious as they have always been to these writers who recognise in themselves a connection to something else. (Dawes, 1999: 280)¹⁵

Responses to what some writers denounce as the ‘tyranny of representation’ and Andrea Levy’s own assertion that she stands ‘proud to be part of the Black British canon’ (Levy, 2009: 338) call to the fore a number of questions: should the black writer inscribe her/himself within a particular tradition, following on the footsteps of eminent figures of the literary postcolonial canon? Should aesthetic considerations take precedence as Fred D’Aguiar passionately argues when he declares that ‘there is only literature with its usual variants of class, sex, race, time and place’ and that creativity ‘cannot be contained for long in any fashion or vice-hold which the process of naming and compartmentalising seeks to promote’? (1989: 106, 109) What of the term black? Does it need redefinition or even abolition within the context of a variety of cultural perspectives and traditions it claims to embrace? Whose black voice is heard and by whom? Who and what is British?¹⁶ Indeed, as Bhabha himself observes, ‘caught in-between a ‘nativist’, even nationalist, atavism and a postcolonial metropolitan assimilation, the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem’ (2004:321).

In a seminal essay, *New Ethnicities*, Stuart Hall argues that ‘black’ was first used in Britain to express a common experience, across ethnic and cultural difference, of marginalisation and racism. As such, it provided a ‘singular and unifying framework’ with which to demand rights to representation and to challenge

¹⁵ In a similar vein, Torres-Saillant critiques all those Caribbean writers who ‘pay little heed to the principle articulated by... Selvon who posited that the West Indian writer had no greater responsibility than that of making his country and his people known accurately to the rest of the world’ (2005:42). He also castigates those writers who have achieved global recognition by reneging ‘their cultural specificity as speakers grounded in the Caribbean experience’ (id).

¹⁶ Writers such as Monica Ali and Zadie Smith strongly denounce demands that their writing should be classified within the Black British literary tradition. Monica Ali rejects the idea that her writing of *Brick Lane* should be seen as positioning herself within the Asian community and insists that she ‘wrote out of character’. She adds: ‘There is a sort of tyranny of representation. James Baldwin’s phrase is still in force and the irony is that, you know, fiction succeeds to the extent that it is particular, not representative...I think it is related to the growth of identity politics’ (2007). Zadie Smith similarly ‘defended herself against the tendency of reviewers to locate her novel in a Black literary tradition, which she felt reduced her to the role of spokesperson on issues of race and ethnicity’ (Procter, 2006: 102). See also an analysis of these positions in Fernandez Irene Pérez (2009: 145-148).

the negative images of the dominant Eurocentric ideology with the ‘counter-position of a ‘positive’ black imagery’ (Hall, 1988: 266). However, the essentialist, hegemonic perspective of the term ‘black’ finds itself challenged at present with the diversity of subjective positions, cultural and social experiences it is meant to represent (268). Also, by only defining itself against a monolithic white perspective, it creates a system of fixed binary relations with the notion of race at its centre. Replacing the ‘bad old essential white subject’ with the new essentially ‘good black subject’ is no longer tenable, Hall asserts (266). Instead, quoting Gramsci, he calls for a move from a ‘war of manoeuvre’ to a ‘war of position’, and for the concept of ethnicity to be rearticulated. It will need to abandon its white and black essentialist discourses of race and nation for one which:

acknowledges the place of history, language, and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes that have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. (Hall: 271)¹⁷

It will be an ethnicity which is not premised on discourses of fixity and permanence, of unalterable oppositions, of exclusion practices, but one which recognises that no one group can have ‘the monopoly on virtue’ (Kureishi, 1985). As cultural difference is thus recognised, it makes the ‘structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process’ and allows for the elaboration of a ‘Third Space’ in which ‘even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew’ (Bhabha: 1988: 208).

I set out to explore Phillips’s, Levy’s and Dabydeen’s texts from the platform of such a vision of identity and ethnicity and along those vectors of ‘similarity’/‘difference’, ‘continuity’/‘rupture’ which Hall has identified as characteristic of Caribbean identities. I also aim to demonstrate in the course of this research that, far from denying their Caribbean heritage as Dawes suggests, Phillips, Levy and Dabydeen celebrate it in all its rich diversity. I examine how, through the ambivalence contained in the plurality of its discourses, through its celebration of ‘difference’, the recognition rather than the erosion of the necessary presence of the

¹⁷ This is the view also expressed by Bhabha (2004: 7) when he writes that the ‘very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition’.

other within the self and the self within the other, the Caribbean text can derive the energy it needs to displace and challenge notions of margin and centre, of homogeneous narratives, of cultural unity and fixity. At the same time, I also consider how this opens up a space in which, through a trans-cultural encounter and dialogue (Phillips, 2004:8), a ‘coming-to-terms with our ‘routes’ rather than a ‘return to roots’ (Hall, 1996:4) is seen as a necessary step towards a reconstruction of Caribbean-British and British identities within the context of a ‘belonging-in-difference’.

1.4 Language as operation of discourse

As he reflects upon his first novel *In the Castle of My Skin*, Lamming is all too aware that Columbus’s enterprise, this ‘sad’ but also ‘hopeful epic of discovery and migration’ (Lamming, 1984: 17) is a defining moment in the construction of the Caribbean self. For the Caribbean of his generation, it is no longer the brutality of the experience of slavery but the tyranny of a hierarchical discourse which fixes reality in its own image and, which, in alienating the Other, becomes the ‘breeding ground for every uncertainty of the self’:

It was not a physical cruelty. Indeed the colonial experience of my generation was wholly without violence...The Caribbean endured a different kind of subjugation. It was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation. (Lamming, 1991: xxxix)¹⁸

Colonialism has engendered a fractured Caribbean society that finds itself caught in between ‘White instruction and Black imagination’ and this, Lamming claims, creates deep anxieties and ‘raises difficult problems of language and values’ (1991: xxxvii). This, I argue, inscribes this research firmly within a vision of language as an operation of discourse. As Torres-Saillant contends, language is ‘among the major paradigms that permit the study of Caribbean literature as an object of inquiry’ (1999: 70).

¹⁸ See also Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986: 9) who writes: ‘Language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation’. This is also a view held by the colonisers themselves: in 1492, the Bishop of Avila had presented Isabella of Castile with the first grammar of a modern European language. When she asked: ‘What is it for?’, he replied: ‘Language is the perfect instrument of empire’. (Quoted by Hanke, 1959: 8).

The world, Lamming writes, ‘is not really the creation of individual wills’ (1991: xxxv), thus rejecting a Cartesian vision of the subject as the source of language, meaning and action. This research aligns itself with such a view and, whilst it distances itself from the French linguist Saussure’s theory of a unitary language and an individual speech, it nevertheless recognises the pioneering and revolutionary aspect of his work in the field of language. In particular, it embraces Saussure’s questioning of the authority of the subject as source of meaning and his rejection of an essentialist notion of language. His stress on the relational, arbitrary and differential nature of language is, I contend, of notable significance for the purpose of this study as it paves the way for a conception of language, not as an abstract, disembodied linguistic system, but as an operation of discourse, deeply embedded in social relationships and practices.¹⁹

In a reversal of Cartesian philosophy, language is therefore seen not to reflect actuality but instead to order thought, to give shape and expression to ideas, to our conceptions of our selves and of our reality. Thus, far from the subject creating language, as humanists maintained, language is seen to construct him/her, as entering the world of language is the point at which we are constituted as conscious, thinking subjects.²⁰ Furthermore, as words and images are now seen to reflect particular social, cultural and historical perspectives, language, from this particular viewpoint, is to be perceived as serving ideological, not objective functions, a point central to the study of colonialism. Within this perspective, I argue, a critical study of language, a prising apart of the sign will help the Caribbean writer highlight whose realities are privileged and whose are suppressed, and how both come into being:

What we can salvage from structuralism at its best, I think, is the descent it encourages the serious arts to make into ‘inarticulate’ layers of community beneath static systems whose ‘articulacy’ is biased. The ‘inarticulate’ layers may be equated with variables of the unconscious. (Harris, 1981:132)

¹⁹ Saussure himself argues that it takes a speech community to establish the relations between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, to confer meaning upon the signs and, as such, language is a social phenomenon: ‘Language is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a special body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty’ (1974 : 9).

²⁰ See Lacan (1977: 106): ‘The psychoanalytic experience has rediscovered in man the imperative of the Word as the law that has formed him in its image. It manipulates the poetic function of language to give to his desire its symbolic mediation. May that experience enable you to understand at last that it is in the gift of speech that all the reality of its effects resides; for it is by way of this gift that all reality has come to man and it is by its continued act that he maintains it’.

Lacan has explored the role of the unconscious within the realm of language as key to the construction of our picture of the world and his findings need also to be examined in the light of this research. Lacan highlights how the entry into language is a space of crisis and of alienation and is first enacted in early infancy through the symbolic event of ‘le stade du miroir’ (‘the mirror stage’), the identification with our specular image, often reinforced by an adult other who validates it further. Though it is misrecognition, subjectivity, he claims, is constructed from this misperception, this fantasy of wholeness and mastery (Lacan, 1977: 1-7). Lacan also argues that the acquisition of language is also marked by a deep sense of loss, a lack (‘a manque’) as it demands separation from the mother. The encounter with the other in language is thus accompanied by a longing for the sense of plenitude and completeness formerly experienced, for ‘desire takes shape in the margin in which demand is torn apart from need’ (311). This role of representation and the sense of lack in the construction of self-identity are themes that have particular force for postcolonial theorists and writers of the Caribbean diaspora, as will be exemplified in the texts in this research.²¹

Furthermore, having acquired the position of speaking subjects, we are then implicated in and governed by the laws of human culture and of the society into which we are born. These are beyond our conscious control, but also the site of radical alterity, of the other, for language ‘lies on the borderline between oneself and the other’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). Desire - which, as we saw earlier, was born of a loss - is a never-ending attempt to control otherness, to occupy that position of power, the ‘Name-of-the-Father’, and is at the basis of language which forms the subject positions from which we speak.²² Within the context of this study, this is a concept which is held to have great force for:

if every desire is at base a desire to impose oneself on another and to be recognised by the Other, then the colonial situation provides an ideal context for the fulfilment of that fundamental drive. (JanMohammed, 1985: 65).

²¹ See also Fanon’s seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* in which he refers to Lacan’s theory which he terms the ‘mirror period’ (1981, 161, n. 16), and also more poignantly his own perception of the tragedy of black subjectivity: ‘As I begin to recognise that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognise that I am a Negro’. See also A Memmi’s *Portrait du Colonisé* (1985). It is also a theme which pervades the texts which I have explored in the course of this research.

²² For Fanon too, language is of prime importance in the formation of subjectivity: ‘A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language’ and a few lines later on, quoting Paul Valéry, he sees language as ‘the god gone astray in the flesh’ (Fanon, 1981:18).

Indeed, in the course of this research, I aim to show how we are thrown into a master discourse of order and prohibition with language as an alienating experience, as it is always other, always to be found outside ourselves. I examine how, for the Caribbean colonised, this is a double alienation, for they find themselves estranged not only from their biological mother but also from their ‘mother’ culture. I also set out to explore how writers of the Caribbean diaspora use the power of imaginative writing in the form of the novel as a platform from which to explore and ‘grapple with that colonial structure of awareness which has determined West Indian values’ (Lamming, 1984: 36).²³

The colonising mission of the imperial enterprise in the Caribbean introduces questions of production of knowledge and power through discourse which, in its Foucauldian sense, is to be understood as a set of statements within a social context which ‘defines and produces the objects of our knowledge’ (Hall, 1997: 44). As discourse ‘rules in’ as well as ‘out’, this also suggests that inclusion and exclusion practices are always at work within language. As we shall see, this is particularly pertinent in the context of the Caribbean diaspora where, with the imposition of the English language, the study investigates how the colonised have suffered a double alienation as they find themselves at once ‘colonised by language’ and ‘excluded by language’ (Lamming, 1984: 14). It also examines how discourses of power demand that processes of social regulation in the form of institutions be set up to regulate, control human conduct and define conditions that must be fulfilled in order to produce compliant subjects capable of reproducing that order (Foucault, 1980).

From this perspective, language becomes a site of power struggle ‘in which marginality and subordination are to be understood as a constitutive effect of representation realized or resisted’ (Barker, 2001:19).²⁴ Seen in this light, no language is neutral since ‘each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life’ and, ‘populated by intentions’, human utterances cannot be seen as innocent (Bakhtin, 1981: 293).²⁵ It also ensues that dispossession of a culture, of a community of thought and action, construction and alienation in the

²³ This view is also one which has been adopted by feminist thinkers and writers such as Judith Butler who, whilst agreeing with Lacan that language is patriarchal, also argues that: ‘the paternal law ought to be understood not as a deterministic divine will but as a perpetual bumbler, preparing the ground for the insurrections against it’ (Butler, 1999: 38).

²⁴ As Thiong’o Ngugi wa writes: ‘to control a people’s culture is to control their tools of their self-definition in relationship to others’ (1986:16).

²⁵ See also Brand (1990).

language of the Other, and the desire to resist narrow definitions of selfhood are themes which are to be found at the forefront of Caribbean writing.

Most pertinent, to my mind, for the purposes of this research, is the argument that it is through the discursive power of print languages as ‘languages of power’ (Anderson, 1991: 44-5) that knowledge was produced about the coloniser and its colonial Other. As evidenced in chapter three of this thesis, this is a theme that Lamming develops when he argues that, as the Caribbean Other in the form of Caliban, he has been enslaved by Prospero’s language ‘not English...but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self’ (Lamming, 1984: 15). It has subjugated his mind, reduced him to silence, obliterated from his consciousness a past which validates him and ultimately has exiled him from himself. The discovery of the book is, Bhabha argues, is a defining moment of ‘originality and authority’ (2004: 146). As a ‘signifier of colonial desire and discipline’ (id), it is used, as we shall see in the texts of this study, as a tool of displacement, of domination and of conquest. I shall also demonstrate how it becomes at the same time an instrument of self-definition which, through the discursive authority of the written word, produces a binary system of representation which constructs the ‘civilized’ European and, ‘apparently outside the field of the symbolic, the representable’, its ‘abject’ ‘native’ Other (Butler, 1993: 22). Furthermore, I explore how, through the authority of the written word and its rejection of orality, the powerful apparatus of the school introduces further dislocation for the Caribbean now confronted to an alien reality, to a world ‘where the signs were without meaning or without the meaning intended by their makers’ (Naipaul, 1987: 120).

‘How do we extricate ourselves?’ Fanon agonises in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986: 10). How can the Caribbean colonised reconstruct themselves out of a past, which has been obliterated, a voice which has been silenced, an identity which has been shattered and annihilated, and a language which has entrapped them in an alien system of representation? How ‘to be true to oneself in borrowed robes?’ (Boehmer, 1995: 115).²⁶ It is, Lamming believes, the ‘twilight zone’, in between the ancestral and the colonial sources, which will be the space of enunciation and the

²⁶ See also poem by Léon Léau (1975: 15): ‘This haunted heart that doesn’t fit/ my language or the clothes I wear/ chafes within the grip of/ borrowed feelings, European ways’.

source of inspiration for the Caribbean writers (1991: xlvi).²⁷ He claims that, together with the desire to recover a voice which has been so brutally silenced by the imperial authority, there needs to be also the recognition that this in-between world was ‘the womb from which he himself had sprung, and the richest collective of reservoir of experience on which the creative imagination could draw’ (1991: xxxvii).²⁸ Gikandi argues that, far from disabling the Caribbean writers, the anxiety engendered by the colonial situation opens up discursive possibilities in which a ‘narrative of liberation’ can be envisaged (1992:12). It is out of this schizophrenic condition (Walcott, 1998: 4) that the Caribbean writers must now forge a new discourse, which re-fashions the ‘master’ language. It is out of this twilight zone, ‘which half-remembers, half-forgets’ (Harris, 1967: 64) that they must set out to explore and make sense of the complexities and dislocations of the colonial experience, restore Caribbean lives ‘to the proper order of attention’ (Lamming, 1991:xxxvii), and attempt to reconstruct their fractured selves so that they may ‘rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around’ them (Fanon, 1986: 197).²⁹

In this research, I set out to examine how Anglophone Caribbean writing responds to the challenge to strive ‘through adversarial contexts and infinite rehearsals to consume both its own biases and those of its always threatening Other’ (Harris, 1985: 48). I investigate the Caribbean writers’ determination to refuse to accept any longer the marginality to which they have been hitherto consigned by an engulfing master narrative, to present the reader with another world-view, another perspective on ‘reality’, an alternative site of identity and meaning-production³⁰, and to build themselves and their community anew from the ashes:

...hearts
no longer bound
to black and bitter
ashes in the ground
now waking

²⁷ See also Walcott who, in *What the Twilight Says*, also explores this in-between space as a source of creative resistance when he argues that ‘the future of West Indian militancy lies in Art’(1998:16).

²⁸ Glissant (1999: 165) himself echoes such a perspective when commenting on the French Caribbean writer: ‘And, as if the Martinican intuitively grasps the ambiguity of both his relationship with French and his relationship with Creole – the imposed language and the deposed language respectively – it is perhaps that he has the unconscious sense that a basic dimension is missing in his relation to time and space, and that is the Caribbean dimension. As opposed to the unilateral relationship with the Metropolis, the multidimensional nature of the diverse Caribbean. As opposed to the constraints of language, the creation of self-expression’.

²⁹ It will be, Wilson Harris declares in an interview with Lemon (1998:48), ‘an ongoing and unceasing re-visionary and innovative strategy that has its roots in the deepest layers of that past that still address us’.

³⁰ See Ashcroft et al. (1989: 145).

making
making
with their
rhythms some-
thing torn
and new' (Brathwaite, 1967: 269-70)

This study also explores Fanon's image of the Caribbean writer as an 'awakener of the people', who not only provides the colonised with a 'mirror' in which they can see themselves on the road 'to disalienation'³¹ but, more notably, endeavour to enter history, and to restore meaning in a divided social and cultural order. As Lamming argues (see chapter three), he is a descendant of Prospero whose language he has inherited, not to be trapped in its rhetoric and its signifying system but to endow it with new possibilities for both himself and his metropolitan Other. Far from being the passive recipient of a 'way of seeing' (Lamming, 1984: 56), Caliban can choose action and become the agent of a liberating discourse of resistance.

How, though, can the weaponry of language, so often wielded by Prospero to conquer and dominate, be now brandished by Caliban to restore him to selfhood? Expanding on Saussure's notion of differences in language, Derrida contends that language is at the origin of all meaning, that all our experiences are structured and mediated by language, writing and textuality, that '*there is nothing outside of the text*' (1976: 158; italics in the text). Of particular significance for the purpose of this study, I argue, is his notion of 'différance' whereby any signifier carries with it the 'trace' of a previous articulation so there can be no fixed signified and as a result, meaning is always deferred, subject to continuous reframing, in a state of constant flux. Language pervades all aspects of our lives and our reality, constructed by language, can no longer be understood as a rigid, immutable entity but is always subject to contextual interpretation, to constant reinterpretation, and as such acquires the instability and ambiguity inherent in language itself:

What I call "text" implies all the structures called "real", "economic", "historical", "socio-institutional", in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that "there is nothing outside the text." That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naïve enough to believe and have me accused of believing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this "real" except in an

³¹ Fanon (1967a: 172 and 1986: 184).

interpretative experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring. That's all. (Derrida, 2000: 148)

Indeed, Lamming remarks, commenting on Columbus's expedition, a journey 'may sometimes have nothing to do with the results that attend upon it' (1984: 36), thus highlighting the contradictions which, from the outset, lay at the heart of the colonial enterprise in the Caribbean. From this encounter with 'human heroes and victims of an imagination and a quest shot with gold' (Lamming, 1984: 17), a heterogeneous, fragmented, unstable Caribbean has emerged, a 'meta-archipelago ... suspended in a soup of signs ... saturated with messages ... sent out in five different languages' (Benitez-Rojo, 2001:1-4). Traditional modes of thinking, identity and knowledge are always perceived as pure, as whole, as never lacking so that their authority can never be in doubt.³² Yet, Derrida argues, our perception, our understanding of events, of objects, of people can never be whole. Since we always apprehend the world from a particular limited viewpoint, a particular limited perspective, we are denied access to complete and unadulterated comprehension and knowledge. The ambivalence contained in the array of discordant voices, the immersion in differences, the syncretic nature of the Caribbean reality, all point to the difficulty of establishing a stable colonial discourse. It is, Bhabha claims, this ambivalence which enables a form of subversion founded on 'the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention' (2004:160). Conflict, Michel Pêcheux contends, is at the very heart of discourse, and this research sets out to explore how this opens the door to the possibility of resistance to colonial language and authority through the process of 'disidentification',³³ which is most powerfully reflected in the desire expressed by the Caribbean writers to:

³² Derrida (1978: 279-280) writes that: 'all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs, archē, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, invariable presence, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth'.

³³ Pêcheux (1982:112; author's emphasis) argues that '*words, expressions, propositions, etc. change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them*, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to these positions'. He outlines three positions for the construction of the individual subject in relation to the dominant ideology. The first is 'identification' when the 'good' subject accepts his/her place and image offered by that discourse and the social order it represents. The second is 'counter-identification' when the 'bad subject' opposes it but in so doing confirms its power by accepting the 'evidentness of meaning' upon which it rests. The third is 'disidentification' which requires a working-through, an appropriation and a transformation of the way the subject is interpellated by that ideology (156-9).

deal effectively with that gap, that distance which separates one man from another, and also in the case of an acute reflective self-consciousness, separates a man from himself. In the isolated case of the Negro it is the desire, not merely to rebel against the consequences of a certain classification, but also a fundamental need to redefine himself for the comprehension of the Other...³⁴

Strong criticism has been levelled by Benita Parry and Arik Dirlif at this form of defiance, which, they contend, locates resistance in discourse rather than in colonialism and thus ignores the ideological, economic and institutional specificities of the colonial societies in which that discourse is exercised.³⁵ Whilst acknowledging the power and the validity of these viewpoints, I shall argue nevertheless that the stress on the fissures at the heart of the Western articulation is a powerful tool of resistance in the Caribbean where language has been used to imprison the colonised in a double consciousness. In this way, I set out to chart the way the Caribbean novel, through literary techniques such as narrative fragmentation, irony, carnivalesque, dialogism, ambivalence and intertextuality interrogates the unitary European vision of a reality and history, whose main thrust is ‘the will to power ... to truth and interpretation’ (Said, 1978: 240).³⁶

It is from the platform of this ‘counter-culture of the imagination’ (Dash, 1973: 66), and through the intersecting discourses of race, class and gender, that I investigate the relationship between centre and margin and the power structures which govern them. It is the standpoint from which I explore how Caribbean writers set out to locate the ways in which the Caribbean peoples have been interpellated as colonial subjects for ‘isn’t storytelling a way of searching for one’s origin?’ (Barthes, 1975: 47). I will consider the role of the narrative in restoring the Caribbean subjects to history and in helping them to re-script and re-define new possibilities of meaning and of being. Furthermore, I shall examine how Caribbean and English identities interact and signify upon each other within the context of the imperial enterprise and how this interaction leads to new subject positions and new realities along lines of similarity and difference (Hall, 1996: 397; Brah, 1996). I shall also consider how the

³⁴ Lamming in ‘The Negro Writer and his world’ (1990). Address delivered to the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, 21 September 1956.

³⁵ See Parry (1994: 9 and also 1997) and Arif Dirlik (1994: 342).

³⁶ Lamming (1984: 37) asserts that after the ‘discovery’ and the ‘abolition of slavery’, the ‘discovery of the novel by West Indians’ is the third most important event ‘as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian community’.

texts enter into a dialogic relationship with the readers whose presence interrogates further ‘the legacy of Empire’ (Lang, 2009: 138; Bakhtin, 1984). As Said argues:

To re-integrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the ‘world’ is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which ‘we’ are human, and ‘they’ are not.³⁷

1.5 Caribbean discourse and post-modernist/colonial theory

Said’s quotation above brings together two of the three most prominent early exponents of postcolonial theory who, together with Gayatri Spivak, ‘the Holy Trinity of colonial-discourse analysis’ (Young, 1996: 163), call for a textual exploration into the power of the colonial discourse to conquer, to divide, to dominate and to define identity. It also enables important considerations to be addressed before entering into any study of response and resistance to colonialism: who speaks? from where? and for whom? Whilst Said, Bhabha and Spivak have been pioneers in exposing and exploring the conflicts at the heart of the colonial discourse, they have also encountered criticism that it would be difficult to ignore. Wole Soyinka warns against a ‘second epoch of colonisation’ which would see theoretical practice exercise its own form of hegemonic control (Soyinka, 1976: p.x). Barbara Christian has also strongly criticised the ‘race for theory’ which, she claims, far from being enabling and liberating, has devalued and silenced those on whose behalf it is being practised ‘with its linguistic jargon...its refusal to mention specific works of creative writers’ (1987: 53). She also forcefully argues that:

People of color have always theorised – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our own theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. (1987: 51)

Torres-Saillant also castigates Gikandi for an ‘overdependence on Western sources’ to legitimise his readings of Caribbean texts in *Writing in Limbo* rather than investigate them from an autochthonous cultural context (1999: 64). In *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean*, he embarks on a fierce campaign against ‘the postcolonial project’, whose champions, he argues, ‘owe their authority to their

³⁷ Said quoted by Bhabha (2004: 93).

dexterous handling of the teachings of Lacan, Foucault ... Derrida ... and the like', a stance which, to his mind only serves to reaffirm 'the epistemological centrality of Western critical theory' (2005: 44). He contends that postcolonial writers have failed to recognise the Caribbean as a producer of discourses of alterity and that they 'resignify paradigms that the Caribbean has long developed' (2005:44). Renu Juneja too, in *Caribbean Transactions*, places Caribbean writing at the vanguard of the discourse about colonialism. She argues that, since it is engaged in the kind of decoding to be found in postcolonial theory itself, any generalized, 'imported' theoretical framework may be irrelevant to the study of the West Indian texts (1996: 2). However, Torres-Saillant's own elevation of Caliban to the 'signifier of the tensions existing at the core of the human experience of the Caribbean' (2005: 200), attests to the complexity of and the contradictions at the heart of the Caribbean. Rather than encourage a binary 'we' versus 'they' stance, I argue with Rivera that we need to consider instead 'multiple, contradictory or even opaque approaches' as agents of liberation (Rivera, 2006: 200). Within this perspective, it is my contention that the Caribbean writer is not, as Michael Dash declares, 'a natural deconstructionist' (1992: 26), but, rather more significantly, as Pouchet Paquet argues instead, 'a self-conscious producer of alternative discourses' (1992: viii) which, in turn, calls for a dialogic approach to be privileged in this research.

I am also very aware that notions of postmodernism, postcolonialism and transculturalism have been the subject of much controversy and of an ongoing debate and that attempts at clear definitions of the terms show no sign of being resolved. Though both postcolonialism and postmodernism share many strategies such as an interest in 'decentring, plurality, marginality, textuality, language and difference ... discursive relations and ideological constructions, and an emphasis on spatialization' (Childs/Williams, 1997: 202), many critics of postcolonial theory are concerned that the decentring of the subject and the fragmentation of histories are a dangerous trap. It can lead, they claim, to a glossing over of the global imbalances of power (Dirlik, 1994: 355) so that active resistance to colonial / neocolonial oppression can no longer be possible. Furthermore, hooks argues, at 'a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time', one needs to be 'suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject'' (1993: 425). However, she also

expresses the view that the postmodernist challenge to essentialist modes of thought and definition of the self might be of import for, as she writes:

We have too long had imposed upon us from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness. Postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency' (hooks, 1993: 425).³⁸

I locate my research within this continuing debate and, by juxtaposing, in my analysis of the texts, a Caribbean discourse of alterity with postcolonial, postmodernist and poststructuralist analysis, my intention is to show what a significant contribution Caribbean writing makes to this body of theory. In a world where the history of the West and non-West are 'irrevocably different and irrevocably shared' (Sangari, 1987: 186), it is indeed necessary to ensure that postmodernism should not once again be a uniquely Western enterprise, and that the 'stifling monologues of self and other' should be replaced with a 'genuinely dialogic and dialectical history that can account for the formation of different selves and the construction of different epistemologies' (id).³⁹ As Antor also argues, we need to move away from a notion of multiculturalism that has created borders and barriers between members of cultural communities, and move instead towards that of transculturalism which concentrates instead on 'the interaction among peoples and on crossing boundaries' (2010: iii). I set out to explore how this research offers an innovative hybrid, transcultural model of resistance and reconstruction and redefinition of the self in which both theorists and novelists signify upon each other through the prism of language as a discourse of both imprisonment and liberation.

1.6 Trajectory

Chapter II investigates claims that language is a subtle and insidious tool of domination, of colonization of the mind. It sets out to explore colonial discourse within the context of the Caribbean through the prism of language as an operation of

³⁸ For further exploration of the debates about postcolonialism, see Loomba (1998: 7-14), Childs & Williams (1997: 2002-4) and Ashcroft & co (2000).

³⁹ I wish to distance my research from Michael Dash's perspective (1992:19) that, 'in this way, the radical scepticism of post-modernism overlaps with the creative intuition of Caribbean writing', which appears to relegate the Caribbean artist to the realm of the 'instinct' as opposed to the 'intellectuality' of the post-modern thinker.

discourse and the book as ‘a signifier of colonial desire and discipline’ (Bhabha, 2004: 146). It examines the contention that not only ‘large parts of the non-European world were produced for Europe’ (Hulme, 1986:2) but that the Europeans too found themselves defined by that colonial discourse. It interrogates the relational nature of language which, with the advent of ‘print languages’, locks both coloniser and colonised in a system of cultural dependence, of domination and control of one group over the other. It considers how, through the authority of the book as ‘the founding stone of the imperialist project’ (Lamming, 1984: 27), power is exercised through a system of representation, a vision of identity and of reality elaborated on a binary construct.

Chapter III is used as a counterpoint to Chapter II and posits a Caribbean discourse of resistance through the analysis of three Caribbean writings which, I argue, are a most pertinent introduction to the study of Phillips’s, Levy’s and Dabydeen’s novels: *Pleasures of Exile* (1984) by George Lamming, *Crick, Crack, Monkey* by Merle Hodge (1970), and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* by Derek Walcott (1967). I aim to study these Caribbean writings from the standpoint of the conflictual nature of discourse alongside Pêcheux’s theory of disidentification (1982: 156-9). From this perspective, I set to examine how these writers explore the ways the Caribbean self has been constructed and subjected in language, thus often anticipating colonial / post-colonial and literary discourse analyses. I also intend to investigate how the ‘twilight zone’ becomes a creative space from which to write back to the centre and articulate a ‘narrative of liberation’.

Chapter IV is the study of *Crossing the River* by Caryl Phillips. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how, alongside Derrida’s concepts of hauntology (1994: 176) and ambivalence (2000: 148), Bakhtin’s theory of intertextuality and dialogism (1984:184), and Wilson Harris’s notion of asymmetry (1999: 101) the novel’s revisiting of the history of slavery challenges the authority of the ‘monolithic’ text and enables binary constructions of margin and centre, identity and belonging to be questioned, contested and re-negotiated. My analysis also sets out to examine the power of active remembrance and of the novel as polyrhythmic performance as tools of contestation and reconstruction.

Chapter V is the study of *Disappearance* by David Dabydeen (1993), a writer from the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. The novel inscribes itself within the theme of ‘vanishing and re-appearing’ which, Harris claims, is at the heart of the writer’s task (1999: 86). It sets out to explore the text from the Caribbean perspective of creolisation perceived, not as ‘affliction’, but as ‘creative potential’ and ‘unceasing process of transformation’ (Glissant, 1999: 142). It considers how, via the strategy of ‘diversion’ (Glissant, 1999: 19-22), enacted through a pervading intertextuality, *Disappearance* offers us a Caribbean exploration of the multiple and shifting locations of subjectivity. It aims to examine how such a Creole reconfiguration allows for a ‘re-scripting’ of the self to be envisioned.⁴⁰

Chapter VI is the study of *Small Island* by Andrea Levy, a child of the first wave of immigration into Britain from the Caribbean. The aim of the chapter is to explore *Small Island* from the perspectives of ‘routes’ and ‘roots’, of travelling but also of settling, and of ‘the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of staying put’ (Brah, 1996:181). I examine how the power dynamics which ‘inscribe racialised modes of subjectivity and identity’ (Brah, 1996: 185) are exposed through the lens of imperial projects such as the 1924 Wembley Exhibition.⁴¹ I consider how, through a criss-crossing, an interweaving of narratives along the lines of similarity and difference, ambivalence is introduced at the heart of discourses of authority and of the self. I consider how such a standpoint may lead to a re-articulation of the concept of ethnicity, of re-imaging of Britain and of what it means to be British.

⁴⁰ For analysis of ‘Creole’ and of the ‘Creole continuum’, see Donnell and Lawson Welsh (1996: 13-26), and Ashcroft & co (1989: 43-6).

⁴¹ The 1924 Wembley Exhibition which, I argue, Levy uses as a mirror through which the text unfolds, was the largest exhibition ever staged, bringing together 58 different countries. Its official aim was to stimulate trade, but also significantly, for the purpose of this research, to ‘enable all those who owe allegiance to the British flag to meet on common ground and learn to know each other’.

2. **'LANGUAGE, AN UNSTATED HISTORY OF CONSEQUENCES'** (Lamming, 1984:109)

2.1 **The book as 'signifier of colonial desire and discipline'** (Bhabha, 2004: 146)

The history of colonialism is one of the brutal destruction and exploitation not only of lands but also of people, nowhere more so than in the West Indies where, as Lamming claims, 'colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian's cultural awareness' (1984: 35).⁴² To explore the full force of colonialism as an instrument of cultural oppression and subjugation and the attempts at destabilising it in the context of the Caribbean diaspora, this research aims to examine how its processes of meaning production have shaped the way colonisers and colonised view the world, define their place and role and ultimately themselves within it. Of particular interest for this study is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's contention that:

language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.⁴³

In a similar vein, Tiffin and Lawson argue that imperial relations, whilst initially established 'by guns, guile and disease' were later maintained 'in their interpellative phase largely by textuality'. As a result, they claim, colonialism is an operation of discourse and as such, it interpellates colonial subjects 'by incorporating them in a system of representation' (Tiffin and Lawson, 1994:3). Benita Parry is very critical of this over-emphasis on discourse which is also, she contends, at the basis of Bhabha's and Spivak's work, and which, she feels, homogenises colonialism and ignores the material conditions and vicissitudes of colonial rule (Parry, 1987: 43).⁴⁴

I would like to argue that it should not be necessary to choose between these two positions if discourse is to be understood, not only as another word for representation, but 'involves examining the social and historical conditions within

⁴² This leads the writer V.S Naipaul to argue somewhat dismissively that in the West Indies, societies are 'manufactured with no internal references' (1983: 253).

⁴³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986: 9). This is also a view held by the colonisers themselves: in 1492, the Bishop of Avila had presented Isabella of Castile with the first grammar of a modern European language. When she asked: 'What is it for?', he replied: 'Language is the perfect instrument of empire' (Quoted by Hanke, 1959: 8).

⁴⁴ She accuses current theories of colonial discourse of an 'exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis' (1987:43).

which specific representations are generated' (Loomba, 1998: 97). I intend to demonstrate that, within the context of the Caribbean, far from directing us away from an understanding of the conditions suffered by the colonised, the study of the power of discourse should help us to better comprehend their historical, social and economic underpinnings. As JanMohamed declares, there is 'a profoundly symbiotic relationship between the discursive and the material practices of imperialism' (1985: 64). Indeed, it is Gramsci's contention that ideological and political superstructures should not be reduced to the economic base but that the role of the economic was also to 'create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought' (1971:184). The coherence of philosophical thought, he claims, can only be effective once it has penetrated and transformed the consciousness of the masses. This is what he calls 'common sense' and which Hall defines as 'the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of people is actually formed' (1996:431).

With particular reference to the Caribbean, where 'England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native's reading' (Lamming, 1984: 27), it is important to examine the role played by print languages as 'languages of power' in the elaboration of a European mode of thought and a Caribbean consciousness (Anderson, 1991: 44-45).⁴⁵ As Foucault argues, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the emergence in Europe of a new 'mechanism of power', no longer in the hands of a king or a queen endowed with divine rights but one where 'truth and knowledge' became the new gods (1980: 131-3). It is with the advent of human sciences and through the power of texts, Said contends, that Europe was able to construct its own particular knowledge about the Other as a means of control. The picture that emerges offers us a vision of reality based on a binary construct which promotes the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). What is more, Said claims, this form of control produced new forms of thinking and acting among the natives so that the Oriental was no longer 'a free subject of thought and action' (1978: 43-46).

His line of argumentation is of particular relevance in the context of the Caribbean, where power too is exercised by producing a discourse about the coloniser and the colonised through a system of representation of self and other. Indeed, the written word, in the form of the authority of the book, is regarded by

⁴⁵ It is interesting here to note Lamming's use of the term 'native' to describe not the original inhabitants of the Caribbean islands but the colonised who had been transplanted there as slaves.

many Caribbean writers and postcolonial theorists as the founding stone of the imperialist project, as ‘the first important achievement of the colonising process’ (Lamming, 1984: 109). Its avowed aim is to convince the European colonisers of the superiority of their language and culture whilst entrapping the colonised others into the value system of the dominant culture and allowing them to construct themselves as inherently inferior. It has always been a powerful instrument of colonial authority, but particularly, I contend, in the Caribbean where the indigenous and imported languages, ‘a soup of signs’ (Benitez-Rojo, 1996: 2) had to ‘submerge’ themselves when European languages, value systems and cultures were introduced and imposed on the population through a discourse ‘that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery’ (Hulme, 1986: 2).

As Lamming so powerfully demonstrates in his analysis of *The Tempest* (see chapter three), the ‘gift of language’ is ‘the most delicate bond of involvement’ for both coloniser and colonised whose destinies are to be changed for ever as a result of this encounter (Lamming, 1984: 109). Caliban’s outburst, in Shakespeare’s play, is indeed one of the most potent examples of the recognition of the power of Prospero’s Art as instruments of domination and coercion:

First, to possess his books; for without them
He is but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command ... Burn but his books.
(*The Tempest*, Act III, scene ii: 182)

The power of print over oral competence in the Western world, of reason over nature arises from the way it was perceived to be able to fix what has been said, a ‘being in the world’, capable of transmitting the authority of the word, and ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ to present and future generations (Said, 1991:33). It was also necessary to convince the colonised and coloniser communities of the superiority of the written word, and at the same time of the inarticulacy, of the lowly and savage nature of the condition of the natives because of their reliance on orality. This is a view firmly adopted by Renan in his own rewriting of *The Tempest* as he addresses Caliban in the vilest of terms: ‘Thou knewest the name of nothing there. Thou wast a stranger to reason and thy inarticulate language resembles the bellowing of an angry camel rather than any human speech’ (Renan, 1896: 17).

Conceptually emptied of its rightful occupants who are, through their apparent inability to master the written word, deprived of any claim to humanity and

reduced to the status of animals, the colonised land can now be justifiably and righteously occupied. The claim of *terra nullius* can be invoked by the colonising European power which, as the Mercator Projection Atlas underlined as early as 1636, ‘hath the right of Lawes, the dignity of the Christian Religion ... Moreover, ... manageth the Arts and Sciences with such dexterity ... hath ... all manner of learning, whereas other countries are all of them, overspread with barbarisme’ (Mercator, 1636: I:32). The written text, through its power to name the landscapes it wishes to occupy, erases from them any trace of lives which had unfolded in that space and becomes a powerful instrument of Empire, a vehicle for settlement in and possession of far-away lands. Texts as a ‘system of forces institutionalised by the reigning culture’ (Said, 1991: 53) are thus shown to be deeply implicated in the Empire’s desire for conquest, power and domination of lands and of those peoples who were forcibly brought over from Africa to work on them as slaves and of their descendant. This is the theme taken up by Lamming who argues that Caliban has been ‘colonised by language’ and, through that same power, ‘exiled from his gods, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name!’ (1984:15).⁴⁶

Non-literary texts such as maps, travelogues, engravings also become, I contend, a crucial tool in the project of Empire for, used as a way to ‘inscribe the emptiness’, they are not innocently recording reality but subtly creating and manipulating it (Ryan, 1994: 115). The practice of representing the unknown as a blank, a *tabula rasa*, allows for the establishment of a new order which privileges Western forms of knowledge and further enhances the authority of the dominant power. Hence maps are to be seen as embedded in the discourse of colonialism as one of ‘the intellectual weapons by which power could be gained, administered, given legitimacy and codified’ (Harley and Woodward, 1987: 506). Indeed, José Rabasa situates the genesis of the trope of Europe with the invention of the world map a century after Columbus ‘discovered’ America, thus discursively locating the Caribbean in a position of prominence in the birthing of European modernity:

The millenarian dream whereby the Franciscans transferred the geographic realisation of history to the New World now, with Mercator, returns the locus of universal history to Europe; the angelic nature of the natives is replaced with a universal subject that is indispensable to the knowing of truth and thus constitutes the apex of history. Europe, which in analogous allegories is invested with a

⁴⁶ In his introduction to the 1910 edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, A.C Liddell (1910: xi) writes: ‘we enjoy the stolid, business-like way in which Crusoe sets to work to make, and succeeds in making, the best of a very bad job, and as Britons we like to think of him as typical of the many Britons who, before his time and since, have by pluck and perseverance planted colonies all over the world over, and turned howling wilderness into regions of prosperity and plenty’.

sphere and a cross emblematic of Catholicism, assumes a secular version where science and knowledge define her supremacy and universality. The remaining parts of the world are posited outside truth, since Europe holds the secret of their being. (Rabasa, 1993:207)

Following the ‘discovery’ of America, and as the concept of global difference enters through texts the consciousness and the minds of Europeans, the ‘worldling’ (Spivak, 1985: 262) of the Caribbean - among other colonies - and of Europe begins, a process ‘by which the colonized world becomes a crucial factor in the imagining of Europe’ (Ashcroft, 2001: 27). The colonial gaze cast upon the colonised exposes the coloniser as ‘a voyeur as well as a map-maker’ possessed with the need, alongside the military and economic conquest, to examine, scrutinise, investigate, inspect, analyse, and record the alien environment. This is an imperial exercise in absolute control, for ‘to govern was to know; to see in the round, panoptically’ (Boehmer, 1995:71) but it must also be stressed that the economic, cultural and social well-being of Europe and of its inhabitants was totally reliant upon the domination of its global empire.⁴⁷ For this reason, whilst Hulme contends that at the heart of colonial discourse is the presumption that ‘large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe’ (1986:2; emphasis in the text), I would also like to argue that language, as an operation of discourse, locks not only the colonised but also the coloniser in a system of cultural and economic dependence, of representation of the other through the forces of knowledge and power.

Modernity is about conquest, ‘the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of the soul, and the creation of truth’ (Turner, 1990: 4). Under the mantle of the civilising project, as symbolised by Kipling’s ‘*White Man’s Burden*’,⁴⁸ it is a concept which enables the control, exploitation and domination of foreign territories but also, and most importantly, of the minds both of the seemingly civilised at home and the perceived uncivilised abroad. Whilst the Caribbean people were relegated in the

⁴⁷ Indeed, as Said asserts in his study of *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen sees the maintenance of ‘higher values’, authority and order at home as ‘grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory’. *Mansfield Park* is dependent on the ‘productivity and regulated discipline’ of Sir Thomas Bertram’s Antiguan territories for its own ‘domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony’. (Said, 1994: 104)

⁴⁸ Kipling (1899) *The White Man’s Burden* / Take up the White Man’s burden / Send forth the best ye breed / Go, bind your sons to exile / To serve your captive’s need; / To wait, in heavy harness, / On fluttered folk and wild / Your new-caught sullen peoples, / half-devil, half-child.

This is a view also held by such intellectuals as Ruskin who, in his *Inaugural lecture as Slade Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Oxford* in 1870 advocates that England must bear the White Man’s Burden and send forth its young into the far corners of the Earth to spread the message of its glory. It must also ensure, he claims, that, through the ministration of the enlightened colonials, those distant nations, those ‘fastened fleets...are transformed from savagery into manhood and redeemed from despairing into peace’. (See Boehmer, 1998: 16-20)

European imagination to the dark, savage, barbaric, primitive margins of the universe, the colonisers acquired, from the rapid expansion of their empire and the authority they exercised upon it, a sense of their own importance and superiority. They saw the imperial mission as following in the footsteps of the Ancients and endowed it with altruistic intentions:

As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands along the path of progress, so ...we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilisation...We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, to govern. (Lord Lugard, 1922: 618-9)

To further justify the subjugation of the Other, it also becomes necessary for the colonisers to apprehend the world in terms of a binary opposition between themselves, the civilised Europeans as the depositary of knowledge, order and ultimately good and the barbaric Others as the symbol of savagery, chaos and ultimately evil (JanMohamed, 1985).⁴⁹ If it was to survive and maintain its ascendancy upon the colonised, it was indeed essential that the dominant colonial discourse should set out to further develop, through the power inherent in the texts, the stereotypical attitudes which already prevailed and whose function was to ‘perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Gilman, 1985: 18). Commensurate with this was a deep sense of anguish that the distant lands engendered in the minds of the colonisers as so much was still unknown, unreadable and inaccessible in spite of claims to the contrary. The strategy of displacement whereby ‘the intransigence or discomfort the colonizer experienced was projected on to the native ... represented ... as unruly, inscrutable, or malign’, was used as a way of countering the feelings of unease and fear experienced by the colonisers themselves (Boehmer, 1995: 95).

⁴⁹ See the German philosopher Hegel, whose perception of Africa is that of a land with ‘no movement or development to exhibit’, and which must be dismissed as being ‘no historical part of the world’ for he explains: ‘what we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature’. The ‘negro’, to his mind, ‘exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state’, and therefore, he continues, ‘we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character’ (1956: 99-103).

Disturbingly, this is a view still held today by world figures such as Nicolas Sarkozy, France’s ex-president who, in a highly controversial and criticised speech in Dakar on July 26th 2007 declares: ‘The tragedy of Africa is that the African man has not fully entered into history’ (my translation). See whole speech on:

<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/20090407.OBS2391/le-discours-de-nicolas-sarkozy-a-dakar.html>

The construction of racism, a vital element of colonial discourse, and of particular importance in the construction of the Caribbean Other,⁵⁰ inscribes itself into this apparently irreconcilable difference between notions of black and white. Winthrop Jordan points out that long before the English encountered the black inhabitants of West Africa and the Congo, blackness was imbued with the most negative connotations, both physical and moral. Embedded in it 'was its direct opposite - whiteness', the colour of perfect beauty: 'Every white will have its blacke, and every sweete its sowre' (Winthrop, 1974:44).⁵¹ Nevertheless, Robert Young argues, modern racist theory is a nineteenth century academic creation whose precepts and concepts became widely known and recognised as truth. It takes on the force of an ideology which permeates all the areas of knowledge and European culture becomes irremediably bound up with it.⁵² The responsibility of the Christian Church in the elaboration of racism deserves serious scrutiny, as it provides colonials with the justification they need for further enslaving the 'negroes' in negative imagery. The Biblical account offers a monogenetic account of man descended from a single source, which seems to offer no explanation to the differences between the races. Blackness, they are forced to conclude, is the outcome of God's wrath on Ham, cursed to become 'a servant of servants', thus justifying the enslaving of 'Negroes' as heathen savages. They are described as brutish, bestial, libidinous creatures whose behaviour and appearance belong to the realm of the animal, not to the human kingdom.⁵³ Indeed, until the 1950s, the divine Christian Providence was understood to be incarnated in the character of Prospero whose beneficent authority is seen to shine over the island (Hulme, 1986: 106). Caliban, 'some monster of the island with four legs' (Act II, scene ii: 175) is his dark, pagan, savage counterpart, the symbol of Renaissance 'Wild Man', the devil incarnate.

Commensurate with that comes the charge of primitive, abject practices such as 'cannibalism', which marks out the Caribbean particularly as a prime location for

⁵⁰ See Long (1774: II, 336) 'the father of racism', who in his seminal text *History of Jamaica* writes: 'for my own part, I think there are extremely potent reasons for believing that the White and the Negro are two distinct species'.

⁵¹ Winthrop (1974: 44).

⁵² Young (1995: 64). See also Bernal in *Black Athena* (1987: Vol.1, p220), who analyses the strong links between racial theory and the development of knowledge along racist principles. Also Said (1978:227) who writes: 'What gave writers like Renan and Arnold the right to generalities about race was the official character of their formed cultural literacy'.

⁵³ See Long's description of the 'natives' (1774: vol.2 pp82-83): 'The Negro's faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less than their commerce with other sexes: in these acts, they are shameless as monkeys and baboons. The equally hot temperament of their women has given probability to the charge of their admitting these animals frequently to their embrace'.

the accusation of inveterate savagery and which ensures it holds a special place in the discourse of colonialism. Hulme demonstrates most convincingly the way in which the concept is a European construct which has its origins in a misinterpretation and misappropriation of Columbus's *Journal*. It has since been used however to signify the perceived innate difference between the civilised white European and the savage, primitive black Other in imperial thought. It stands, I contend, as a potent symbol of the power of language to construct imaginary worlds of meaning which acquire the validity of a reality by which coloniser and colonised subjectivities come to be defined:

It is not a question of a discourse employing a particular word whose meaning is already given: *the discourse constitutes signification*. 'Cannibalism' is a term that has no application outside the discourse of European colonialism: it is never available as a 'neutral' word. (Hulme, 1986: 84)⁵⁴

It is also impossible, I maintain, to disregard the major role that Western science has played in the construction of the discourse of racialism and in the elaboration of racial difference not only along the lines of binary constructs but as deviance from the white norm: 'From the point of view of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 178). As Social Darwinism enters the debate and sees as its main tenet the survival of the 'superior', the 'fitter' white race, colour becomes a social reality and sets Blacks against Whites for a long time to come. There is renewed interest in *The Tempest* and in the character of Caliban in particular as 'the missing link, a 'novel anthropoid of a high type' (Wilson, 1873: 79).⁵⁵ With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the concept of natural selection, there is also an ever-growing fear of contamination, of adulteration, of miscegenation, and an anxiety that the imagined 'superior' standards and values of the dominant culture might be tainted in contact with an 'impure', alien environment where 'savage passions' go unchecked. Colonialist literary texts abound with images of foreign lands as sites of idleness, infections and moral turpitude. The depravity of Caliban who is accused of having violated Miranda is contrasted with the portrayal of a male imperial hero, such as Kipling's *Kim*, as the

⁵⁴ See also the whole chapter 'Caribs and Arawaks' for an in-depth analysis of the theme (Hulme, 1986: 45-88).

⁵⁵ See also Nixon's analysis of the play as 'a vehicle first for Social Darwinian and later for imperial ideas' (Nixon, 1987: 561)

embodiment of the West in all its vitality, rationality, technological advancement and moral rectitude.

Far from being a mere economic or military reality, colonialism, through the medium of texts, has emerged as a powerful tool to construct European knowledge about self and the other and a new way of encoding European ambitions. That knowledge, and the language used to enforce it upon the coloniser and his/her colonised other, are, I have demonstrated, far from neutral and innocent. Colonial discourse is revealed not only as a tool for the elaboration of knowledges but as a vast ‘desiring machine’ to control, to possess, to be recognised by the other whilst all the negative aspects of the self are projected onto the inferior and objectivised other.⁵⁶ As elements of cultural and social differences are presented as characteristics inherent to the race, they are seen to assume a universal, metaphysical essence. This distortion of reality, this myth, helps to maintain the sense of moral high ground adopted by the colonials, and to confirm the unbridgeable gap which they perceive exists between themselves and the ‘other’:

The ideological function of this mechanism, in addition to prolonging colonialism, is to dehistoricize and desocialize the conquered world, to present it as a metaphysical ‘fact of life’, before which those who have fashioned the colonial world are themselves reduced to the role of passive spectators in a mystery not of their making. (JanMohamed, 1985: 65)

I have shown that for the British Empire, colonialism is as fundamental to its own representation as it is to that of its others. However, the dominant power is also only too aware that the authority and control it exercises upon its colonised are fragile entities and that, in order to sustain its assumed ‘supremacy in taste and judgment’ (Lamming, 1984:27), it needs to set about conquering the minds of the natives. This is what the vast and elaborate education programme upon which it embarks, the ‘foundation stone of colonialist power’ (Ashcroft, 1995:425), intends to achieve. In the Caribbean, it is to play a vital role in the way the natives defined themselves for, as Lamming declares, their whole apprehension of the world, their understanding of culture, ‘all of it, in the form of words came from outside’ (1984:27).

2.2 ‘The morning of the chalk and the blackboard’

⁵⁶ Young (1995:98). See also chapter 7: ‘Colonialism and the desiring machine’, pp159-182.

Peter Hulme rejects Gramsci's and Althusser's concept of ideology as being irrelevant in the Caribbean where, he claims, there is no 'consensual model of social formation' but rather 'a model of division' (Hulme, 1986: 7). In this research, I argue that, as 'the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986:15),⁵⁷ the powerful apparatus of the school works through a combination of coercion and consent upon the yet unformed mind of the colonised Caribbean child. I intend to demonstrate that the psychological violence perpetrated in the classroom is more insidious but no less effective than 'the cannon' in enforcing the power of the empire and entrapping and subjugating its subjects to its values, its means of representation and its will.

In his analysis of *The Tempest*, Lamming stresses the absolute power of transformation that language exerts on coloniser and colonised alike as Prospero and Caliban find themselves irremediably bound to each other by the power of Prospero's Art. In this way, language is to be understood, not as a system of signs but as a 'way of seeing', a path to self-knowledge and understanding which could not be reached in any other way, for 'what a person thinks is very much determined by the way that person sees' (Lamming, 1984: 109; 56). From this perspective, the school is to be seen as a powerful medium through which a particular language as mode of thought may be enforced. It becomes an essential tool in the racial, cultural and moral construction of colonised and coloniser selves, since 'the Other is located most fundamentally in language, the medium for representing selves and others' (Sapiro, 1989: 28). It also helps to understand why the analysis of the discursive and cultural aspects which, from infancy, have led to the 'control of the mind of the conquered and subordinated' (Atalas, 1977: 17) occupy such a prominent place in the works of many Caribbean writers.⁵⁸

The trope of childhood, with its stress on the contradictory needs for nurturing as well as for discipline, is of particular relevance in the study of colonialism in the Caribbean and is seen by many as 'a necessary precondition of

⁵⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:15). He quotes Cheikh Hamidou Kane who, in his novel *Ambiguous Adventure*, had described the sinister nature of the education methods used during the colonial period: 'On the Black continent, one began to understand that their real power resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed the cannons. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magnet. From the cannon it took the efficiency of a fighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent. The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul' (12).

⁵⁸ This is a view also held by Said who, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993:8), writes that imperialism and colonialism are not 'a simple act of accumulation and acquisition' but that they are supported by 'impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination'.

imperialism' (Wallace, 1994:176). At the heart of the rhetoric of Empire is the vision of the 'native' in a child-like state, lacking since yet deemed uncivilised, and living in a condition of immaturity and illiteracy which requires spiritual, moral and intellectual paternal guidance, instruction and restraint. The construct of the native as a child seems to offer a less brutal concept of difference than the notion of race which comes into being at around the same time but divides colonisers and colonised along totally divergent lines in a more ruthless manner. The concept of *tabula rasa* which was used to inscribe the 'empty' landscapes is now brought into play for the inscription of the ideals of empire into the minds of both the child and the perceived savage other, with the emphasis on reason, on the acquisition of a Western type of knowledge and moral and physical self-control. Indeed, whilst colonies such as the Caribbean and Africa, 'the land of childhood' lay 'enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (Hegel, 1956: 91), England, imbued with a sense of the absolute superiority of its language and culture, sets out to educate, to 'civilise the natives', and to convince them that 'colonialism has come to lighten their darkness' (Fanon, 1967: 166-7). This is a mission that writers such as Kipling and Rider Haggard portray to their young readers as a divine enterprise in which the role of the British colonialist was to selflessly serve and care without reward for the greater good of all mankind.⁵⁹ It is through education and literacy that, it is claimed, both child and 'barbarian' come into existence, into society, for until then, Ashcroft asserts, it is felt that 'they cannot be 'read' in any meaningful way' (2001: 41).

This move from filiation, the realm of nature, to affiliation, that of culture and society is a familiar theme in Caribbean texts, as the child / native is found to be subjugated to the hegemony of the Father culture as her / his sole form of representation (Said, 1991: 19-20). A powerful example is to be found in the Friday-Crusoe encounter seen as 'the paradigmatic colonial encounter' (176), a view reinforced by Rousseau's choice of *Robinson Crusoe* as the only book he would recommend a child to read (Rousseau, 1984:147), thus 'naturalizing' the relationship between childhood, education and colonialism (Wallace Jo-Ann, 1994: 175). Friday is portrayed as the innocent, ignorant, lacking savage and is contrasted with Crusoe, his benevolent, civilised, 'educated' counterpart. Yet, as Crusoe sets out 'to teach

⁵⁹ Haggard (1877) quoted by Cohen (1965: 50): 'We Englishmen, he asserted, ...came to this land with 'a high mission of truth and civilisation...it is our mission to conquer and hold in subjection, not from thirst and conquest, but for the sake of law, justice and order'. And also, 'I do not believe in the divine right of kings, but I do believe... in the divine right of a great civilising people - that is their divine mission'. See also Kipling's poem *Recessional* (1897).

him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy and helpful' (Defoe, 1719: 195), the outcome is to entrap Friday once more into a master-slave relationship. From this perspective, Crusoe's civilising project is to be seen as the *locus classicus*, as emblematic of English linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 1998: 11). By teaching the children / natives, as exemplified by the characters of Caliban and Friday, to speak, to name the world in the image of the master discourse, Prospero and Crusoe imprison them in the images and values of their dominant culture whilst negating the merits, and even the existence of the natives' own cultural experience. This is why texts such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* have acquired such a symbolic resonance for writers of the Caribbean diaspora up to the present day.

With the arrival of the printing press, the rise of literacy as the element which most clearly separates the child from the adult, the civilised from the savage nations is of notable import for the purpose of this research for it engenders the very strong belief that 'groups of humans who do not use script are - by definition - inferior, and often less than human' (Tapping, 1989b: 89). It is also impossible to ignore the role played by the Christian Church in that indoctrination process, as the ability to read and interpret the Bible is viewed as the pathway to virtue, good manners, social acceptance and individual salvation. Moreover, print languages as 'languages of power' become the tools which help to lay 'the foundations for national consciousness', and through which the dominant nations define themselves to themselves and to their marginalised others (Anderson, 1991:44-46). Through membership of the group, individuals acquire common values, attitudes, codes of behaviour, beliefs which are further reinforced by the institutions and reflected in the way they use language.⁶⁰ As the nation-language is endowed with an imagined but nonetheless highly valued sense of history and culture, it becomes the means through which national superiority is established as well as the vehicle for the civilising of 'barbarous and wretched nations, who for want of Learning and Virtue are but a kind of more savage beasts'.⁶¹ As Macaulay declares:

⁶⁰ In Burke et al (2000:1), Fynes-Moryson stresses the power of language in giving members of a nation state a sense of common purpose and is quoted as saying: 'In general, nations have thought nothing more powerful to unite minds than the Community of language'.

⁶¹ Carey-Webb (1999: 8). Also Lane (1700: xix). See also Said (1991:14) on culture and nation when he concludes: 'The large cultural-national designation of European culture as the privileged norm carried with it the battery of other distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, European and non-European, higher and lower...But my main reason for mentioning them (discriminations) is to suggest how in the transmission and persistence of a culture there is a continual process of reinforcement, by which the hegemonic culture will add to itself the prerogatives given it

The claims to our language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of the imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us... Whoever knows that language has access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the Earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations...It may be safely said, that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world. (Macaulay, 1835: 349-50)

We can see then that texts become, from infancy, and via the education system, the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and conceptions of truth, knowledge, reality and identity are established. Through the projection of imperial images as icons of propriety, they develop into essential tools for the exercise of the domination and conquest of foreign lands and natives, for the elaboration of the imperial myth of beneficence and supremacy in all things and ultimately for the construction of the coloniser and colonised self. However, as Hulme declares, civility can only survive by 'denying the substantiality of other worlds, other words, other narratives' (1986: 156). The colonial text masks the harsh realities of colonialism from the coloniser, whilst the imposition of a foreign 'way of seeing' necessarily gives rise to deep feelings of displacement and alienation for the colonised. This is a common trope for writers from the Caribbean diaspora who stress in their work the marginalisation and the 'cutting down to size of all non-England' (Lamming, 1984: 27).

They also decry the necessary loss of orality which the entry into the written discourse entails. They stress how this 'oldest form of building historical consciousness' (Trinh, 1989: 148) informs and defines the child as a member of his / her immediate and wider community. They show how the storyteller weaves her magic to enchant, educate and nurture and how the child, very early on, learns the suggestive, imaginative power of language which gives meaning to the world s/he lives in. Storytelling belongs to the world of enunciation and refers to 'realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures' (121). As the child enters the colonial school, however, the harmony of that communion between language and community, language and sense of self is broken as s/he finds her/himself submerged in the tidal wave of the coloniser's linguistic mode of representation. The Caribbean texts

by its sense of national identity, its power as an implement, ally or branch of the state, its rightness, its exterior forms and assertions of itself: and most important, by its vindicated power as a victor over everything not itself'.

highlight how, through the imposition of another language and the marginalisation of his/her own, a new reality is enforced upon the child which adversely affects her/his sense of identity and self-worth.

I would like to argue that for the Caribbean colonised, the consequences seem to have been even more devastating than for the African. Europe, having dismantled the original Amerindian culture in the West Indies, imported labour 'on the edge of the slave trade winds, on the edge of the hurricane' (Brathwaite E.K, 1984:7) to work as slaves on its lucrative sugar cane plantations. It then imposed upon this mosaic of cultural traditions and tongues an absolute dependence on the language of the conqueror and on the values and representations inherent in it. This became the only language common to all, the only channel of communication, the only way the Caribbean colonised came to define himself since 'a foreign or absent Mother culture has always cradled his judgement' (Lamming, 1984:35). The universalist myth, a fundamental feature of the construction of colonial power, forces upon the colonised, through the medium of language, a particular way of apprehending the world, of understanding it, of constructing reality. With the colonial school, a second childhood begins in which hitherto unintelligible signs now acquire meaning and a presence that slowly obliterate all the signs and symbols of an earlier self. All the perceptual concepts are those of 'Mother Culture' so that they are more conscious of 'the falling of the snow...than the force of the hurricane' (Brathwaite, 1984:8-9). This leads to a denigration of the local landscape and an immersion in 'daffodils and apples' but most significantly however, as Juneja argues, this does not bring 'a knowledge of daffodils and apples' (1996: 158).

Colonialism is then to be understood as a primary site of cultural and identity production for both colonised and colonisers. I want to return once more to the character of Robinson Crusoe whom James Joyce perceives as prophetic of empire, as the 'prototype of the British colonist' for, he claims, the 'true symbol of the British Conquest is in Robinson Crusoe' (Joyce, 1964: 24-25). As Crusoe teaches and civilises Friday, as he gets 'a savage into (his) possession' (Defoe, 1719: 183), we are able to observe, Pennycook argues, the 'dedicated way in which the British created their empire' (1998: 12). It is through the schooling of Friday that Crusoe, with the emphasis on a code of propriety, is able to establish habits of subordination, so that Friday begins to respond to the values and standards set by Crusoe and through him, the imperial authority he represents. There is no trace of Friday's own

language in Crusoe's account of his stay on the island and the 'gentle savage' is taught instead to name his cultural environment with the colonising English words. He is held captive in the structures of an alien way of thought and action and has no apparent will of his own. The dialectic of slavery is hinted at: 'I taught him to say Master, and let him know this was to be my name' (209), yet Friday's 'voluntary' servitude through the power of the imperial discourse to subjugate the mind allows for the denial of its existence. Indeed, Memmi argues, it is only when the colonised has willingly accepted himself as slave that the coloniser can truly believe in the legitimacy of his claim as master (Memmi, 1965: 87-8).

Crusoe, assuming the role of beneficent Father, instructs his faithful, servant/son Friday, and further enslaves him in colonial discourse as he demonstrates the superior technology the enlightened nation he represents has at its disposal, such as the barbecue to cook meat and the building of a canoe. At first sight, this appears to be a somewhat surprising choice as both 'barbecue' and 'canoe' are Carib words and two aspects of Carib technology that Europe learned from the Caribbean. However, it is on this very denial of the assumed savages' claim to competence and proficiency and on their supposed ignorance of civilised behaviour that the success of the colonial enterprise rested. With Defoe's novel, there emerges a new imperial subjectivity which 'is simultaneously an individual and a national consciousness, both forged in the smithy of a Caribbean that is...both parabolic and historical at the same time' (Hulme, 1986: 210-11).

It is this new relationship between 'benevolent master' and 'willing slave' on whose foundation imperialism depends which, I argue, is to have a profound effect on the construction of the two protagonists' self-image in the colonial drama. Whilst the coloniser is imbued with the sense of her / his moral rectitude and cultural superiority, the colonised self suffers the subjugation and annihilation of the self through the imposition of a white alien culture which demands to be worshipped and revered. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o asserts, this has the effect of a 'cultural bomb' (1981:32), as Jamaica Kincaid so powerfully illustrates:

What I see is millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no mounds of earth for holy ground ...and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed this crime (Kincaid, 1988:32).⁶²

⁶² See also Dabydeen's poem, *Turner*, (1994:38-40): 'Turner crammed our boys'mouths too with riches, / His tongue spurting strange potions upon ours / which left us dazed, which made us forget / The very sound of our speech. Each night / Aboard ship he gave selflessly the nipple / Of his tongue

2.3 'Self's shadow' (Spivak: 1993:75)

Such a forced immersion into an other's perception of reality is viewed by Gayatri Spivak as 'epistemic violence' (1993:76), a recurrent theme in Caribbean writing where it is shown to lead to deep psychological trauma, to a splitting of the self, and a deep crisis of identity in the colonised torn between two worlds. Jamaica Kincaid's use of the metaphor of daffodils in her novel *Lucy* perhaps best illustrates, I suggest, the feelings of inner turmoil and distress the imposition of such alien concepts brings about. As the main character Lucy, now in exile in North America, analyses her, at first, puzzling sense of repulsion when happening upon a field of daffodils, she is taken back to her school performance of Wordsworth's poem whose subject matter is meaningless but which she has been taught to value as the epitome of superior knowledge. As she recites the poem, her two selves are in deep conflict: 'I was at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside, I seemed one way, inside, I was another; outside false, inside true' (1990:18). The destructive, annihilating power of the colonising enterprise is even more apparent when its symbolic presence, in the image of these same daffodils, haunts Lucy in her unconscious as she dreams of being 'buried deep underneath them and ... never to be seen again' (id). In another piece of writing, she exposes the dangers inherent in this process of acculturation whereby the colonised come to acknowledge and make their own England's superiority in all things and which expunges from their memory and consciousness all traces of another reality (1991). The only possible outcome, she believes, is erasure of the self as she is made to feel 'incomplete or without substance' since she 'could not measure up' because she 'was not English' (1991: 32-40). Indeed, it is, I contend, this lack which has most haunted the Caribbean colonised for, in Fanon's words, it produces 'individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, a race of angels' (1986:10).

I would like to examine a further dimension to the agonising legacy of the Middle Passage and slavery, where, Walcott declares, 'amnesia is the true history of the New World' (1998: 39). For the Caribbean colonised, living, as they are told, until we learnt to say profitably / In his own language, *we desire you, we love / You, we forgive you ...* and my face was rooted / In the ground of memory, a ground stampeded / By herds of foreign men who swallow all its fruit / And leave a trail of dung for flies / To colonise... / No Savannah, moon, gods, magicians / To heal or curse, harvests, ceremonies,.. / No stars, no land, no words, no community / No mother'.

beyond the threshold of world history, there is indeed only void. The history they have been taught is to be seen as a discursively constructed text, an ordering of events created by the conquerors to subjugate the conquered to their own singular narrative. The concepts and representations they have assimilated are not their own, for everything has taken place somewhere else and is 'overdetermined from without' (Fanon, 1986:116). They can only exist in reference to the recorded history of the Mother Country, to what they are not. History has deliberately severed and erased them from their own narratives, reduced them to insignificance and ultimately silence, as Brathwaite so powerfully illustrates:

For the land has lost the memory of the most secret places.
We see the moon but cannot remember its meaning.
A dark skin is a chain but it cannot recall the name
Of its tribe. There are no chiefs in the village.
The Gods have been forgotten or hidden. (1967: 164)

Moreover, as Fanon argues, the white coloniser wants the world for himself alone, for he has elevated himself as master of the universe (1986: 128) but he is at the same time also aware of the fragility of the edifice which the English language has constructed with its myth of superiority. The presence of the black Other and his desire to be recognised as 'the same' disturbs and threatens that white order and his sense of self. It is therefore important that the black man's claim to humanity should be resisted at all costs and that he continues to be relegated to the imagery of the world of savagery and base instincts. Using Kristeva's notion of the 'abject', I would also like to argue that the imperial language, through the discourse of cannibalism as abjection, further obliterates the Caribbean self. As she declares, the 'abject' exists somewhere outside the web of meaning, 'at the border of inexistence and hallucination, of a reality which, I recognise it, annihilates me' (1982: 126). The colonised find themselves confronted collectively with the European imaginings of bestial and primitive behaviour, of the inherent wickedness of those descendants of Africa, 'the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals' (Fanon, 1986: 166-175). Thus exiled to the edges of the human condition, they are reduced to objects of knowledge and instruments of production for the benefit of the coloniser, a vision which Césaire's equation, 'colonisation = thingification', perhaps best serves to illustrate (1972:21). They suffer a disintegration of the self for, as Memmi explains:

A sign of the colonized's depersonalization is what one might call the mark of the plural. The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity'. (1965: 85)

Commensurate with the discourse of cannibalism is that of Blackness, a theme which Fanon has explored in great depth and to whose insightful analysis I would like to turn, as it is of particular relevance in the context of the development of a sense of Caribbean consciousness. From his first encounter with the white man's world, Fanon argues, the black man is suddenly made aware of his blackness and at that very moment, he is also brought face to face with all the negative imagery and connotations such a recognition entails. Fanon quotes Jung who argues that at the heart of European consciousness is the belief that, within each individual, slumbers an uncivilised savage, a 'negro', the seat of base, immoral instincts (1986: 166-175). Blackness thus becomes the symbol of the darkness which is seen as the innate characteristic of the black self and which furthermore threatens at every moment to turn the white wo/man into a beast. In imperial discourse, salvation from abjection, an ever-present trope, can only be found in the destruction of barbarism through civilisation. The black man is in every sense the victim of white civilisation for, having been the slave of the white man, and made to 'carry the burden of original sin', he now enslaves himself in the negative image of his body, a creation of the white man which he has internalised so that it becomes his reality, his ipseity (192). Having made theirs the myth of colour, the colonised blame themselves for their oppression.

The seat of much psychological trauma is also to be found in the strong desire felt by the black self for 'lactification' (Fanon, 1986: 47), to 'renounce his jungle' in the hope of regaining status as a human being, for, Fanon tells us, 'For the black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white' (18; 12). Having made himself white by 'putting on the white world', he finds himself robbed once again of all sense of being, and drowning in a state of limbo. As he 'meets the white man's eyes...the only real eyes' and is interpellated in his blackness: 'Look, a Negro!', the fragile white mask he has painstakingly adopted falls away (109-12). He finds himself confronted by and imprisoned in the blackness he has fought so hard to escape. He is once more the slave of all the images and the myths the white man has woven around him, 'responsible at the same time for (his) body, for (his) race, for (his) ancestors...battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects' (112). When all he wanted was to be allowed to be a man, the black man is

suddenly made aware of her/his 'ugly uniform'. He suffers deep shame, self-contempt and despair as he realises he is hated, despised and rejected by an entire race for reasons he fails to understand (118). From all these perspectives, the 'bond between colonizer and colonized' is seen as both 'destructive and creative' as it is found to destroy and re-create 'the two partners in the colonization process into colonizer and colonized' (Memmi, 1965: 89). Whilst the colonial discourse mutilates the coloniser, awakening him to the brutal instincts of violence and oppression, it also dehumanises the colonised with that same oppression and violence (id).⁶³

It is from a feeling of utter despair, having been 'made to feel a sense of exile by (their) inadequacy and (their) irrelevance of function in a society whose past (they) can't alter, and whose future is always beyond (them)' (Lamming, 1984:24), that many Caribbean colonised choose refuge in the bosom of the Mother Country.⁶⁴ Secure in the knowledge of England, of its culture, its language, its people, its history that has cradled them from birth, whose cultural and spiritual heritage is the only one they can identify with, and which they have made their own, they feel they are going home.⁶⁵ Too soon, though, the journey becomes another fracturing experience, as they find themselves once again assailed by the assumptions of inferiority of their assumed subordinate condition and suffer cultural amputation at the hands of their European other, and need to re-appraise themselves in the light of this new encounter.

Naipaul is such a colonised who saw England as the place where 'untrammelled by the accidents of history or background', he could make a career for himself as a writer (1974: 206). The ever-present colonial gaze, however, inhibits all creative endeavour and all attempts to create an original identity (233). He finds himself hopelessly caught between mimicry of the coloniser in a Europe which has defined him or a return to the subservient role assigned to his 'kind' by the master discourse. Such a dilemma is the theme of *The Mimic Men* in which Naipaul's character, Singh, having escaped to London finds himself trapped in a position of dependence on the imperial country for his identity. The imperial centre, 'a three-

⁶³ See also Césaire (1972: 9-25).

⁶⁴ This is what Hall (1990: 234-5) views as the 'Présence Américaine', as the 'New World' presence which 'stands for the endless ways in which Caribbean people have been destined to 'migrate', and is 'the signifier of migration itself – of travelling, voyaging and return as fate, as destiny'. It is defined, he argues, 'not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite difference'.

⁶⁵ See Baldwin J (1964: 14) who sees himself as a 'kind of bastard of the West', an 'interloper' for this is not his 'heritage' he argues. At the same time, he has 'no other heritage' which he feels he 'could possibly hope to use' for he 'had certainly been unfitted for the jungle and the tribe'.

dimensional space, so rooted in its soil, drawing colour from such depth', gains in even grander stature when it is contrasted to the image of the erstwhile colonised who had come 'in the hope to find the beginning of order' and instead are reduced to two-dimensional figures 'trapped into fixed, flat postures', to a mockery of themselves (1995: 27). Singh longs to attain that three-dimensional reality the city seems to offer but instead, the journey to the imperial centre is a story of non-belonging, where the exiles are once again condemned to a dual amputation, a dual rejection. Unable to identify with the world of their birth which their imperial 'mother' has taught them to despise, they are in turn rejected by that very mother they have learnt to worship. Singh ironically uses the metaphor of the 'snow' whose long-expected arrival has engendered feelings of hope, but which disappointedly turns to a 'film of melting ice' (4), to symbolise a despair as deep as that felt by the character of Lucy in Jamaica Kincaid's eponymous novel as discussed earlier in this chapter. As he uncovers that he is rejected by a civilisation he has none the less assimilated, this is, he writes, 'the end of an empty world' (41). There can only be 'extinction' as Mother Country can offer no solace, but only hollow words and promises (id). Perhaps the metaphor of 'The Floating Man' which Naipaul attributes to himself is the one that best describes the condition of the colonised, ruthlessly deceived and abandoned by a language, a culture and a society whose myth of superiority has nurtured them from childhood, but which has now left them rootless, divided in themselves and voiceless.⁶⁶

Colonialism is a painful experience for the colonised, a place of ghostly shadows, of cultures trampled underfoot, of alienation and subjugation to an imperial authority. Language, this research argues, is deeply interwoven in its discourse as, with the advent of the Book, texts have become profoundly implicated in the imperial civilising enterprise, in the construction of empire and of self and other. Language as discourse is defined by its centripetal force which stresses the need for a unitary, authoritative utterance with its attendant strong desire for self-betterment and purity (Bakhtin, 1981: 270-1). It is through the power invested in the authority of a single reigning language, that the colonials came to view themselves as a superior nation, a nation of daring conquerors, of worthy masters of the universe. It is through

⁶⁶ Naipaul V.S in an interview with James Campbell in *The Guardian* (15.12.07: 1). It is also a reference to Naipaul's novel *Half a Life* in which Willie Somerset Chandran, the main protagonist, also experiences this 'feeling of being detached, of floating, with no links to anyone or anybody' (2002:29).

that same power that the colonised witnessed the erosion of their own cultures and found themselves enslaved in an alien system of values and 'Truth' and reduced to ghosts of their former selves. The text, as a vehicle of imperial authority, invaded hitherto unknown lands and imposed its own meanings upon its peoples as it inscribed and named their landscapes, thereby erasing any former sign of existence. As well as knowledge about the other, a binary system of representation was constructed through the power of language between a civilised self and a barbarian other which led to the debasement and the silencing of the colonised. In this way, difference comes to be 'fixed and consolidated within a 'unified' discourse of civilisation' (Hall, 1996c: 252). The tragedy of colonialism is indeed that 'the white man sealed in his whiteness' and 'the black man in his blackness' fail to recognise each other because of the distance that colonial discourse has erected between them (Fanon, 1986:9).

What I have also tried to show, however, is that colonisation can no longer be perceived as a marginal interlude in some grand narrative but must be considered as a major and 'ruptural world-historical event' (Hall, 1996c: 249) for it is:

'signifying the whole process of expansion, exploration, conquest...and imperial hegemonisation which constituted the 'outer face', the constitutive outside, of European and then Western capitalist modernity after 1492' (id)

From this perspective, colonisation must be viewed as being as vital to European self-definition as to the way the colonised came to see themselves and it is this double inscription and not the binary, mutually exclusive conditions of the colonising encounter which, to my mind, needs to be stressed. It allows for a displacement, a deconstruction of power-knowledge relations to be envisioned, a venture Lamming, Walcott and Hodge were to embark upon.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ As Hall remarks (1996c: 246): 'One of the principal values of the term 'post-colonial' has been to direct our attention to the many ways in which colonisation was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis. It was also inscribed deeply within them - as it became indelibly inscribed in the cultures of the colonised'.

3. 'LANGUAGE, AN UNKNOWN HISTORY OF FUTURE INTENTIONS' (Lamming, 1984:109)

3.1 A new way of seeing

I must go back through a march from home
through graves at sea without goodbye.
I must go back
through friendless arrivals...
through change of name
through loss of tongue
through loss of face...
to the grave of a slave
through people fixed in a ship like wood
in long listless days and days
over the swell of indifferent seas.
Berry (1987: 71)

Commenting on the powerful legacy he has inherited from his literary forefathers, such as Lamming and Selvon, Caryl Phillips highlights how their work makes ‘links between the Atlantic slave experience and the colonisation of language’ (1999: 36). Within this perspective, Lamming’s essay, Walcott’s play and Hodge’s novel examined in this chapter are to be seen on the one hand as a ‘writing back’ to the master discourses in chapter two. On the other hand, as they place the ‘migration of Caribbean peoples to Britain into a global, political and cultural context’ (id), they also serve as a most pertinent introduction to the novels of Phillips, Dabydeen and Levy studied in chapters four, five and six. The Caribbean writer’s challenge to the monopoly of the imperial text inscribes itself within a debate about the power of discourse in the dismantling of the colonial paradigm, which has pitted postcolonial critics against one another, and which shows little sign of abating. I turn once again to Parry whose authoritative overview of the current postcolonial discourses is of particular relevance to this research. She offers a powerful criticism of Bhabha’s and Spivak’s subsuming of ‘the social to textual representation’ which, she argues, represents colonialism as an ‘agonistic’, rather than an ‘antagonistic’ mode of authority (1994:13).⁶⁸ In offering us, she claims, ‘The World according to the Word’ (9), they displace and dismiss the anti-colonialist representations of ‘the murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists’ (Fanon, 1967a: 28) in favour of a ‘configuration of discursive transactions’ (Parry, 1987: 42). She feels that this ‘textual insurrection’ locates native resistance only within and against the colonial text⁶⁹ and that, far from empowering the colonised, it obliterates the ‘role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of an-other knowledge and producer of alternative traditions’ (1987: 33). She advocates instead a Fanonian model of a discourse of resistance ‘born in political struggle’ and ‘combative social action’ which ‘initially enunciated in the invaders’ language, culminates in a rejection of imperialism’s signifying system’ (45). It seems to me though that Parry’s alternative runs the risk of also offering us a homogenising and homogenised

⁶⁸ See Bhabha (2004: 153)

⁶⁹ Ironically, this returns us to Bhabha’s own objection to Said’s suggestion in *Orientalism* that ‘colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer’ (1986: 158).

discourse of opposition which takes little account of local realities⁷⁰ and that we seem to be caught between:

stark oppositions of colonizer and colonized societies, on the one hand, and notions of hybridity that leave little room for a resistance outside that allowed by the colonizing power on the other, between romanticizing subaltern resistance or effacing it' (Loomba, 1993: 308)

I set out to demonstrate how Caribbean writers present us with a paradigm of resistance which offers us an escape from such a double bind. It is, I claim, through the appropriation and transformation of the language of the coloniser that they find the seeds of rebellion and reconstruction, for 'it was in the language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis) use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled' (Brathwaite, 1971: 31). As Bakhtin remarks, there is a centrifugal force at work in language which allows for other worlds of signification, relations and intentions to be introduced so that language becomes a field of contestation (1981: 263). This does not suggest, however, that the Caribbean peoples find themselves subjugated once more to the authority of the colonial centre, as Parry implies. Indeed, for Lamming, the 'discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian Community' is seen as one of the three important events in Caribbean history (1984: 37). Neither does it mean that resistance is reduced to a singular linguistic act which ignores local social, economic and political realities for as Lamming reminds us:

It is not often recognised that the major thrust of Caribbean literature in English rose from the soil of labor resistance in the 1930s. The expansion of social justice initiated by the labor struggle had a direct effect on liberating the imagination and restoring the confidence of men and women in the essential humanity of their simple lives. In the cultural history of the region, there is a direct connection between labor and literature.⁷¹

The exile to the metropolis needs also to be viewed as a political and social act enforced upon the Caribbean writers by an environment dominated by a 'particular colonial conception of literature', in which they are made to feel culturally

⁷⁰ See Memmi (1965:5) for a criticism of Fanon who, he claims, 'failed to hide his scorn of regional particularisms, the tenacity of traditions and customs that distinguish cultural and national aspirations'.

⁷¹ Lamming (2001: 22). This is to be read alongside Laura Chrisman's argument (1995: 210) that 'the anti-colonial movements ... become a fundamental element in the theorisation of colonial discourse' and are 'seen as constitutive of, not merely constituted by, colonialism'.

irrelevant and inadequate in the islands of their birth.⁷² It is through that physical encounter with the white metropolis, that writers from the Caribbean are confronted with their condition of ‘non-being’ induced by the colonial context (Kincaid, 2004: 81). They are also faced with the knowledge that they are ‘obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost’ (Rushdie, 1991: 11).⁷³ Hall’s argument that it is experiences such as these which enable the dialogic nature of the colonising encounter to be uncovered, and which highlight how the ‘centrality of questions of narrative and the imaginary in political struggle’ must be taken seriously (1996: 251), is of great import in this research.⁷⁴ It is from this standpoint that writers see it as their mission to decolonise the mind, to expose and interrogate the discursive strategies at the heart of the European enterprise. It is Lamming’s contention that colonised and colonisers alike need to come to the realization that their identities and sense of place are not self-determined but that a certain ‘prevailing power does that’, outside of themselves (Lamming, 1996: 2). The task is then to disrupt the received version of history, a ‘history written by the winners’ in books which ‘glorify their own cause and disparage the foe’ (Brown, 2003: 343) and reinterpret it from the point of view of the hitherto dispossessed. The trappings of the colonial power must be unveiled, laid bare but also acknowledged as part of their heritage if the Caribbean colonised are to transcend the history of dispossession and redefine themselves and the colonisers in the light of this new understanding.

For the Caribbean writer, the language of that dismantling will have to be English, the language of the ‘conqueror’, but the ‘only word tool he started with as a reader and as a learner’ (Lamming, 1984: 31). It is, they contend, at the very base of the Caribbean cultural awareness but, as Walcott observes, ‘all revolutions begin amateurishly with forged and stolen weapons’ (1998: 16). However, it will be an English which ‘is like a howl, or a shout or a machine gun’, (Brathwaite, 1984: 13), which disrupts the authority of the ‘Word’ and endows with new meanings. This anticipates Bhabha’s preoccupation with mimicry, ‘almost the same, but not quite’

⁷² See Lamming (1984: 24-27). See also Brathwaite (1993: 7) who wrote that ‘the desire (even the need) to migrate was at the heart of West Indian sensibility – whether that migration was in fact or by metaphor’.

⁷³ See also Sohat (1992: 109) who argues that this would enable the past to be negotiated differently, ‘not as a static fetishized phase to be literally reproduced but as fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences’.

⁷⁴ As he continues (1996: 251): ‘isn’t that precisely what is meant by thinking the cultural consequences of the colonising process ‘diasporically’, in non-ordinary ways – that is, *through*, rather than around ‘hybridity’? Doesn’t it imply trying to think the questions of cultural power and political struggle *within* rather than against the grain of the ‘postcolonial’?’ (emphasis in the text).

(Bhabha, 2004: 127, which is perceived as a menace, a threat to the sovereignty of the colonial discourse since it involves a deliberate misreading. As this other English 'produces another knowledge of its norms' (122-3), the colonial authority finds itself displaced as its ambiguities are exposed and its authenticity challenged.

Derrida argues that the meaning of a piece of writing can never be guaranteed but is always subject to possible re-interpretation, re-reading, what he terms 'iterability', that is repetition but with a difference. He further suggests that writing would not be possible without it, that it might be 'the very force and law of its emergence', at the basis of all our experience and that we could not function without it (Derrida, 1982: 325). Though Derrida never denies the existence of intentionality on the author's part, he contends that no intention can be guaranteed absolute force in all imaginable circumstances, and that we cannot reject the possibility of it being reinterpreted another way. Iterability is to be seen not as repetition of the same but as potential for a new interpretation of texts, for reading them afresh and giving them new life. This slippage, this spatial gap between writing and reading, between production and consumption, is the indeterminate 'Third space' of enunciation where a counter-discourse can be elaborated and cultural difference articulated.⁷⁵ It is a place where the authority and purity of an original meaning can be contested, reinterpreted and appropriated.

It is within this context but in a Caribbean setting, that I would like to examine how instrumental Lamming's re-reading and re-interpretation of *The Tempest* was in 'the unmasking of imperial fictions ... through examination of the book as fetish, dream, and insignia of authority' (Tiffin, 1989:31). Rob Nixon argues that *The Tempest's* 'value for African and Caribbean intellectuals fades out once the plot ran out' (Nixon, 1987: 576). However, it is my contention that, in challenging not only the canonical text, but also 'the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in postcolonial worlds' (Tiffin, 1987:23), Lamming's work is of particular relevance up to the present day. This research intends to demonstrate that the Caribbean writer is to be seen, not so much as 'a natural deconstructionist' (Dash, 1992: 26) but as a 'self-conscious producer of alternative discourses' (Pouchet Paquet, 1992: viii), whose work needs to be posited in active dialogue with theorists in the fields of post-colonial and critical discourse

⁷⁵ Bhabha (2004: 217-219). This term is borrowed from Frederic Jameson.

analysis whose writings, I contend, s/he often anticipates. I also want to expose how though s/he privileges discourse as a tool of resistance, his/her undertakings are steeped in local, political, historical, social and cultural realities.

With the rise of Social Darwinism at the end of the nineteenth century, the character of Caliban in the *Tempest* becomes a representative figure for Darwin's 'missing link', a symbol of black, brutal sensuality against whom Prospero stands as its reverse image, that of enlightened civilisation.⁷⁶ It necessarily follows that, half a century later, *The Tempest* is to become a master-text of imperialist discourse for writers from the language traditions of the Caribbean:

Our symbol then is not Ariel...but rather Caliban...I know no other metaphor more expressive of our cultural situation, of our reality...what is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban? (Retamar, 1994: 342-3)

Lamming's critical analysis of the play in his collection of essays, *Pleasures of Exile* (1984),⁷⁷ 'a seminal work of self-enquiry and cultural assessment in the context of Caribbean life',⁷⁸ thus inscribes itself within a Caribbean collective, transcultural framework of contestation and re-appropriation.

It is also important, in my view, to situate the writing of *The Pleasures of Exile*, first published in 1960, within a particular geographical, historical, cultural and autobiographical context. Lamming's goal is to create a counterdiscourse around his own experience as an aspiring exiled writer, schooled in the canon of English Literature, this 'tabernacle of dead names', and burdened by the weight of 'this ancient mausoleum of historic achievement' (Lamming, 1984: 27). Not long arrived in England in the first wave of West Indian immigration, he is also keenly aware that the British Caribbean, though not yet independent, is on the brink of a new history, and that Caliban's history itself belonged not only to the past but also very much to the future (107). He also sees a strong parallel between his own condition and that of *The Tempest*, which he perceives as a 'drama which grows from the seeds of exile and paradox' (95-6), with an island as the perfect setting for the study of that

⁷⁶ See Griffiths (1983); also Cohn (1976), with particular reference to two adaptations of the play by the French historian and philosopher, Renan. See also Fanon (1986: 187). Jung asserts, he claims, that, at the heart of European consciousness is the belief that, within each white individual, slumbers a black wo/man who is the seat of sin and immoral instincts. Blackness thus becomes the symbol of the darkness which threatens at any moment to turn the white wo/man into a beast, away from what s/he believes is the purity of her/his white soul.

⁷⁷ All further references to this collection of essays are to this edition.

⁷⁸ See Paquet S. Pouchet (1992: pvii) in Foreword to Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin*.

condition. Through a re-appraisal of the play from the point of view of those who, like him, have been ostracised, his aim is to dismantle 'a colonial structure of awareness' and to engender a 'new way of seeing' for Prosperos and Calibans alike (36).⁷⁹ As an active agent of decolonisation, he offers a liberating narrative which, in the introduction, he sets firmly within a Caribbean context. He uses the symbolic trope of the Haitian 'Ceremony of the Souls', a Vodun religious rite of passage, a ritual of redemptive dialogue between the living and the dead, to position himself as a witness 'claiming extraordinary privileges', in his re-visioning of the play and of its characters (11). As he declares:

It is not important to believe in the actual details of the ceremony. What is important is its symbolic drama, a drama of redemption, the drama of returning, the drama of cleansing for a commitment towards the future'. (1966: 64-5)⁸⁰

From the outset, Lamming sets his claim to the right of speech when he appropriates the canonical text not only as a personal but, more importantly, as a collective act of 'impiety' which, he argues, is 'one privilege of the excluded Caliban' (Lamming, 1984: 9).⁸¹ As a descendant of both Prospero and Caliban, he believes that he occupies a unique position from which to speak and expose a 'certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the West Indies' (id). It is as Caliban though, an authoritative 'I', that he enters into a dialogue with Prospero and, through him, confronts England and its colonising venture with the collective experience of a 'Caribbean sensibility at home and abroad' (8). First, what is absent from the canonical text needs to be exposed, so that

⁷⁹ See also p 56 when Lamming writes: 'I do believe that what a person thinks is very much determined by the way a person sees. This book is really no more than a report on one man's way of seeing, using facts of experience as a guide'.

⁸⁰ In the course of this rite which Lamming himself experienced whilst in Haiti, the souls of the dead ask to be released from the 'purgatory of water' in which they have been imprisoned and returned to their families. No release is possible however until the living and the dead have atoned for their past behaviour. The dead can then leave their watery confines through the body of a possessed *Houngan* who intercedes on their behalf. For further information about Afro-Caribbean rituals and their role in resistance to colonial authority, see Taylor (1989: 95-128) and also Lamming's novel (1979) *Season of Adventure*, pp 22-28.

As Hulme also points out (2000: 225), 'the idea of the colonial trial had a particular strong resonance in 1960. Nearly 100 people had just been accused in the South African 'Treason Trials' of 1958-9. Closer to home, a series of trials had followed the Notting Hill riots of August and September 1958. The law often provides a dominant metaphor for historiographical and literary work'.

⁸¹ Rob Nixon (1999: 58) stresses how important it is that this act of 'impropriety' should be seen as a collective act and not just the act of one individual: 'Lamming's assertion that this unorthodoxy is collectively grounded is crucial: those who defend a text's universal value can easily discount a solitary dissenting voice as uncultured or quirky, but it is more difficult to ignore entirely a cluster of allied counterjudgments, even if the group can still be stigmatised'.

this absence becomes a presence which haunts the text, destabilises and redefines our perception, our understanding and appraisal of it. He highlights how the play is overshadowed by the spirit of almighty slave traders such as ‘the right worshipfull and valiant knight sir John Haukins’ who set sail ‘in search of human merchandise’ first to Sierra Leone, and from there to the ‘Island of the Canyballs’ (12). It was, Lamming argues, tales of these voyages which were recorded by writers such as Hakluyt, that led to the opprobrious renaming of the Carib Indian and African slave as Cannibals and to their misrepresentation as ‘wild fruits of Nature’ whose spirit of revolt Prospero ‘by sword or Language is determined to conquer’ (13).⁸² It is myths such as these, he continues, which contributed to the elaboration of a Manichaean rhetoric that, in turn, helped to justify the violent deportation of thousands of Africans from the lands of their birth, the conquest of the West Indies, and to lay the foundations for the civilising mission. They could not have failed, Lamming claims, to fire up Shakespeare’s imagination so that the authority of the book, in the form of Hakluyt’s journals and Shakespeare’s play, ‘set against the background of England’s experiment in colonisation’ (13), is shown to be directly linked to the destiny of the Caribbean peoples, ‘prophetic of a political future’ which is now their present (id.).

Education, the ‘gift of language’ (109), which Prospero bestows upon his slave is shown to be far from an altruistic and enlightening venture. From Lamming’s perspective, it is to be viewed instead as an instrument of coercion. With it, Prospero intends to bend to his will and to tame the beast that, he believes, lives within Caliban whose physical, ‘deformed’ appearance is for Prospero the sign of the savage instincts inherent to his race (109). It is also and particularly deployed, in Lamming’s view, for reasons of self-interest so that Caliban may better serve him (id.). On the one hand, Lamming presents us with the portrait of a Prospero who views the ‘possession of the Word’ as his rightful inheritance, an accomplishment which distances him from a creature who, to his mind, is ‘eternally without the seed of a dialectic which makes possible some *emergence* from nature’ (110; italics in the text). He uses it as an act of self-affirmation which validates his claims to superior knowledge, culture and ultimately sense of self. He has taken centre-stage as the

⁸² Richard Hakluyt published in 1589 the first of a series of narratives on various late 16th century English navigations, explorations such as those of Hawkins. In a conversation with George Kent, Lamming (1973:13) remarks what a great effect the reading of those voyages had on him for, he argues, ‘when it comes to the questions of Black studies, there are sometimes few sources more rewarding for understanding how Black men saw whites than in the reports of whites about what whites thought was actually happening. Quite often, a Hakluyt, or any of those men reporting those voyages never realized how ironic that exercise would be to a later reader ... You think that was a glorious moment. Now, let me show you how that moment was being seen from the other side’.

‘Philosopher-King’ of the island, having been granted what he perceives to be the divine ‘right to rule people’ and ‘the spiritual need to organise reality’ (107). On the other hand, Lamming offers us the image of a Caliban who finds himself ‘colonised’ by Prospero’s language, ‘exiled’ from ‘his gods’, from ‘his nature’ and most poignantly, from ‘his own name’ (15), and who is enslaved in his master’s definition of who he is. Yet, Lamming insists, it is this ‘gift of language’ itself which, as an operation of discourse, binds Prospero and Caliban irretrievably together. As ‘a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way’ (109), it is in the power of language that are to be found the seeds of dissent and rebellion as Lamming’s re-reading of *The Tempest* so powerfully demonstrates:

There is no escape from the prison of Prospero’s gift ... Only the application of the Word to the darkness of Caliban’s world could harness the beast which resides within this cannibal. This is the first important achievement of the colonising process. The gift of Language is the deepest and most delicate bond of involvement. It has a certain finality. Caliban will never be the same again. Nor, for that matter, will Prospero ...

Prospero has given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, an unknown history of future intentions ... It is this way, entirely Prospero’s enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities. Therefore, all of Caliban’s future – for future is the very name for possibilities – must derive from Prospero’s experiment which is also his risk. (Lamming, 1984: 109)

Lamming appropriates Prospero’s language to re-appraise the character of Prospero’s own daughter, Miranda, since gender and race are inseparable aspects of identity for the Caribbean writer. He draws close parallels between her own enslavement by Prospero’s language, and that of Caliban and by extension, of himself and his Caribbean community. He identifies with Miranda who, like many an African slave child (1984: 111), is ignorant of her mother’s identity as all that Prospero will reveal was that she ‘was a piece of virtue’ who ‘said thou wast my daughter’ (I, ii, 56-57). He draws our attention to how she has ‘no instruments for making a comparative judgment’ (105) since she has been confined to the island from the age of three and her only apprehension of the world is through Prospero’s instruction and through his books. Her reading of Caliban as a symbol and seat of the dark, savage, brutal animal instincts, and as a warning to whoever chooses to transgress the laws of nature (105) can only be, Lamming contends, the outcome of Prospero’s teaching. He offers us Miranda as a mirror through which we are able to ‘glimpse the origin and perpetuation of myth coming slowly but surely into its right

as fact, history, absolute truth', an imperial myth which is seen to imprison both coloniser and colonised in its binary dialectic (111).⁸³

For Lamming, the tragedy of the Middle Passage itself is re-enacted in all its horror in Ariel's account of the shipwreck in that very same sea, with Prospero as a ruthless and almighty captain: 'Hell is empty, and all the devils are here' to which Prospero replies: 'Why, that's my spirit' (Act I, scene ii; and Lamming, 1984: 97). It is, Lamming believes, a nightmare from which both Caliban and Prospero need to be released. It is in his ability to survive the atrocities of the Middle Passage as well as the vicissitudes perpetrated on the powerless slave by a sadistic Prospero that Caliban appears unique in 'his capacity to last' (Lamming, 1984: 98). As he exposes Prospero's dependence on Caliban, Lamming effects a powerful destabilising of the master / slave relationship in the play. He demonstrates how Prospero needs Caliban for his own survival and how, even though the 'master' knows that his 'slave' contains within him 'the seeds of rebellion', he dares not murder him as this would be 'an act of pure suicide' (99). He presents us with a vision of a Caliban who, though weakened by persistent mental and physical torment, and entrapped in Prospero's rhetoric, refuses passivity and never loses 'the spirit of freedom' (101), unlike Ariel, the emancipated slave. Moreover, the past has not deserted him, for he is still rooted in the beauty of his island and is at his most compelling when he celebrates his love for the place of his birth.⁸⁴

It is for this reason, Lamming insists, that Prospero has to resort to 'rock imprisonment' and when Caliban still refuses to be silenced, this last act of resistance unleashes the charge of rape (98-102). Lamming gives serious consideration to Caliban's response, 'O ho! Would't had been done! /Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans' (I, ii, 351-352). His own interpretation of what he considers to be a most extraordinary rejoinder from a slave to his master, exposes a Caliban who appropriates the instruments of the erstwhile master to intimate that he not so much desires 'mounting a piece of white pussy' as engendering a race who

⁸³ As Lionnet argues (1995:5; italics in the text), 'Enlightenment claims about selfhood and individuality were underwritten by the simultaneous offering of those who had to be spoken *for* because they were said not to possess much reason (slaves, women, children...)'.

⁸⁴ Indeed Wynter (1970: 36) argues that it is because of this close relationship with nature that the African slave was able to survive the atrocities of slavery: 'Out of this relation, in which the land was always the *earth*, the centre of a core of beliefs and attitudes, would come the central pattern which held together the social order. In this aspect of the relation, the African slave represented an opposing process to that of the European, who achieved great technical progress based on the primary accumulation of capital which came from the dehumanization of Man and Nature ... The African presence, on the other hand, '*rehumanised Nature*', and helped to save his own humanity against the constant onslaught of the plantation system by the creation of a folklore and folk-culture'.

could rebel against this now reviled and narcissistic creature (Lamming, 1984:102). In so doing, he lays bare the coloniser's fear of miscegenation, and of the intimation of a 'fusion both physical and other than physical', which, at heart, Lamming maintains, Prospero both needs and fears (102). As he thus appropriates Prospero's weapons, the master's language and conceptual framework then become, as Lamming makes evident, powerful tools of resistance and rebellion. As Nixon also argues, such an annexation of the Shakespearian text can be seen to generate 'a Caliban who could stand as a prototype for successive Caribbean figures in whom cultural and political activism cohere (1987: 569).⁸⁵ I also contend that, as it thus confronts the authoritarian discourse with another knowledge, such a writing back refutes Parry's contention that this is something that a counterdiscourse located in the dominant structure of representation cannot achieve (Parry, 1987: 43). Indeed, in his re-reading of *The Tempest*, Lamming is shown to occupy a prominent position among those writers who:

have moved from their once peripheral positions to occupy something like centre-stage... They have moved uninvited into the masque, spoken their lines, and made a new generation of readers see the play differently. (Hulme, 2000: 235)

Will the appropriation of Caliban's birthright by stealth, the 'Lie' upon which Prospero established his authority, be discovered?, Lamming asks in *Pleasures of Exile* (117). I want to argue that Lamming, Prospero's 'convert, colonised by language, and excluded by language', is seen to have set it as his mission to uncover the deceit at the heart of the colonial enterprise through a powerful act of 'disidentification', as highlighted by Pêcheux. As he defies Prospero's claim to authenticity, and to a singular vision of (his)story, he is shown to redefine colonial reality and to open up a space from which his voice and that of his fellow Caribbean peoples may now be heard and heeded. This is a stance that Phillips, Dabydeen and Levy have further developed when, as we shall see in the study of their novels, they see it as their mission to enable the hitherto silenced, marginal voices to write themselves on the national stage. As Lamming makes his own the language of the coloniser, as he claims the right to challenge Prospero's weaponry and the magic that has been brandished to enslave him, the book, as 'fetish and insignia of authority',

⁸⁵ Peter Hulme suggests that it is this particular passage in his analysis of the play which reflects most directly Lamming's sense of impiety, 'offering a transgression of all kinds of boundaries about the 'proper' way in which to conduct literary-critical discussion' at the time of writing (Hulme, 2000: 232).

becomes a 'site of transgressive appropriation' (Pouchet Paquet, 1972: xviii). This paves the way for the extensive use of intertextuality by Phillips, Dabydeen and Levy as a means not only of disrupting the linearity of the master discourse but also of introducing us to the necessary complexity, plurality and shifting locations of identity beyond single vision.

The early optimism of a possible reconstruction of the West Indian identity, of a re-ordering of history through a redefinition of the Prospero-Caliban relationship that pervades *Pleasures of Exile* is however far from realised in Lamming's novel *Water with Berries* (Lamming, 1973). The novel takes its title from a speech by Caliban in Act I, scene 2, and has been seen as the Sixth Act of *The Tempest*, 'perhaps the most challenging and radical re-writings of the play'.⁸⁶ Written eleven years later, the political future at which Lamming hinted in his earlier work, has become the present. Caliban has exiled himself to London, to the tempestuous island of Prospero and of his master's language, and is incarnated in the characters of three artists who have set out on their journey to Britain with the hope of reconstructing, with Prospero, identities shattered on their fictional Caribbean island of San Cristobal. The Caliban-Prospero encounter however ends in tragedy for all concerned, as the characters seem unable to escape the tragic destiny to which they had been consigned in *The Tempest*. *Water with Berries* highlights the apparent impossibility of the hybrid subject to function as an active participant in Prospero's monolithic society, and 'to assert his humanness in a manner that can be reconciled with Albion's needs' (Thieme, 2001: 138). It is to be seen as an intimation of the ominous future that awaits us all should Prospero refuse to enter into active dialogue with Caliban:

It was a divine recognition of privilege which made Prospero's past, the divinity which gave him the right to colonise the unarmed and excluded Caliban is the witness which waits for this decision. He cannot deny that past; nor can he abandon it without creating a total suicide of all those values which once sanctified his acts as a coloniser... He must act; and he must act with Caliban. (Lamming, 1984: 85)

Thirty years later, the theme of *The Tempest* still haunts Lamming because of the 'persistence of the metaphor of Prospero', a character whom he sees as 'synonymous with the phenomenon of the modern, and modernity', an omnipresence from whom, he asserts, no part of the planet can be immune. The great challenge for each culture,

⁸⁶ Hulme (2000: 228, 223). See also Nair Supriya (1996: 56-57) for reflections on the 'sixth' act.

he argues, is not to kill it off but ‘to try and incorporate modernity into whatever it imagines to be its specific destiny’ and to find ways to accommodate it ‘in what you conceive to be your specific and special cultural space’ (Lamming, 2004: 193). Lamming also reminds us of the heterogeneous nature of concepts of nation, of culture, and ultimately of the self, each an ambivalent entity split and hybridised by its contact with the ‘Other’ since ‘cultural displacement ...confounds any profound or ‘authentic’ sense of a ‘national’ culture’ (Bhabha, 2004: 21). These are perspectives that are also explored in Walcott’s play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970).

3.2 Detention and departure ⁸⁷

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

Walcott (1992: 18)

The drama of the Middle Passage will forever haunt the Caribbean and, in these ‘history-orphaned islands’ (Walcott, 1992:392), where the natives see themselves dependent upon an other’s fiction, and defined by the disincarnate ego and the incarnate other, the quest for self-definition is an ever-present and recurrent theme.⁸⁸ Tragedy, Fanon asserts, is the acceptance, the internalisation of the myths of colonialism which, if not resisted, produce ‘individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless - a race of angels’ (1967a: 175). The colonised need to be released from both carnal and mental forms of repression if they are to liberate themselves from the colonial nightmare and reclaim both bodies and minds. Caribbean writers have looked for ways of reconstructing a Caribbean identity out of the schizophrenia which threatens the Caribbean psyche. The crisis of history becomes the terrain of resistance from which they attempt to ‘grapple with the paradox of shaping narrative to affirm an evolving recovery of identity while resisting the totalizing hold of a single linear flow of time’ (Sharrad, 1995: 94).

For both Fanon and Walcott, drama is seen as a fitting platform from which to address issues of identity, language, myth and history, and to raise the

⁸⁷ Taken from the title of a poem by James Berry (1985: 11).

⁸⁸ As Fanon writes, ‘The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth’ (1986: 211).

consciousness of the colonised population.⁸⁹ Walcott is credited with having developed a distinctive Caribbean theatre, which he was determined would be rooted in the local experience, and in a fusion of cultural traditions expressed through the medium of creole and English. From its use of white masks, its divisions along black/white Manichean lines, Walcott's play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, (1970)⁹⁰ is meant to be seen, from the outset, as a dramatic rendering of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986).⁹¹ Hogan views the work from this perspective and more specifically as an exploration of the 'various ways in which racism defines an unlivable identity for oppressed people, an identity that pushes towards madness' (2000: 45). This, in my view, is too reductive and bleak an outlook that offers no hope of escape out of the drama of colonialism. Instead, I would like to consider the play from the point of view of language as an instrument of imprisonment and of liberation. Such a perspective also enables us to consider Hall's contention that identity must not be viewed as 'eternally fixed in some essentialised past' but is a matter of 'becoming' (Hall, 1990: 224).

In the note on production, Walcott writes that the play is a 'dream, one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of its writer and as such, it is illogical, derivative, and contradictory' (Walcott, 1995: 208). He stresses the potential of the imagination as a tool of emancipation as well as the personal and the collective nature of the work. At the same time, the use of the dream allows for an approach which rejects linearity and fixity of meaning and favours instead movement and ambivalence. Particularly striking, Uhrbach argues, is Walcott's use of the word 'contradictory', to be understood 'in its most literal sense', as 'contra-diction', as working against a Western literary expression (1986: 578). This, in my view, not so much highlights the 'impossibility of writing' and 'the difficulty Walcott and his readers experience with language' (id), as Uhrbach suggests, as points to another way of seeing and being embedded in a Caribbean oral tradition which for too long had been despised and ignored by a Western imperial

⁸⁹ As Fanon writes: 'Finally, in the third phase ..., the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people ... he turns himself into an awakener of people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature' (1967a: 179). See also Walcott: 'The future of West Indian militancy lies in art' (1988: 16). Walcott's experiments with dialect and folk forms helped to establish, Dabydeen claims, a 'most vibrant tradition in West Indian drama, realising his hopes of making 'heraldic men' out of 'foresters and fishermen' (1988a: 20).

⁹⁰ All further references to the play are to this edition.

⁹¹ Indeed, in a clear allusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Walcott writes in the introductory essay to the 1970 edition of the play, 'My generation looked at life with black skin and blue eyes' (9).

mode of thought. Similarly, the use of mime to introduce the play, a mime with two figures, one a dancer, the other with a 'face halved by white make-up' (212), emphasises the importance Walcott places on the role of mimicry as a determinant factor of Caribbean identity. In his celebrated essay, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry', he condemns Naipaul's dismaying assertion that 'nothing was created in the West Indies', that all was pure mimicry.⁹² He maintains instead that, in the Caribbean, 'mimicry is an act of imagination' which must be celebrated for it produces cultural forms which 'originated in imitation...and ended in invention' (1974: 10; 9). It is within these contexts that I would like to explore *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

The prologue is set in an oral folk context as a Conteur and a chorus introduce us to Makak, a black charcoal burner, who has just been thrown into jail by Lestrade, a mulatto official, seemingly for being helplessly drunk (1970: 224). He is summarily put on trial but it is however his 'vile, ambitious, obscene dream' (id) which is the cause of a deep sense of outrage in Lestrade as the representative and upholder of English Law. The revelation by a white goddess-woman that Makak is 'the direct descendant of African kings, a healer of leprosy and the Saviour of his race', that he felt he was 'God self, walking through cloud in the heaven on (my) mind' (225; 227) is none other than an act of blasphemy in the eyes of the colonial authority. As Bhabha declares, 'blasphemy goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and re-inscription' (2004: 323). It disrupts and threatens the hegemonic order of the European discourse which has constructed the colonised as a passive subject with no power of utterance and of self-definition. Furthermore, Makak's claim to have taken, 'with the camera of his eye', 'a photograph of God' and to have seen nothing but 'blackness' (Walcott, 1970: 225) is an impending menace to the claims of authenticity and supremacy of the ruling order. Lestrade sums up the horror Makak's dream inspires in the coloniser when he declares:

Blackness, my Lords. What did the prisoner imply? That God was neither white nor black but nothing? That God was not white but black, that he had lost his faith? Or...or...what? (225)

Indeed, the imperial authority relies on an irrefutable Manichean relationship that relegates Makak and all the other black characters to the rank of animals. It is through language that its power is exercised as it denies them the ability to name

⁹² See Naipaul in the *Middle Passage* (1962: 20).

themselves, one of the main constituents of selfhood, according to Lacan. Makak's foregoing of his individual and human name for the derogatory 'Makak' or 'Monkey' stresses the trauma he and countless black African slaves have suffered at the hands of a racist ideology that has taken away their rightful claim to humanity. He is made rootless, deprived of family, of homeland, alienated from his culture or community, a tragic figure, 'a being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of his own' (222) as Lestrade so cruelly remarks. Moreover, Makak, who, when arrested, is found carrying a white mask, himself rejects any visual self-image that might remind him of his 'ugly' blackness: 'is thirty years now I have look in a mirror', and he even stirs up his hands first before he drinks in a pool 'to break up' his image (226). The 'colour of English is white' (267), Moustique declares in the play, and as Walcott and Fanon stress, Makak has internalised the negative, destructive images of a white racist world, exercised in and through language, which denigrate the very essence of his being.⁹³ He repudiates his black mirror-image, the symbol of savagery in his eyes, and yearns instead for whiteness, in the shape of a white woman, his antithesis, a symbol of purity but also of sustenance for, as Souris, one of Makak's fellow prisoners explains, he has been taught since childhood 'to be black like coal and to dream of milk' (290). As Sartre writes in the epigraph to Part Two of the play, drawn from his preface to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised people with their consent' (277).

Walcott offers us another form of mimesis in the character of Corporal Lestrade, a common type in Caribbean literature, the mulatto who strives to be white, often a representative of a neo-colonial society in the Caribbean and who, as we also shall see in *Crick Crack Monkey* through the character of Aunt Beatrice, has 'fallen to the bribes of white imperialism' and often outdoes 'the whites in their hatred and oppression of blacks' (Rodney, 1969). He displays total contempt for his black counterparts as he harangues his prisoners through the medium of a language which resounds of the undertones of the racial prejudice inherent to the white ideology, relegating them to the status of animals and demanding 'a transfer to civilisation' (Walcott 1970: 216). He is portrayed as a puppet master, an animal tamer who takes Makak through a humiliating drill which is to confirm him even further into his simian condition: 'Walk! ... stand up! sit down! ... Hands out! ...', an ignominious

⁹³ See Fanon and 'lactification' (1986: 41-82).

performance in which the chorus, in its response, is also seen to collude: 'Everything I say, this monkey does do, I don't know what to say this monkey won't do' (222-3). As Walcott argues, 'when language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes' (1974: 6-7).

Lestrade's scorn turns into hatred towards his black counterparts not only because he has made the racist typology his own, but also because, ironically, he despises the very passivity he and his likes have enforced upon them. He wishes they would 'challenge the law, to show (...) they are alive' (261) though, paradoxically, he also knows he would severely punish them if they did so. He also stands as a staunch defender of colonial authority, and of the law it is seen to uphold, the Roman law. Furthermore, having been given and accepted 'the white man work to do' (279), he sees himself as the representative of the imperial power, which, to his eyes, is the depository of civilisation and order. At the same time, a powerful challenge and resistance to the colonial discourse are introduced as his pronouncements are shown to be a mere parody of legalistic language, a jumble of unintelligible utterances. They make a mockery of the primacy of law, of the English language, and ultimately, of the imperial authority itself: 'when the motive of the hereby accused by whereas and ad hoc shall be established without dichotomy...' (221-2). The tragedy of Lestrade's own situation also does not escape the audience's attention for, in adopting the white value system, he has been forced to reject an essential part of himself.

Makak sees his salvation in his dream of a white woman who calls out his 'real name' on 'resurrection morning', gives him pride in his heritage and, in so doing, obliterates Makak, the symbol of his subjugation, of his abjection and restores him to the condition of a human being (235). He sets out to reverse the hegemony of the colonial discourse, to no longer accept the labels of the white world's fantasy, but to act as a messianic deliverer, a healer, a racial redeemer, 'God's warrior' (226), and to lead his people back to Africa where, he believes, they belong. In this act of insurgency, he returns the gaze of the coloniser and severely threatens the authority of the colonial order whose fragility and vulnerability are suddenly exposed: 'Attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That's the most dangerous crime. It brings about revolution' (287). However, once crowned African Chieftain, Makak is soon disillusioned since, where he hoped to find harmony and unity, tribes are slaughtering each other, led ironically by Lestrade, who, in a complete about-

face, has now accepted his African self, the 'eclipse' (299) he had formerly rejected. In a carnivalesque reversal of his former position, he is seen to now have 'black work to do' and to uphold 'tribal law' (307; 311). It is an enterprise however that is bent on revenge against figures regarded as white oppressors of black people, who are brought before Makak and quickly condemned to be hanged. It is an absurd, farcical jumble of names, from Francis Drake and Cecil Rhodes to Noah, Shakespeare, Aristotle, Marlowe, and even Tarzan, which can only invite derision, mockery and condemnation.

Resistance to colonial authority often finds its expression in impulsive acts of reprisal. Decolonisation, Fanon argues in *The Wretched of The Earth* begins with this unleashing of the primal struggle for recognition. Since the Prospero-Caliban relationship is constructed on violence, it seems almost inevitable that resentment on the part of the colonised should also lead them to a brutal resolution of the conflict. Enslaved in a Manichean perception of the world, the colonised are forced into a reactive posture where the only escape, if they are to be restored to dignity and humanity, seems to be the destruction of the colonised and of their world. Lamming too contends that 'there is almost a therapeutic need for a certain kind of violence in the breaking. There cannot be a parting of ways. There has to be a smashing'.⁹⁴ However, Nietzsche maintains, and as the play demonstrates, the colonised are again trapped in 'slave ethics', whereby they are once more victims, locked in their resentment of the other. They can only define themselves in relation to the hatred and rancour they feel towards the coloniser whom they rightly see as the source of all their anguish and despair. They want to avenge the ills they have suffered but find themselves, once again, imprisoned in mimicry, determined along racial lines by the all too powerful Manichean discourse (Nietzsche, 1956: 170-1). This is only repeating the seemingly endless cycle of violence first initiated by the colonisers, as Moustique warns Makak:

Look around you, old man, and see who betray what. Is this what you wanted when you left Monkey Mountain? Power or Love? ...All this blood, all this killing, all this revenge...Once you loved the moon, now a night will come when, because it white, from your deep hatred you will want it destroyed... That is not your voice, you are more of an ape now, a puppet. (Walcott, 1970: 314-5)

⁹⁴ Lamming G in conversation with Kent (1973: 91). See also Fanon (1967: 27-85).

Makak needs to go beyond this reversal of the hegemonic discourse and confronts the white apparition which has deceived him and caused him all this suffering. She is the 'angel' who, through her love for him, has seemingly restored him to his culture and his racial and ethnic heritage. She is also the 'diablesse', a female devil prominent in Walcott's folk culture of St Lucia, a beautiful white woman who entices black men into the wilderness and drives 'niggers mad' (Walcott, 1970: 228). Her promise of plenitude in a benevolent Africa was another form of entrapment and it is Lestrade himself who urges Makak to perform the act of ultimate violence and behead her for:

She ...was but an image of your longing...as fatal as leprosy...destroy her, otherwise...You will be like I was, neither one thing nor the other. Kill her!... She is the mirror of the moon that this ape look into and find himself unbearable ... She is ... the mother of civilization and the confounder of blackness. I too have longed for her. She is the colour of the law, religion, paper, art and if you want peace, if you want to discuss the beautiful depth of your blackness, nigger, chop off her head! ... She is the white light that paralysed your mind, that led you into confusion. It is you who created her, so kill her! (Walcott, 1995: 318-9)

So, removing his African robe, Makak beheads the white apparition and in this symbolic double act, he repudiates the twin 'bewitchings' (277) of Europe and Africa.

Hogan condemns such an act of violence arguing that, 'perhaps, Walcott is following Fanon in linking violence with catharsis' (2000: 80). He also rejects the 'claim of secure identity', 'the recognition of self and culture' at the end of the play as 'hollow', for all we are offered, he argues, is the image of 'an old man, poor and alone, burning charcoal on the side of Monkey Mountain' (81). This, I argue, is to misread, in the epilogue, the power of self-naming as an act of resistance and as affirmation of Makak's newly-discovered sense of self, a theme which, as we shall see later, is also developed too in *Crick Crack Monkey*. It returns us to the prologue in a carnival-like reversal of images for, whilst, at the start of the play, Makak claimed to have forgotten his name, and that his religion was 'Ca'olique' (Walcott, 1970: 219), he now proudly proclaims: 'My name is Felix Hobain...Hobain, I believe in *my* God' (my emphasis).⁹⁵ It is also in the juxtaposition of standard

⁹⁵ As Sinnewe also points out, he is going home, not to a mythical Africa, but to his profession as a 'charbonnier', a charcoal maker, 'not as a prophet of black and white culture, but as a man who defines himself through what he does' (2001: 59). This is a reality that Hogan seems to have too easily disregarded for, as Walcott declares in a conversation with Baer (1996:18), 'You forget Makak is a charcoal burner, he has to face a reality too. He has to come down to the market every Saturday to make a living'.

English and the vernacular, both now spoken with boldness and authority, that Makak, in his concluding speech, is best able to demonstrate how, with his newly discovered 'faith to use old names anew' (Walcott, 1998: 10), he has now 'found ground' (Walcott, 1970: 326):

Other men will come, other prophets will come, and they will be stoned, and mocked, and betrayed, but now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world. Come, Moustique, we going home. (id)

For Walcott as for Hall, Caribbean identity is not to be viewed as a fixed entity entrapped in the 'uniform cloak or documentary stasis of imperialism' (Harris, 1999: 159), but is determined by the diversity of influences to which the Caribbean has been subjected since the arrival of Columbus. It is, they believe, within a 'new kind of space' at their confluence (id), that the Caribbean colonised can free themselves from essentialising and exclusionary white and black narratives and perspectives, and learn to reconstruct their shattered selves.⁹⁶ This crisscrossing, this interweaving of discourses is a theme which is to be found at the heart of the novels by Phillips, Dabydeen and Levy in the following chapters of this research. In a move away from the traditional binary oppositions of a Western 'power machine' and a Caribbean 'resistance machine' (Benitez-Rojo, 1996: 28), their work is seen to explore the power of the polyphonic, polyrhythmic text as a dynamic, liberating performance which, in its celebration of ambivalence, displaces the universal order and a singular vision of subjectivity.

However, as Hogan and many other critics have pointed out, Walcott's world is a patriarchal, Adamic vision from which the black female colonial is absent (Hogan, 2000: 80). It is a 'creative world', Elaine Savory Fido writes, 'whose treatment of women is full of clichés, stereotypes and negativity' (Fido, 1986: 110). There is obvious misogyny in his choice of a white woman as the symbol of all the ills from which black men must run away, and an obvious contradiction in a 'mulatto aesthetics'⁹⁷ that rejects rigid binaries and identities but excludes women (id). Critics have also pointed out that it should be of some concern that Lamming, in his analysis

⁹⁶ Harris (1999: 159) sees this as a 're-assembly which issued from of state of cramp to articulate a new growth', a 'creative phenomenon of the first importance in the imagination of a people violated by economic fates'. See also Hall (1990: 222-237) about the influences which have been so prevalent in the Caribbean since Columbus's fated arrival and which he identifies as the African presence, the European presence and the New World Presence.

⁹⁷ Term used by Olaniyan (1995: 114).

of the *Tempest*, seems to consciously postpone consideration of the female characters of Sycorax and Miranda's mother 'as contributing subjects of Caribbean cultural history', and that resistance and liberation should be exclusively perceived as a male endeavour (Pouchet Paquet, 1992: xxii). Some even contend that the absence and the silencing of the native woman in *The Tempest* should lead us to question the efficacy of that text as a platform from which a liberating narrative in which both men and women can participate could be elaborated (Wynter, 1999: 97). Whilst this research would in no way attempt to decry the part that Lamming's or Walcott's work have played in the elaboration of a challenge to the authority of the colonial power, it also acknowledges that the absence of a Caribbean female perspective needs to be addressed. With this in mind, I set out to explore how in her novel, *Crick Crack Monkey*, Merle Hodge stages a powerful Caribbean counter-discourse which develops a political and social analysis of the colonial endeavour as well as a psychological exploration of its effects upon the selfhood of the colonised child (Hodge, 1970). I also examine how her challenge of the 'master' vision of reality and of identity recentres orality and the hitherto voiceless 'native' woman in history.

3.3 'Claiming an identity they taught me to despise'⁹⁸

Now against the rhythms
of subway trains my
heartbeats still drum
worksongs. Some wheels
sing freedom, the others
Home.

Still, if I could balance
water on my head I can
juggle worlds
on my shoulders

Olive Senior, 'Ancestral Poem' (1985: 9-10)

As the male Caribbean colonised found themselves emasculated in the rhetoric of the master's discourse, they produced, in response to this aggression at the heart of the self, a discourse of liberation which, by its emphasis on males as sole agents of decolonisation, doubly marginalised the native women, by virtue of race and gender, and silenced them. Whilst men viewed themselves as leaders and active citizens in

⁹⁸ Cliff (1980).

the newly established nations, women were confined to private spaces and their roles defined as passive guardians of traditional practices. Under those circumstances, it ensues that ‘a national identity could not be but a problematic terrain for women novelists’⁹⁹ for, if resistance is to be seen only in terms of nationalism, there is the risk that other forms of resistance, other histories will be overlooked, and ‘to ignore the subaltern today is ... to continue the imperialist project’ (Spivak, 1993: 94):

The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature ... By voicelessness, we mean the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women’s rights and more direct social and cultural issues. By voicelessness, we also mean silence: the inability to express a position in the language of the “master” as well as the textual construction of the woman as silent. Voicelessness also denotes articulation which goes unheard. (Boyce-Davies and Savory Fido, 1994: 1)

Spivak herself has been accused of displaying a ‘deliberated deafness to the native voice where it can be heard’, and of ignoring the ways in which women in colonised societies, such as the Caribbean, have inscribed themselves as ‘healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists’ (Parry, 1987: 39). This research examines how, as they demand to be heard and insist they have stories to tell, myths to expose, identities to reconstruct, Caribbean women writers such as Merle Hodge give the lie to Spivak’s position. At the same time, it calls into question Parry’s own criticism of an over-emphasis of discourse as a tool of resistance, as it demonstrates how, through the subversive power of language, her narrative draws attention to ‘the conditions of existence of those subjects who are muted, elided, or unrepresentable in dominant discourse’ (De Lauretis, 1986: 9) and enables new realities come to the fore since, as Hodge states:

For me, there is no fundamental contradiction between art and activism. In particular, the power of the creative world to change the world is not to be underestimated ... creative writing becomes, for me, a guerrilla activity. We are occupied by foreign fiction. Fiction which affirms and validates our world is therefore an important weapon of resistance. (1990: 202, 206)¹⁰⁰

Childhood and the leaving of it have been recurrent themes in West Indian literature, but whereas many critics have considered *Crick Crack Monkey* (Hodge,

⁹⁹ Franco Jean, quoted by Gikandi (1992: 197).

¹⁰⁰ As Marjorie Thorpe (1990: 530; 529) points out, ‘breaking the silence has never been too fearsome a task for Caribbean women’ for, she continues, ‘we are all too familiar with the comment by the government official in Trinidad who observed in 1823 that female slaves more often deserved punishment than males because they used to great effect that powerful instrument of attack and defence, their tongue’.

1970)¹⁰¹ from the standpoint of the Bildungroman, as a coming-of-age story,¹⁰² this study views the novel as a platform from which the author enables ‘a people to read itself - to decipher its own reality’ (Hodge, 1990: 205).¹⁰³ It also argues that the doubleness contained in the autobiographical text as it apprehends the past, not just from the child’s space of enunciation, but also from the knowing backward look of the adult, allows for a vision of the self as a unitary entity to be challenged. It considers how the ambiguity contained in both this doubleness and ‘the catastrophe of memory’, when only fragments of our past can be recollected (Derrida, 1995: 207), and in the movement between past and present, ‘personal affect and historical fact’, enables ‘the sovereignty of essences and the myth of origins’ to be interrogated (Silverman, 2009: 9). The novel is also examined from the perspective of Derrida’s *récit*, ‘not simply a memory reconstituting a past’ but ‘also a promise ... something that makes a commitment toward the future’ (1995: 206).

Crick Crack, Monkey opens with a chorus of voices as the child protagonist Tee, standing on a chair at the window, announces to all and sundry ‘we getting a baby’ (Hodge, 1970: 1), thus privileging oracy over the hegemony of the written form. As Gikandi argues, for Merle Hodge as for many other Caribbean writers, the recovery of the voice through which unspoken and repressed experiences could be represented, is viewed as a ‘precondition for black subjectivity in the colonial situation’ (1992: 203-4). Through the power of the imagination which ‘resists, destabilises and transforms the status of the world in action’, through ‘the subtle or even explicit manipulation of speech rhythms’ (Lamming, 2003b), the colonised speak back to the metropole and restore themselves to their community and ultimately to themselves. The voice becomes the instrument through which seemingly lost identities re-emerge to transform themselves and ‘name themselves anew’:

‘Liberated’, hollowed out, emptied, through a dialectical process of paired contradictions ... Images crumble, shift, dissolve and coalesce in strange combinations or, to use Harris’s own term, ‘paradoxical juxtapositions’, reflecting a universe in the process of becoming. (Shaw, 1985: 125)

¹⁰¹ All references to the novel are to this edition.

¹⁰² See Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe, (1988a: 18, 38; Japtok, 2001: 1; Narinesingh, 1970: vii).

¹⁰³ Indeed, Hodge further argues in an interview with Balutansky (1989: 653): ‘What is very interesting is that many people, not just in the Caribbean but also in Africa ... have chosen the device of a child narrator or protagonist ... these novels aren’t really novels about children ... I think that to a large extent it was stock-taking and validation of our culture ... So the impact of the educational system on the child is really an exploration of the impact of the educational system on the budding culture’.

In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, the adult Tee, through the voice of her younger self reappropriates the world of ‘Tantie’ and ‘Ma’ which she abandoned and disowned as she left for England and its ‘Golden Gates’ (Hodge, 1970: 123). In Caribbean fiction, ‘the conflict of values is often rendered in terms of place... the house and memories of a particular place become metaphors for cultural identity’ (Juneja, 1996: 27). So it is to Tantie’s home that Tee returns, a raucous, exuberant, warm place where Tee is free to roam, to experience the richness of her cultural and natural environment and to grow with a clear feeling of belonging: ‘Tantie’s company was loud and hilarious’ (Hodge, 1970: 4). It is a universe where the individuals define themselves not in isolation but through the identity of the group, of the larger community. Through the unconscious use of the pronoun ‘we’ to describe her life at Tantie’s in opposition to the ‘I’ of her time spent with her Aunt Béatrice, the neo-colonial ‘mother’, Tee contrasts the communality of the Caribbean experience with the individualism of the Western discourse in which the self feels alienated. It is at the basis of Caribbean culture, for ‘almost all of us’, Hodge remarks, ‘are socialised ... in a family framework which had nothing to do with the traditional nuclear family’, with women playing a very central role.¹⁰⁴

Tantie’s community is brought together by sound and the use of creole which has ‘stubbornly survived generations of disrespect’ (Hodge, 1990: 204) and which opens up a subtle but at the same time powerful space of resistance to the colonial established order. Through it, we are introduced to the communal voices of daily interaction: ‘Ma saluting houses on the way: Oo-oo Ma-Henrietta...’, which fill Tee with excitement; to the sounds of communal mockery at the over-rectitude of the colonial bourgeoisie personified in the schoolmistress’s ‘stiff bottom’: ‘Mind, Mis’ Hinds, the bottom fallin’; to the sounds of rebellion as Tantie fights Auntie Beatrice for the guardianship of the children: ‘Wha paper...I would shit on allyu paper! You ain’t have no right!’; to the sounds of the steel bands, a whole community performance which penetrates her whole being so that she and the music becomes one as it ‘thudded through (her) belly’ with her ‘teeth clashing together in time’ (Hodge, 1970: 7-34).

In the Caribbean as in Africa, the native voice is kept alive by a strong oral tradition and folk memory provides the members of the community with a deep sense of place. It is ‘the oldest form of building historical consciousness’ (Trinh, 1989:

¹⁰⁴ See Hodge in Balutansky (1989: 655).

148), the means of coming home, as the act of recovering the past is one way of validating and making sense of the present and affirming a sense of self. From very early on, the child is cradled in the oral tradition of storytelling, performed mostly by women, and as 'Big Mother' weaves her magic, s/he learns the suggestive, imaginative power of language, 'the immemorial quality of the sky and the forests and the rivers' (Thiong'o, 1986: 10-1). It is with her grandmother Ma, the storyteller, that Tee learns about the hypnotic power of the voice, which appeals to all her senses and nourishes the deepest parts of her being for, 'in the process of storytelling...the speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures' (Trinh, 1989: 121). Moreover, like the steel bands that symbolise the soul of a people that refuse to be silenced, the 'nancy-stories' Tee delights in, with their trickster folktale hero, Anancy, stand for the resistance of the Caribbean spirit against the force of colonial domination. The community is brought together as they respond in unison to Ma's 'Crick Crack, Monkey' with a 'Monkey break 'e back on a rotten pommerac!' and this engenders a deep sense of belonging and of continuity in all the participants.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the subversive element contained in the trickster tale allows for the refusal to accept one's destiny and the possibility of endless redefinition of the self, of renewal:

The trickster tale orders social experience in terms of an ongoing creative process that enhances both the integrity of the community and the need constantly to reformulate and recreate that community. (Taylor, 1989: 21)

It is through Ma that Tee encounters the indefatigable spirit of her great grandmother whom she is told she incarnates and who is portrayed as a 'tall, straight, proud woman' who, until the day she died, refused all attempts to be called 'Euphemia or Euph-something' but insisted on her 'true-true name' (Hodge, 1970: 21). This is a powerful reminder of how self-naming was used as a potent form of resistance in a society where alien names, imposed on the slaves by their colonial 'masters', estranged them from their past and from themselves. Ma, though, to her great despair, cannot remember that name until the day she died: 'Ma had suddenly remembered her grandmother's name and wanted it added to my names'. Tee though will have to carry the burden of that forgetting as 'Tantie had not even bothered to remember it' (122). The whole tragedy of colonialism is embodied in that erasure of

¹⁰⁵ As Hodge explains in her interview with Balutansky (1989: 657): 'It's part of our oral culture; it's a rhyme that is said at the end of stories. At the end of a story there's a variety of phrases you say, or a variety of rhymes you say, but one of them is 'Crick, crack / Monkey break 'e back / On a rotten pommerac'.

the name but, with Tantie's act of forgetting, Merle Hodge also highlights the ambiguity and the contradictions that are to be found in the narration of the past and in the construction of the self:

The past cannot be narrated without a cognizance of the contradictory voices that defined it – repressive voices coexisting with liberating ones. The figure of the voice is shown to be central to the narrator's conception of her childhood and a paradigm that defines the context in which her multiple selves were produced. (Gikandi, 1992: 204)

Ambiguity is also to be found in the double-voiced discourse brought about by the juxtaposition of two modes of utterances. The unsophisticated language of the child resonates throughout the novel as she reproduces and appropriates the voices of the adults around her in a move towards constructing her sense of self through her encounters with others in language: 'when Tantie had found her voice again what she ain't tell that bitch is what she forget' (Hodge, 1970: 13). Indeed, as Bakhtin remarks, 'the Word in language is half someone else's' (1981: 293). The child's voice also interweaves with that of the insightful, controlling adult author as she renders Tee's childhood experiences in the studied and polished language of the erstwhile coloniser of which she now has full mastery. It introduces another consciousness which, from the space of autobiography, disturbs the apparent authority of the child-narrator and introduces the reader to realities which lie beyond the child's as yet limited understanding: 'I took it for granted at first that my mother was a poor soul because she'd had the misfortune to die. But bit by bit I gathered that a misfortune quite as regrettable had overtaken her while still living' (Hodge, 1970: 90). It is also used to highlight how Tee's doubleness of the self in the language of her community prefigures her further estrangement in the colonial environment of the school and of Aunt Beatrice.

This is also another ambiguous moment for, even as she celebrates the enchanted world of Ma, the school is a space that she desires to enter:

'I looked forward to school. I looked forward to the day when I could pass my hands swiftly from side to side on a blank piece of paper leaving meaning marks in its wake; to staring nonchalantly into a book until I turned the page, a gesture pregnant with importance for it indicated that one had not merely been staring, but that the most esoteric of processes had been taking place whereby the paper had yielded up something or other as a result of having been stared at.' (Hodge, 1970: 22)

It is obvious that, for the young Tee, the authority of the school resides in writing, to which she attributes mythical qualities and which, she has been made to believe, bestows power onto whoever is initiated into its mystery.¹⁰⁶ The reality she uncovers, however, is that of colonial education system which revels in the control of bodies as well as minds, of a world of rigid conformity, of unquestioning obedience and passivity and where strict codes of behaviour are drilled into young, susceptible minds. Hodge uses the imagery of a slave ship to expose the violence perpetrated on the children by the institution of the school:

We sat in a kind of well, for there were children packed onto a raised platform running along the edges of the cavernous hall ... closely wedged together ... reciting and buzzing in contradictory tempos. (Hodge, 1970: 48)

It is portrayed as a disquietening environment where, through the medium of the standard English language, concepts alien to her immediate, familiar environment are forced upon the child. It is through the use of irony in the Bakhtinian sense of a double-voiced, hybridized discourse within a single utterance,¹⁰⁷ that Hodge is able to convey how the Book is a site of deep alienation as, through reading, Tee is made to enter ‘the *familiar* solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable *normality* of *real* Boys and Girls who...called things by their *proper* names’ (my emphasis). As she is thus transported into the world of the colonising Other, her Caribbean environment loses all substance since ‘Reality and Righteousness’ can only ‘be found Abroad’ (67).¹⁰⁸ Her sense of alienation is further reinforced by the violent and destructive power of the racist discourse. It is through books too that Tee is first confronted with her blackness and with all the negative imagery and connotations that such a recognition entails. Through the representation of ‘Negroes and Red Indians’ as images of the Devil, of evil spirits, of savages, she is made to feel shame and repulsion for her physical appearance and is found praying for her ‘black sin’ to be ‘washed away’ so that she may stand ‘white and shining’ before the Lord’ (33).

¹⁰⁶ As Eagleton argues (1996:113): ‘Just as Western philosophy has been ‘phonocentric’, centred on the ‘living voice’ and deeply suspicious of script, so also it has been in a broader sense ‘logocentric’ committed to a belief in some ultimate ‘word’ presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation of our thought, language and experience’.

¹⁰⁷ As Bakhtin writes (1981: 304-5): ‘the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a single sentence. It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction – and consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents’.

¹⁰⁸ As Merle Hodge contends (see Dabydeen 1988b: 78): ‘The problem in a country that is colonized ... is that the education system takes you away from your own reality ... turns you away from the Caribbean ... We never saw ourselves in a book, so we didn’t exist in a kind of way and our culture and our environment, our climate, the plants around us did not seem real, did not seem to be of any importance – we overlooked them entirely. The real world was in books’.

The feeling of her own immateriality and that of her village community is further compounded when she leaves the comforting womb of Tantie's household to enter the sterile environment of Aunt Beatrice, symbolically with Tantie's acquiescence. Aunt Beatrice, a member of the colonised bourgeoisie, has adopted the value system of the coloniser dominated by middle-class conventions, by 'the right way' to speak and to behave, and far removed from 'all those raucous niggery people' (95). Its artificiality and insubstantiality are symbolised for the reader by the faded image of the 'White Ancestress' proudly hanging on the wall. The sensual vitality of Tee's early childhood world is replaced by an environment which harshly represses and reproves the whole of her being. Her body becomes such a site of loathing, and such an 'affront to common decency' that she wishes for it to 'shrivel up and fall away' so that she 'could step out new and acceptable' (107). The Carnival, which she now watches 'primly' from afar 'in the company of tourists', is now a source of shame for she is only aware of the 'niggeryness of the whole affair' (97) and becomes 'a mirror of her inner conflict and her divided self' (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe, 1997:70).

Even though Tee experiences daily 'reproof' for her 'niggeryness' and 'ordinaryness', she nevertheless wants to belong, and this accentuates her crisis of identity (Hodge, 1970: 105). In a struggle to acquire 'validity', she re-invents herself as 'Helen', 'the proper Me. And me, I was the shadow hovering about in incompleteness' (67-8). However, as we have seen in chapter one, this identification with the specular image in Lacan's 'stade du miroir', is misrecognition, an imaginary elaboration. The world reflected in the mirror that she wishes to enter has no physical substance as it only exists as a textual reference to an illusionary world 'over there'. It powerfully demonstrates how Tee's subjectivity is constructed through language but also how the place of identification, 'caught in the tension of demand and desire is a place of splitting' (Bhabha, 2004: 63).¹⁰⁹ The colonised child finds herself doubly

¹⁰⁹ As Tee explains in the novel (1970: 68): 'For doubleness, or this particular kind of doubleness, was a thing to be taken for granted. Why, the whole of life was like a piece of cloth, with a rightside and a wrongside. Just as there was a way you spoke and a way you wrote, so there was the daily existence which you led, which of course amounted to marking time and makeshift, for there was the Proper daily round, not necessarily more agreeable, simply the valid one, the course of which encompassed things like warming yourself before a fire or having tea at four o'clock; there were the human types who were your neighbours and guardians and playmates – but you were all marginal together, for there were the beings whose validity loomed at you out of every book, every picture The beings whose exemplary aspect it was that shone forth to recommend at you every commodity proposed for your daily preference, from macaroni to the Kingdom of Heaven'. The juxtaposition of macaroni and Kingdom of Heaven is another example of Bakhtin's linguistic hybridity and makes a mockery of the whole colonial enterprise.

alienated in language as the power of the colonial school and of its system of representation unsettles her Caribbean world, whose reality pales into insignificance and is ultimately silenced.¹¹⁰ She is torn between the marginality of her creole environment and the artificiality of the colonial culture and their two modes of representation, neither of which she feels she can appropriate or belong to. Exile to England seems to be the only way of resolving an inner turmoil which is reflected in a withering Mother Nature which had hitherto sustained her:

Everything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be, since I had moved up and no longer had any place here. But it was painful, and I longed all the more to be on my way. Ma gone, the shaddock tree dried up as if with Mickey gone, it no longer had any function. (122)

The closure of the novel is deliberately problematic, a place 'of ideological ambiguity' (Franco, 1989: 132) and perfectly reflects, in my view, the ambivalence at the heart of Caribbean consciousness. The responses to the book also share that sense of indeterminacy. Narinesingh claims that the main protagonist's exile to England cannot be seen as a 'morally affirmative position' from which to attain 'personal synthesis and coherence' (1970: xv). Thorpe warns that though her sojourn in the metropolis might help Tee to resolve the tension between her two cultural legacies, it could also 'aggravate her contempt for the local black Creole culture, thus removing her permanently to the ranks of the culturally displaced' (1977: 32). I favour a more positive outlook and contend, that it is from that ambiguous, liminal space that Tee may be best able to comprehend how her younger self was constructed and alienated in language.¹¹¹ From this perspective, exile is seen as a third space from which 'the whole conflict could be resolved' and Tee would be 'able to understand where to place Aunt Beatrice and where to place Auntie and what her own position was'.¹¹² It is, I suggest, through her appropriation and mastery of the 'master's' weapons that Hodge, the adult Tee, is able to interrogate the insidious value system of the colonial edifice, ask questions about 'who did the stealing ...and what was stolen' (Philip, 1987: 39). For that purpose, as Philip declares, it seems that there is 'no way around the language, only through it, challenging the mystification

A similar theme appears in Jean Rhys's *White Sargasso Sea* (1966: 147) when the image in the mirror is used to convey Antoinette's growing sense of alienation: 'the girl I saw in the glass was myself, yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely, I tried to kiss it but the glass was between us'.

¹¹⁰ See Bhabha (2004: 62-3).

¹¹¹ For a similar perspective, see also Gikandi (1992: 197-217).

¹¹² See Hodge in Balutansky (1989: 654).

and half-truths at its core' (id). Hodge, Gikandi argues (1992: 209), has been able to overcome and transform the alienation of her Caribbean self through narration in 'an insurgent act of cultural translation', so that the "past-present' becomes the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living' (Bhabha, 2004: 10). The power of language as an operation of discourse both as a tool of enslavement but also of liberation is a powerful element in the novels by Phillips, Dabydeen and Levy in the following chapters. As in Hodge's novel, these writers use ambivalence, dialogism and heteroglossia and appropriate the power inherent in language to be dissonant to enable other ways of seeing, meaning and being to come to the fore through which metropolitan and Caribbean subjectivities can be reconfigured.

By placing black Caribbean women centre-stage in her novel, she also makes up 'for the neglect, the disregard, the distortions, and untruths' suffered at the hands of a male imperialist discourse (Marshall, 1992: 20). The title of the novel partakes of the sense of ambiguity that pervades the whole text and is meant as a warning against the aping and the imitation of a dominant literate culture which, in Hodge's view, can only lead to a deep sense of 'un-belonging' and non-being.¹¹³ Furthermore, it powerfully posits the advent of the colonial book and its value system in the Caribbean as 'just a story' among others whose singular authority and value system can also be challenged with the sound of the Crick Crack rhyme at the end of Ma's Anancy stories, thus undermining some of its ascendancy.¹¹⁴ At the same time, whilst it acknowledges the written form as an inevitable constituent of the Caribbean self, it also reasserts, through that same medium, as we shall also see in Dabydeen's novel, an oral culture as an essential part of Caribbean consciousness, as a source of nourishment and a means of reconnection to a past not preserved in a literary form for:

It is left to the visionary witness to fill the void with a fiction of the imagination that will repopulate history with invisible presences never quite completely destroyed...this process no longer relies on documentary epic, official records or social realism, but on subjective, tentative deconstruction of dominating presence to show the shadows of reconstructions from absence. (Sharrad, 1995: 97)

¹¹³ Id. p 657.

¹¹⁴ Id. Hodge maintains that 'the book is about our cultural situation in the colonial era. The values into which we were inducted were part of a make-believe value system. In my book there are a number of incidents where you have people living out fantasies, like Manhattan...His whole ambition is to be an American and he actually lives it full time. So, I think the real story of Manhattan is revealed when the boys say, 'Crick, Crack'...The 'Crick crack' they say at the end is to deflate his bubble'.

It is through the reduction of language to the One, through that 'hegemony of the homogenous', Derrida argues, that the colonised experience a sense of displacement, exclusion and alienation. 'I have only one language; and it is not mine', he bemoans, for 'it exists asymmetrically, always for *the other*, from the other, kept by the other' and returns 'to the other' (1996: 1; 40). However, this 'pure 'ipseity' of language (hospitality or hostility)' is but an illusion, for language always bears within itself a relation to something other which fractures it and alienates it from within, so that neither coloniser nor colonised can truly possess it (22-5). Our experience of the world is always partial and incomplete, for the encounter with the other means repetition and interpretation and this challenges the concept of identity and the language which defines it as universalist, fixed entities. Any attempt at excluding and effacing that other in a longing for completeness is doomed to fail as the other is already within us, for 'I is an Other' ('Je est un autre'), the French poet Rimbaud writes. Deconstruction is to enter into a *Poetics of Relation* (Glissant, 2006), to respond to that other, to welcome it in a gesture towards a past which has been excluded and towards a future which is yet to come. This is what Derrida, in a play on the etymology of the word, calls 'invention' (in-venire), to both let in and to create something new.

As we have seen, colonialism, in forcing very different societies into contact, contains within itself the seeds of deconstruction, though the imperialist West still finds it difficult to abandon its essentialist norms. Glissant argues that fragmented colonised societies such as the Caribbean are therefore better placed to undertake the task of deconstruction, which far from imposing universalist norms which reduce everything to 'the same', calls instead for diversity as its underlying principle: 'Diversity leads to Relation: it is the modern implication of cultures in each other, through their wanderings, their 'structural' demand for absolute equality...Diversity establishes Becoming' (1999: 196). 'The pleasure and paradox' (Lamming, 1984: 50) of exile and of migration is the condition of the colonial and it is from these spaces of enunciation that Caribbean writers have recently felt able to assert themselves in the face of a totalising culture, to find a way 'to change the meaning and perspective of this ancient tyranny' and offer another 'way of seeing' (229). They have challenged the authority of the Book which offered a view of the world which alienated and excluded them and have demanded to be inscribed in its history

and its discourse, and to engage in a dialogue with Prospero. They have explored their estrangement from an all-embracing oral culture, through the medium of a scripted alien language that imposed a foreign way of apprehending reality, and erased their sense of self. They have created a Caribbean Theatre through which ‘the collective consciousness sees itself and consequently moves forward’ for ‘there can be no nation without a theatre’ (Glissant, 1999: 196). They have liberated the Caribbean body from its enslavement in the rigidity of the written and allowed it to rediscover movement and voice through the celebration of orality and a Caribbean landscape. They have struggled to repossess the memory of a fragmented and ruined past, and to question a monolithic Western history which imprisoned them in its myths of origins. Most importantly, they have disturbed the sovereignty of the colonising edifice and of a reductive view of identity which defined itself in opposition to the other.

Instead, they have opened the way to a conception of the self and of our relationship with the past defined, not by exclusion of the other, not by binary oppositions but by ‘the knotted intersection of histories produced by a fusion of horizons’.¹¹⁵ It is akin to Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, which sees relation operating within an open totality which is not exclusive and alienating, as in the imperialist ideal, but which needs a crisscrossing of experiences, cultures and ‘peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relationship’ (1999: 98). It functions within a dynamic process which Glissant calls ‘errance’ and which, in challenging and dismissing the universal, in refusing to be imprisoned in fixed structures and entities, chooses instead to be immersed in the inter-relational nature of the human condition which views ‘marginality...not so much (as) a geographical position...but rather an angle of creative and re-creative capacity’ (Harris, 1990: 15). Identity becomes then a positioning and constant repositioning from a particular place and time, from a particular history and culture, in relation to a criss-crossing of narratives. It is within this optic of knotted intersections and ‘errance’ haunted by the Atlantic sound that I would like to examine works by three contemporary British writers of the Caribbean diaspora¹¹⁶ who, I argue, through an exploration of intersecting identities, of voices and cultures

¹¹⁵ Gilroy (2004a: 78). See also, ‘Knotted Intersections: Cixous and Derrida’ in *Wasafiri* (2009: 9-12), Vol.24, n°1 (March).

¹¹⁶ These terms, Black, British, Caribbean are always controversial. Phillips, in an interview with Bronwyn T. Williams (1999: 4) talks about the political importance of calling himself a ‘British writer’ rather than a Black or Caribbean writer because to do otherwise ‘lets people off the hook, because they don’t want to then reconsider, to reconfigure Britain in their minds’.

across frontiers and boundaries of time, space, race, language, culture, gender, class and sex, challenge traditional oppositions of centre and periphery. They call instead for a move away from the constraints of enslaving binary paradigms and linear constructions, for an interweaving and interdependence of coloniser and colonised narratives, for 'a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel' (Bhabha, 2004: 9), for a syncretic vision in which 'the colonized bring a history into being in which the colonizers too find themselves' (Taylor, 1989: 227)

4. **CARYL PHILLIPS'S *CROSSING THE RIVER* (Phillips, 1993)¹¹⁷**
'A Chorus of Common Memory'

So crossing the river
and walking the path
we came to Kumasi.

You were on the other
bank, walking away
down the slope,

Can you hear
Can you hear me? (Brathwaite, 1967: 136)¹¹⁸

4.1 **'Writing as hopeful space'**¹¹⁹

The 'vexing questions' of belonging and identity and the theme of travel as a means of attempting to come to terms with the conundrum of 'home' are seen by most critics to be at the forefront of Caryl Phillips's preoccupations and of his writing.¹²⁰ In a thought-provoking study of postcolonial writing which includes an analysis of *Crossing the River*, Bewes argues however that a 'diasporan' reading of Phillips's fiction might not be the best way to comprehend his work (2011: 51). He contends that the same feelings of shame as those experienced by Primo Levi as a holocaust survivor pervade Phillips's writing. It is the shame, as Levi describes it, of the survivor-writer caught in the paradox of having been given the tools to bear witness whilst at the same time, feeling that his 'very eloquence testifies to the fact

¹¹⁷ All further references to the novel are to this edition.

¹¹⁸ It is Davison (1994: 95) who pointed out to Phillips the connection between Brathwaite's poem and the title of his novel. A surprised Phillips put it down to an unconscious connection, re-enforcing once more the theme of this research.

¹¹⁹ It is W.E.B Du Bois (1968: 2) who calls our attention to writing as a 'hopeful space' where concepts of race and identity can be expressed.

¹²⁰ See Phillips, 'The High Anxiety of Belonging' (pp 303-9) and pp 1-6 in *A New World Order* (2002). Maya Jaggi (2001) calls him a 'chronicler of displacement and precarious belonging' and a 'compulsive itinerant'.

that he has not experienced the full horror' since he is not one of the 'drowned'(20).¹²¹ Bewes claims that, after colonialism, shame and writing must be understood as coterminous with each other:

Shame is not an affect that may be communicated by writing, nor an emotion that is covered up by writing, but a complex that arises precisely with the writing itself. Shame arises from an incommensurability between my own experience and myself as reflected back to me in the eyes of the other – an incommensurability that is materialized precisely in my writing. (Bewes, 2011: 41)

This leads him to conclude that Phillips's work is not about giving voice to the 'subalterns' as the author himself and many critics have claimed, but is about the dialectic of the possibility of speaking and the impossibility of it. He is at the same time very critical of those scholars who choose to examine texts such as *Crossing the River* from a Caribbean perspective. He declares that the notion of cultural identity has nothing but 'incidental relevance for our engagement with the actuality of the literary text' and that such 'positionality' should have no bearing upon the novel other than as a 'banal, purely empirical point of departure' (68; 71).

I first would like argue that, in order to fully engage with Phillips's novels, we cannot so easily dismiss that 'point of departure' for, as Bewes himself acknowledges, writing is 'one of the major ways in which we place ourselves before the other...represent others to ourselves – or indeed ourselves to ourselves' (60).¹²² It is in childhood, 'the bank balance of the writer',¹²³ spent in a predominantly white working-class part of Leeds in the 1960s and 1970s, that the roots of the sense of displacement and alienation which pervade his work can be uncovered. It is, particularly, through the medium of literature itself that he is first introduced to the 'shame' of his black condition as well as to that sense of ambiguity that resonates throughout his writing. Through the power of the imagination, books provide him with a welcome refuge from a humdrum daily existence and allow him to discover and explore worlds hitherto unknown. At the same time, the reality they name is not one he can identify with and the absence of black narratives, of black history, lead to a deep feeling of immateriality and insubstantiality. Moreover, reading will be always associated in Phillips's mind with the humiliation and the pain of racial

¹²¹ See 'Shame' in Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989:70-87).

¹²² As Anne-Marie Fortier (2005: 184) succinctly puts it, diasporic memory is 'place based' but not 'space bound'. For a further discussion on the subject, see also Baronian et al (2007: 9-16).

¹²³ Phillips (1994: 82) in conversation with Anita Desai and Ilan Stavans.

prejudice. In an autobiographical piece written in the third person, he invites the reader to be witness to that suffering, both as a personal and a collective experience:

Miss Teale...begins to read them a tale about of Little Black Sambo. He can feel eyes upon him. He now wishes that ...the teacher would please read them a different story...Two brothers up the street sometimes let him borrow their Enid Blyton paperbacks...the first literary lives he intimately engages with. However, he tells his mother that he does not understand why the boys' mother warms the Enid Blyton in the oven when he returns them. The two brothers have mentioned something to him about germs. His mother is furious. She forbids him to borrow any more books from these two boys. (Phillips, 2005b)

Thus, it is that, 'riddled with the cultural confusions of being Black and British' (Phillips, 1987: 2), and having to embrace two modes of living, two modes of communication, he takes a break from his English studies at Oxford and whilst in the United States, acquires a copy of *Native Son* by Richard Wright. This first encounter with black writing is to prove a decisive moment, 'as if an explosion had taken place' inside his head' (1987:8). The deep sense of possibility that is suddenly exposed does not resonate at that time with the anguish and despair suffered by the survivors of the Holocaust when confronted by the need to bear witness in a language that they feel is unable to convey that which is ineffable (Bewes, 2011: 43). Instead, he feels he is no longer drifting, that his life has now been given a purpose and that he will be a writer, as 'the emotional anguish of the hero... the uncompromising prosodic muscle of Wright, his deeply sense of social indignation, provided...a possibility of how (he) might be able to express the conundrum of (his) own existence'.¹²⁴ At the same time, however influential American writers such as Wright, Baldwin and Ellison might have been, they also appear to Phillips to inhabit an altogether different world.¹²⁵ It is only as he comes upon Selvon and Lamming that he is able to find in their writings the same 'anxieties of belonging and non-belonging' that underscore his own life (234). Lamming's 'deeply historical sensibility' is of particular appeal to Phillips:

Those of my generation who were going to write found in the work of these two authors recognizable subject matter and a restlessness associated with formal invention, which meant there was no longer any necessity for us to keep looking to New Jersey or Chicago or Detroit for our literary fixes. (237)

¹²⁴ Phillips (1987: 8). See also 'Growing pains' (2005b).

¹²⁵ Phillips (2002: 233; 36) writes that whilst he could recognise in their writing the 'roots of its indignation' still left him 'with the feeling that there was still something missing'. He is particularly concerned that, once in Europe, writers such as Baldwin and Wright appear to have overlooked the plight of the colonial and economic migrants over there as well as appeared 'indifferent to the disturbing and undeniable spectre of the Holocaust'.

A trip to his birthplace of St Kitts in his early twenties liberates him further from the narrow British perspective in which he has hitherto been confined, as he realizes that ‘the narrative did not begin in Leeds or Brixton’.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, he is suddenly faced with a world he does not understand, with which he appears to have ‘no cultural point of reference’, but which, he knows and feels, is an essential component of who he is.¹²⁷ Writing thus becomes for him in part a concern with ‘trying to write’ himself ‘into the landscape’, to understand and ‘nurture’ his Caribbean self.¹²⁸ Of particular importance for this research, the Caribbean is also, for Phillips, the gateway to a trans-cultural venture, where ‘impurity is the norm’, where one is defined not by excluding the other but by interaction with the other.¹²⁹ Indeed, he argues, Britain and its literature have been ‘forged in the crucible of fusion, of hybridity’ for, ‘as soon as one defines oneself as ‘British’, one is participating in a centuries-old tradition of cultural exchange, of ethnic and linguistic plurality’ (Phillips, 1997a: xiii). Far from dismissing it as an irrelevance, as Bewes does, I want to explore, throughout this chapter, how this particular sense of Caribbeanness as a dynamic site of both conflict and trans-cultural exchange is ‘the central organising symbol’ for the novel in its ‘motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa’.¹³⁰

In his first play, *Strange Fruit*, Phillips explores the sense of frustration, isolation, alienation and rage suffered by the second-generation of immigrants who find themselves ‘lost between two waves’ (Phillips, 1981: 98-99). He is concerned that young Caribbean displaced living in Britain might, like the young protagonists in the play, seek solace and refuge in a black, separatist movement or in a return to an Africa or a Caribbean to which, he contends, they do not truly belong. This, he believes, would be a vain pursuit for it would lead, as the play intimates, to a descent into another form of essentialism, and ultimately to further estrangement, fracture,

¹²⁶ Phillips in Jaggi (2001).

¹²⁷ Phillips (2007: 4) in conversation with Bishop and McLean.

¹²⁸ id

¹²⁹ Phillips in Jaggi (1998). See also Ledent (2007: 81), in which she argues that the Caribbean provided Phillips with a model for viewing the world in terms of connections or of relations and not only in terms of division and that ‘seems to constitute one the main facets of the Caribbeanness of Phillips’s fiction’.

¹³⁰ I have borrowed this expression from Gilroy (1993b: 4; 218) who offers us the chronotope of the ship to suggest the ‘web of diaspora identities and concerns’ that he has labelled the Black Atlantic. As he explains: ‘The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons...Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts’.

pain, and despair.¹³¹ He argues that it is necessary to move beyond an essentialist and Manichaeian view of the colonial condition, and instead to understand the larger events of history which have contributed to the problems these young people now face.¹³² In what I perceive as a refutation of Bewes's argument, Caryl Phillips suggests that, rather than feeling guilt or shame for one's history, one should 'just take responsibility for it'.¹³³ For him as a writer, this means working 'against an undertow of historical ignorance',¹³⁴ of travelling beyond our own boundaries and confines and, of particular importance for the purpose of this research, of opening up to the possibility of dialogue with others across time and space:

If you don't understand where you've come from and you don't understand the difficulties that have preceded you, then you have no idea of *how* you got to where you are...you have no understanding of where you are. And if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you are going. So ... you have to learn that the anxiety that is currently ensnaring your life, the predicament you find yourself mired in, has usually been tackled by somebody else, and one might learn something by being aware of what happened before.¹³⁵

Writing, one's 'own personal bag of fears transmuted into some form of literature for the reader', starts for Phillips, not with ideas but with characters whose voices 'insist' themselves upon him, 'start making demands'.¹³⁶ His intention is to be invisible as an author, to hide behind his characters who, he argues, have entrusted him with their stories without fear of judgement. In his analysis of Phillips's work and *Crossing the River* in particular, Bewes strongly disputes such a claim arguing that none of the characters appear to 'meaningfully own the discourses they make use of' but instead 'play out a majoritarian scenario of colonial mimicry, steeped in

¹³¹ We are reminded here of Walcott's play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* analyzed in 3.2 above.

¹³² See Gilroy (1993b: 198) who conceives of the 'black Atlantic' as a 'non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the manichean logic of binary coding'.

¹³³ Phillips in conversation with Davison (1994: 24). See also Morrison in Gilroy (1993a: 179) who also claims to be writing out of a sense of responsibility towards a past which has been erased.

¹³⁴ Phillips in conversation with Jaggi (2004: 123).

¹³⁵ Phillips in conversation with McLeod (2005: 110). We are also reminded of the lines in the song 'Buffalo Soldier' (1983) co-written by Bob Marley and King Sporty in the album *Confrontation*: 'If you knew your history/ Then you would know where you coming from/ Then you wouldn't have to ask me/ who the heck do I think I am'.

See also Gramsci (1971: 353) who asserts that 'each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations. He is a précis of the past'. He also argues (324) that 'the starting point of critical elaboration' is 'the consciousness of what one really is, and in 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'. As Said (1978:25) further comments, quoting this statement by Gramsci: 'The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci's comment at that, whereas in fact Gramsci's Italian text concludes by adding: 'therefore, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory'.

¹³⁶ Phillips in an interview with Bishop and McLean (2007: 149).

shame' (2011:63; 66). He also deplores the absence of the narrative voice of the author and is particularly critical of what he perceives as Phillips's 'systematic evacuation of every discursive position that might claim freedom from implication in colonialism' (64). I intend to show that Phillips's aim, in *Crossing the River*, is not to create an alternative historical narrative to run alongside the dominant text but to reposition the hitherto voiceless others on the stage of the national and cultural discourse. I set out to examine how, from this perspective, the novel 'allows an instinctive interrelation of margins and centres, past and present' to be considered (Sharrad, 1994:216). Whilst it is an interrelation 'that offers no easy accommodation', I investigate how it might open up to 'the possibility of discovering new coordinates' (id), new ways of being and seeing through memory as a creative polyrhythmic performance, which spins its 'threads of continuity' across boundaries of time and space (Fortier, 2005: 184):

The 'thread of continuity' (Fortier) that diasporic memory spins should not be seen as an Ariadne's thread that provides a solid, traceable connection with the past or a lost and retrievable origin. Its continuity is not essentialist but performative, implying that it consists of a chain of acts of memory that constantly rework and reinvent the content of what is being remembered and forgotten. At the same time, the poetics of diasporic memory do not function randomly, arbitrarily and totally 'detranslocated' but always and constitutively in relation to the impulses by which they are actuated and – *moved*. (Baronian et al: 2006: 15; emphasis in the text)

'The past surges like a mighty river' (Phillips, 2000: 220) and the seed for *Crossing the River* was sown on a visit to a slave fort in Ghana, from a strongly felt need on Phillips's part 'to make a connection between the African world which was left behind and the diasporan world which people had entered once they crossed the water'.¹³⁷ It is through the allegory of the tragic crossing of a river that Phillips narrates a guilt-ridden African father's search for the three children, Nash, Martha and Travis, whom he sold into slavery when his crops failed. Ever since this 'shameful intercourse', he has been haunted for two hundred and fifty years by a 'chorus of a common memory' and 'among the sundry restless voices', he has recognised at times those of the children he has so ruthlessly 'jettisoned' (Phillips, 1993:1). Their disparate narratives interweave with that of the slave trader to transport us through a fragmented structure across time and space to Africa at the

¹³⁷ See Phillips in conversation with Sharpe (1995: 157) and with Davison (1994: 19-20). See also Phillips's account of his visit to Ghana in his work of non-fiction, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000).

time of the slave trade, the moment of contact, to 19th century Liberia, to America and then to Britain during and after the Second World War. The voices of the ‘disremembered and unaccounted for’ (Morrison, 1997: 274) insist themselves upon us, and demand that their stories of survival which transgress the borderlines of time and space be heard so that they should in turn illuminate our present and our future.¹³⁸ In the first section ‘Pagan Coast’, Nash’s story is related in the form of letters from this nineteenth-century emancipated African slave to his erstwhile master and father-figure Edward who has sent him ‘back’ to Liberia as a missionary. Edward’s third person narrative as he journeys in search of his ‘son’ opens and closes the chapter. In the second story, ‘West’, Martha, a slave turned frontierswoman recalls, as she lies dying, a life defined by that moment of fracture when she found herself standing on that fated beach, waiting with her father and brothers. In the third chapter, ‘Crossing the River’, we encounter James Hamilton, the slave trader who bought the three children, uprooting them from their soil and leaving them ‘broken-off, like limbs from a tree’ (2). In the fourth and last narrative, ‘Somewhere in England’, Travis’s story comes to us through the diary entries of his white English wife, Joyce, who meets him when he is sent to England as a GI soldier during the Second World War.

4.2 ‘Father, why have you forsaken me?’ (Phillips, 1993: 42, 73)¹³⁹

Do
you remember?

I tossed my net
but the net caught no
fish

I dipped a wish
but the well
was dry

I could not find my mother
I could not find my father
I could not hear the drum...

¹³⁸ Brathwaite (1974: 42) argues that the myth of Caliban as we know it may disappear once he had succeeded in ‘a movement of possession into present and future.’ Through ‘this movement of possession’ he argues, ‘we become ourselves truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word’.

¹³⁹ Herman (2001: 94) reports that most trauma sufferers ‘experience the bitterness of being forsaken by God’.

Whose ancestor am I?...

...could not hear
my children
laugh...

...Whose
brother, now, am I? (Brathwaite, 1967: 124-6)

The Middle Passage, Hall argues, has shaped black Caribbean identities along lines of 'difference and rupture' but also of 'similarity and continuity' (1990: 222-237). More than any other human experience, slavery, as Brathwaite's poem intimates, is viewed as a history of irremediable loss, of dislocation, of a search for 'navel strings' which only too often 'receives dumbness back for its echo' (Brathwaite, 1967: 149). For the peoples of the African diaspora, the sugar plantation, that violent machine of slavery, is seen as the ultimate instrument of displacement, a 'paradoxical homeland', a bifurcated centre that exists inside and outside at the same time (Benitez-Rojo, 1998: 54-55).¹⁴⁰ Throughout *Crossing the River*, arboreal imagery of peoples from the African diaspora torn asunder, 'broken off, like limbs broken off from a tree' (1993: 2), provides us with apt metaphors for the trans / plantation and deracination suffered by the slaves and their descendants.¹⁴¹ The disjuncture engendered by such a momentous event is also reflected in the novel's fragmentary form and structure, in the polyphony of its voices, in the ceaseless movement between places and periods of history. I would like to suggest that the narratives in the novel need to be viewed within Hall's context of 'rupture' and 'continuity', as illustrative of those 'billions of cultural fragments' which have slowly exploded in all directions 'throughout modern history' from the age of slavery, and still powerfully resonate with us today (Benitez-Rojo, 1998: 54-55). History, for people of the Caribbean diaspora, may be absence, amnesia, 'the silence of four hundred years' and the 'void of historical discourse on slave parent-child relationships and pain' (Morrison, 1993:22). If they are however to survive and

¹⁴⁰ See also Ashcroft (2001: 67-80) on sugar and colonialism: he sees sugar as a metonym of imperial discourse.

¹⁴¹ See Deloughrey (1998: 18-38). The break up of family structures, which, for Phillips, stems from the usurpation by the 'master' of the role normally assigned to the father as provider has, he believes, ramifications which extend into present-day Britain (See Phillips in conversation with Davison, 1994: 22-3). It has also a personal resonance for the author who finds himself estranged from his own father some time after their arrival in Britain.

transcend the tragedy of slavery, Glissant argues, they must now 'possess' that time that was never theirs.¹⁴²

And when people in certain political circumstances try to make a break with the past, they will return to the very past they may have rejected, return in order to seize it consciously, to disentangle it from the myths and fears that once made it menacing. They return because the urgency to discover who and what they are demands that the past be restored to its proper perspective, that it be put on their list of possessions. They want to be able to say without regret or shame or guilt or inordinate pride: 'This belongs to me. What I am comes out of this. (Lamming, 1992:46)

Crossing the River opens with the spectre of the African father asking for forgiveness and it is also through the intermediary of a ghost, that of a child, that Tony Morrison in *Beloved*, a novel which has been a great influence in the writing of *Crossing the River*, helps 'the reader deal with the factually incredible thing which was slavery'.¹⁴³ Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994) also begins with a reflection on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to his son and demands that his untimely death be avenged. For many blacks, Gilroy declares, the slave experience is an 'aberration from the story of greatness told in African history' and they are urged to replace it at the centre of their thinking with a 'mystical and ruthlessly positive notion of Africa', which, to his mind, can only lead to further alienation (1993b: 189). Morrison powerfully argues that the 'struggle to forget' which once was important in order to survive, is now a 'fruitless enterprise'.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, far from being detached from our past, Derrida affirms, we are haunted by it and need to recognise its traces and shadows within ourselves and the way they populate and disrupt our present. Whilst Spivak maintains that it is not the task of the postcolonial intellectual to recover signs of 'the disenfranchised speaking for themselves' (Spivak, 1990: 56),¹⁴⁵ Morrison asserts that the novel, which was once a neglected form for black people who turned to music for solace, is now 'needed in a way it was not needed before'.¹⁴⁶ I would like to consider *Crossing the River* within these contexts and particularly that of Derrida's *hauntology* which

¹⁴² Glissant (1999: 161): 'For History is not only absence for us. It is vertigo. The time that was never ours, we must now possess'. See also Morrison in Gilroy (1993a: 179) who states that 'slavery wasn't in the literature at all' partly because in the move from bondage to freedom, there was a move away from slavery and slaves. But, she now insists 'We have to re-inhabit those people'.

¹⁴³ Morrison cited in Lennox Birch (1994: 177).

¹⁴⁴ Morrison in Gilroy (1993a: 179).

¹⁴⁵ Parry (1997: 11) argues that one of the consequences of such an assertion would be to disregard 'the evidence and traces of resistance to colonialism' such as the slave narratives.

¹⁴⁶ Morrison in Evans (1983: 340).

affirms that the spectral other is always within us and that we need to acknowledge our debt to the 'not-present'. We must learn, Derrida insists, 'how to talk with (ghosts), how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself' (1994: 176). No justice, no future, he continues, is possible without a sense of responsibility to those ghosts of the past which, as fragments and 'cinders' of memory', come to 'disjoin the living present' (xix).¹⁴⁷

Crossing the River is framed, not only by the lament of a guilty African father, as Ledent suggests (1997: 275), but also, I argue, by the haunting, shadowy presence of the slave ship through the character of Hamilton, the slave trader. It is through the weaponry of language, through the medium of two opposing discourses, that Phillips powerfully conveys the barbarity and the 'terror' of the slave enterprise. The two voices, one a despairing cry of shame and anguish, the other a series of utterances void of all emotion, are inextricably interwoven in the prologue, intimating how their destinies are now irrevocably bound together: '*Bought 2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl. I soiled my hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh*' (Phillips 1993: 1; emphasis in the text). It highlights too how the encounter between black and white is at the heart of the text, the 'transaction upon which the book rests' (Ward, 2007: 25). This is also why it is at the centre of the novel that we find the third narrative, *Crossing the River*, that presents us with Hamilton's journal and which, unlike Ledent, I see as suggestive of 'a cross-cultural dynamics' (2002:111) that has come to haunt our present.¹⁴⁸ It starts with the meticulous captain's log, commenced on 24th August 1752, on board Hamilton's slave ship which, tellingly, is almost an exact rendition of the *Journal of a Slave*

¹⁴⁷ Derrida (1995: 207). For him, 'the experience of cinders is the experience not only of forgetting, but also of forgetting of forgetting, of the forgetting of which nothing remains'. Morrison in Gilroy (1993a: 179) argues that the need for a reappropriation of the history of slavery is even more urgent now as 'we live in a land where the past is always erased...the past is absent and it's romanticized... That memory is much more in danger now than it was thirty years ago'.

See also Andrea Levy (2010: 1-5) who explains that the inspiration for her latest novel *The Long Song* came from a heartfelt question by a young woman at a conference who asked 'how she could be proud of her Jamaican roots when her ancestors had been slaves'. Levy wrote too from a deep sense of responsibility as a writer to those 'millions of people who once lived as slaves' and whom 'history has kept silent' up to now but whose voices she felt we must conjure ourselves and to whose stories of survival and defiance we must listen with awe.

¹⁴⁸ Ledent (2002:111) argues that it is ironical that Hamilton's logbook should be entitled *Crossing the River*, 'which falsely suggests a cross-cultural dynamics' in contrast to the titles of the other three narratives which she perceives as giving at first 'an equally misleading idea of geographical and cultural stasis'.

Trader by John Newton, a slave trader turned fervent abolitionist.¹⁴⁹ It is the use of its stark, dispassionate enumeration of horrific events which is the most shocking for it exposes a discourse of slavery as a ruthless, calculating, savage tool of oppression and exploitation. On the one hand, it objectivises the black slaves as mere profitable acquisitions and economic transactions whilst on the other hand, it also dehumanizes the slave traders as much as the human beings it so fastidiously and callously records: ‘In the morning I went on board Mr Sharp’s shallop...to view some slaves. Was shown 10, but bought none. Lame, old, or blind’ (1993:103). The dry, emotionless tone and style of the log are in sharp contrast to the scenes of devastation, the gruesome conditions it so callously evokes: ‘departed this life Edward White, Carpenter’s Mate...Buried at once. Put overboard a boy, No 29’ (116). Slavery ‘broke the world in half. It broke it in every way’¹⁵⁰ and the ‘terror’ which was ‘systematically and rationally practiced as a form of political and economic administration’ is also that shared experience that lies at the heart of black diasporic communities all over the Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993b: 220) and whose stories unfold in *Crossing the River*.

The first narrative, ‘The Pagan Coast’, relates the story of Nash, a freed slave in nineteenth Century America who, in an ironic twist of fate, is sent to Liberia as a Christian missionary by Edward, his ‘beloved benefactor’ and surrogate father, as a ‘reward for faithful service’ (Phillips, 1993:9). The freedom he is supposed to now enjoy is shown to be but an illusion for, as in the days of slavery, he is once more torn away from his family and the support of close friends. The gratitude he displays in his letters to Edward for having ensured he would not be ‘dwelling in the same robes of ignorance which drape the shoulders of (his) fellow blacks’ (21), uncovers for the readers another form of enslavement. Through the imposition of colonial language, he has been thrown into a master discourse of order and prohibition in which ‘utterances are not only signs to be deciphered and understood; they are also signs of ...authority to be believed and obeyed’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 66). In that ‘civilizing’ process, he has been made to wear a white mask of culture, as well as reject and deny a part of himself, an assumed ‘historyless’ and ‘shameful’ other, who has had to be silenced and obliterated. In his internalisation of black inferiority and white superiority he embraces as his own the name of his surrogate father and thus

¹⁴⁹ Phillips (1993) expresses his ‘particular obligation’ to Newton in the ‘Acknowledgments’ for providing him with ‘invaluable research material’.

¹⁵⁰ Morrison in Gilroy (1993a: 178).

allows another self, another history to be erased. He is the unconscious victim of the hierarchical discourse of, it is claimed, 'rational Christian minds' (Phillips, 1993: 9), which fixes reality in its own image, and which, to survive, has to deny alternative claims to knowledge which would threaten its unitary essence.

Nash thus becomes the unwitting artisan of his own destruction and alienation. Far from being 'in no manner in bondage' (20) as he believes himself to be, he has been enslaved once more in a master-slave rhetoric for 'the negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master. The white man is a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table' (Fanon, 1986: 219). Having inherited and unquestioningly adopted the racist and cultural prejudices inherent in the colonising enterprise, he himself becomes involved in the process of 'othering' his black countrymen, those 'uncivilized natives' with 'their crude dialect' (Phillips, 1993: 23). The school he is intent on building is the only instrument through which, he has been led to believe, 'these heathens' will come, like him, to know enlightenment and shed their mantle of 'darkness' (24). In as much as language constitutes the self within the order that Lacan calls the Symbolic, the Name-of-the-Father, Nash finds himself constructed and at the same time imprisoned and alienated by the discourse of the Father, the imperial discourse. When Edward fails to respond to his letters, Nash feels that he has not only been rejected by a father he worships for reasons he cannot fathom, but also that his sense of self, forged by his father's discourse, is fractured. He loses his moorings, for language is how we order, describe and know the world and if this becomes problematic or displaced, then so does our relationship with the world. He finds himself exposed to the violent trauma of exclusion and non-belonging which is the inheritance of slavery and the cornerstone of the colonial enterprise. Hence, his cry of despair, 'Father, why have you forsaken me?' (42), which, with its biblical undertones, highlights the agony of a son who feels abandoned by all he holds dear and no longer understands who he is or where he belongs: 'There are things that I cannot discuss with my native wife for it would be improper for her to share with me the memories of what I was before. I am to her what she has found here in Africa' (id).

It is a lament which is echoed by his 'sister' Martha in the second narrative, 'West', set in pre- and post-emancipation America, as she awaits death at the end of a long journey and remembers 'through some atavistic mist...beyond East...a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man' (73).

All her life is symbolically encompassed and determined by the trauma of that moment of fracture on the shore of the river when she is violently torn apart from all she holds dear. It is a tale of survival in the face of unspeakable circumstances related in a criss-cross movement between past and present which epitomizes the dispersal of people across continents and epochs. How else, Phillips argues, would one write about people whose lives have been disrupted, and torn apart by accidents of history over which they have no control. The past invades the present in the form of a first person narrative in the present tense with, at its centre, that other haunting memory of rupture as Martha recalls that fateful day when she, together with her husband Lucas and her beloved daughter Eliza Mae, await to be sold at the auction house. In contrast, the present is rendered in the form of a third person narrative in the past tense, which emphasises her sense of detachment from it as the memory of the past seems more urgent and forces itself upon her mind. This insistence of the past into the present also serves as a reminder that slave history illuminates our present and is for all of us an ineluctable part of our history and of who we are.

The binary discourse of slavery is once again played out at the auction with each group supporting 'a distinct system of meaning with its own characteristic forms of memory, rules, and racialised codes' (Gilroy, 1993b: 220). Yet, as with the other narratives, both discourses are shown to be inescapably intertwined. On the one hand, we are faced with the revulsion of the new plantation owner who 'holds a handkerchief to his face', the greed of the traders 'with their trigger-happy minds, their mouths tight and bitter' and the pleasure evident on the faces of the 'fun-seeking crowd' (Phillips, 1993: 76-7). On the other hand, the wretchedness and despair of the slaves are enacted through small comforting gestures, all the more moving because the tender love they betray is such a transient affair which fails to be acknowledged by the white onlookers: 'I take Eliza Mae in my arms...I watch as Lucas soaks a cloth in cold water. He comforts me and places it first on my forehead, and then, on that of his child' (id). In the death wish that Lucas proffers, slavery is portrayed in all its horror for it is better to die than to suffer the agony of a life spent away from his loved ones, 'always wondering. Always worrying' (id).

The trader's mechanical, detached performance of his duties follows a predictable, well-rehearsed pattern which, like Hamilton's log, emphasises an obsessive need to record, 'calling out the date, the time, the place' (id), as well an obvious disregard for the desolation wreaked upon the slaves and is in sharp contrast

to Martha's account. Such is the brutality of the happening that language as a linear, structured series of events is inadequate to convey her experience. Instead, the nightmarish quality of the auction is rendered by Martha in a staccato, syncopated style with thoughts, impressions, sensations, events, sounds and people all jumbled up in her terrified mind and imprinted on it as a series of snapshots which explode and penetrate her consciousness like blows: '... He continues to yell... My throat is dry... If a trader buys a man, it is down the river. To die ... A band strikes up' (id). Her voice takes on a haunting quality which gradually pulls the readers in, and forces them to be, like she is, silent and powerless witnesses to the tragedy that unveils itself in front of their eyes.¹⁵¹ The horror of it all is encapsulated in Eliza Mae's cry of despair 'Moma'. In its simplicity and implied innocence, this one word, which she 'whispers over and over again, as though this were the only word she possessed. This one word. This word only' (id) renders better than any grandiloquent speech the gruesome reality of the grander narrative of slavery which sees family upon family callously torn apart, with no hope of ever meeting again. Blinded by the arguments of the rhetoric of colonialism, the white people are dehumanized just as they dehumanize the slaves who, for them are mere chattels, valuable economic units: 'Slaves. Farm animals. Household furniture. Farm tools. We are to be sold in this order' (76). Above all, they cannot conceive of slave men and women as mothers and fathers with a capacity for love, for, as Morrison writes, it is assumed that they are 'naturally dead', with no obligations to their offspring or their own parents' (1993a: 21).

The theme of home and belonging haunts Martha's story as she is found in a perpetual state of wandering 'a part of the colored exodus that was heading west', in the vain hope that she will 'be reunited' at last with her beloved daughter (Phillips, 1993: 87,89). Religion offers her no solace for she finds it hard to sympathise with 'the sufferings of the Son of God when set against her own misery' (79). Unlike Nash, she is also conscious that freedom is but an elusive, meaningless concept which seems to make no perceptible difference to her life as she is 'just doing the same things as before' (85). Even as she awaits death in the care of the white woman who has offered her shelter, she is painfully aware that, even at that final moment,

¹⁵¹ See also Morrison who, in a BBC interview, declares: 'You have to permit the reader to go through the horror as an outsider before allowing him in or encouraging him to go through it as an insider' (cited in Lennox Birch, 1994: 185).

she is still enslaved in the world the white society has constructed for her, which excludes her from the right to self-determination:

‘But you must expect to receive me in the morning. Did she mean by this to suggest that Martha had some choice over their arrangement? That she could, if she wished, choose not to receive her in the morning?’ (89)

Freedom for Martha, as for Seth in Tony Morrison’s *Beloved*, would mean ‘a place where you could love anything you chose – not to need permission for desire – well, now *that* was freedom’ (Morrison, 1997:162; italics in the text). Indeed, whilst the ties of love and friendship offer temporary comfort, they are tenuous, for they are all too easily severed and she is left reflecting upon the wretchedness of her existence, wondering ‘if freedom is more important than love, and indeed if love was at all possible without someone taking it from her’ (86). As Phillips remarks:

The theme of thwarted love, familial and romantic, forms a strong line in the African-American narrative tradition. After all, the participation of Africans in the American world was preceded by the tearing asunder of lovers and families, first on African soil and then during the Middle Passage. Any possibility of reconstructing a new narrative of loving responsibility was further disrupted by the grim realities of American plantation slavery. In this system, a man’s bond with his wife was liable to be undermined or broken, because his master could choose to sell the man or woman to different owners in far-flung parts of the country or, even worse, force himself upon the woman. In such circumstances, it was difficult for black men and women to know just how to love each other. (2005a: 2)

Centuries later, the shadow of slavery also hangs over Travis, the African father’s third child, who, as a black American GI in the third narrative, ‘Somewhere in England’, finds himself, ironically too, defending Europe during WWII. It is there that he meets and falls in love with Joyce, a young Yorkshire woman, mistreated by her ill-tempered husband who is spending time in prison for being involved in the black market. Travis’s story comes to us through her diaries and reveal a world in which the colonial discourse is still very much part and parcel of his daily experience. Travis and his black fellow-men still find themselves defined by the colonial discourse of race rooted in the plantation system. Its bedrock is a hierarchical white society that derives its sense of superiority and its essence from the creation of inferior, savage, deficient black others who, as Joyce is told by one of the American officers, are ‘not used to us treating them as equals’ (Phillips, 1993:145). The black soldiers are instead regarded as abject, non-sentient beings and

kept in a state of 'diluted slavery' (Lamming, 1992: 106), as they are assigned to the most menial and degrading of tasks such as 'cleaning and the like' (Phillips, 1993: 208). Violence is the ineluctable, abhorrent hallmark and outcome of that manichean perspective, and Travis finds himself severely beaten in a racial attack by the military police and further punished for a crime he has not committed. The arrival of the child refugees recalls, in the villagers' treatment of the little 'outsiders', some of the scenes at the auction in Martha's narrative, and echoes some of the discriminatory language which is still very much in evidence today against the immigrants in our midst:

When we got back the refugees had arrived. A dozen boys and girls...an identification tag round their neck ... huddled together, their feet swimming in big shoes...Amongst the grownups, confusion and resentment reigned in equal proportion. Why us? ...Before us stood a dozen frightened children, the farmers eyeing the husky lads, the girls and scrawny boys close to tears. And then, the decision was taken that ... we should send them back. Somebody whispered that all these children wet the bed. That half the mattresses of England were awash, and that at eight and six per child, it wasn't really worth it. I looked across at Len...Not even one of them, he said. They can bloody well go back to where they come from. We're not in the charity business ... The children stood in silence. (Phillips, 1993:144)

The ominous spectre of miscegenation is also a haunting presence in Joyce's narrative as she is warned against association with the black soldiers by the American military who do not 'want any incidents' (206), and also encounters fierce local prejudice, accused of being 'a traitor to (her) own kind' (217). When she finds herself pregnant with Travis's child, permission to marry is only granted 'as long as he didn't try to take (her) back to America with him...it wouldn't be allowed' (227, 225). As tragedy strikes and Travis is killed in action in Italy, she is persuaded to do the 'sensible' thing and to turn her 'beautiful' child Greer over to 'the lady with the blue coat and the maroon scarf...into the care of the County Council as an orphan' (230). As Webster explains, the concept of miscegenation 'signalled not only the idea that races were biological categories marked by difference, but also that the mixing of these in heterosexual relations was deeply problematic and unnatural' (1998: 48). The dark shadow of slavery looms once more over a child who finds himself abandoned like those other children before him on that African beach two hundred and fifty years ago. Like them, he is left anchorless with 'no father, no mother, no Uncle Sam' (Phillips, 1993: 223) to love him, care for him, and no home to call his own. Like them, all mementoes of the past have been reduced to 'cinders', for Joyce has 'destroyed everything. Letters, pictures, everything' and at the end of

the novel, her lament tragically echoes that of the African father all those years ago as she agonises: ‘it seemed the right thing to do, but I was stupid’ (224).

Such is the tragedy of the legacy of slavery in which the colonial myth that dehumanizes both blacks and whites alike is perpetuated by the failure to ‘recognize’ the other (Fanon, 1986: 11). Yet, as Levinas argues, the ethical ‘I’ is ‘subjectivity precisely in so far as it kneels before the other’ and ‘as soon as I acknowledge that it is ‘I’ who am responsible, I accept that my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other’.¹⁵² Letting the other in is a site of conflict, a place of dislocation, of fragmentation as ‘there is no justice without interruption, without divorce, without a dislocated relation to the infinite alterity of the other’ (Derrida, 2004: 81). At the same time, it is also a positive act as by welcoming, by affirming and opening ourselves to the other, as we are called upon to do in *Crossing the River*, we are invited to transcend, not the trauma of slavery, but the ‘compulsive logic of repression and denial’ (Baronian et al, 2007: 16). Whilst bearing witness to a past that can never be resurrected in its entirety, *Crossing the River* strives, I argue, ‘to interpret it and make it coherent’ and through its re-enactments and re-articulations, calls for a reinterpretation of the present and also gives it ‘the promise of a future’ (Dooley and Kavanagh, 2007: 9).

4.3 ‘Survivors all’ (Phillips, 1993: 235)

I
must be given words to shape my name
To the syllables of trees
I
Must be given words to refashion futures
Like a healer’s hand...
It is no
It is not
It is not enough
to be pause, to be hole
to be void, to be silent¹⁵³

¹⁵² In an interview with Kearney (2004: 63).

¹⁵³ Brathwaite (1967: 223-224).

Bénédicte Ledent argues that for Caryl Phillips, the ‘rememory’ of slavery,¹⁵⁴ has nothing ‘to do with redemption or catharsis’ for this would mean that this abhorrent part of our history could be allowed to be forgotten, something which can never be contemplated (2002:131). In this analysis of the novel I contend, however, that if delving into the past is to be viewed as the affirmative action of not forgetting, it is a redemptive act which does not absolve but confronts, reclaims and also transforms the past. As in Lamming’s ceremony of the Vodun (Lamming, 1984: 9-10), the ghost of the mythical father in *Crossing the River* is both absence and presence, hopelessness and possibility, past and present and ‘in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection, a primordial or deeper function for memory begins to exercise itself’ (Harris, 1967: 51). As ‘the spectral host of history’,¹⁵⁵ and through the intermediary of the ancestral father, the writer invites the children in, so they may tell their stories and become, as writers and narrators themselves, ‘subjects of their own directly signifying discourse’, actively engaging with a history from which they have been hitherto excluded (Bakhtin, 1984:8). As Phillips explains, he ‘wanted to make an affirmative connection’, not a connection ‘based upon exploitation of suffering or misery, but a connection based upon a kind of survival’.¹⁵⁶ It is from the perspective of re-memory and its potential for healing, and of the power of language to repossess, re-own, re-name that I would like to consider how a re-scripting of slavery beyond the boundaries of monologic discourse in *Crossing the River* enables new fields of signification and of being to emerge.

Slave narratives such as those of Philip Quaque whose writings are now considered to have played a vital part in the abolition of slavery, are a powerful presence in Nash’s story in the first chapter *The Pagan Coast*.¹⁵⁷ Like Nash, Quaque was an emancipated Christian who was ‘sent back’ to Africa to ‘civilize’ the natives, and letter writing is for both of them an attempt to inscribe themselves into a history from which they have been excluded, and to make audible what has been silenced. As a journey into the self, as a move from object to subject position, writing becomes an audacious act, a powerful tool in the process of self-understanding, of identity

¹⁵⁴ Seth in Morrison *Beloved* (1997: 160). For Morrison, ‘rememory’ is the continued presence of that which has disappeared or been forgotten. It is at once a pain and a resurrection.

¹⁵⁵ See Harris (1981:10-19, italics in text) who sees the author as ‘the complex ghost of his own landscape of history or work’ and his novel as ‘*subsistence of memory*’.

¹⁵⁶ Phillips in conversation with Davison (1994: 93).

¹⁵⁷ See Phillips ‘Cape Coast: an African Missionary’ in *The Atlantic Sound* (2000:139-144). Also, Blyden (1887).

creation. It also entails an act of subversion, of resistance, as the letter writer bestows agency on his silenced self:

If ... as Sartre says 'writing is a way of wanting freedom' and 'wanting freedom' is essentially a political act in a colonial situation – an act of resistance – writing then becomes a political act fraught with all the urgency and necessity within the context of the Caribbean. (Cudjoe, 1980: 68)

Letter writing for Nash also takes the form of a confession born out of the necessity to communicate a sense of displacement, of exclusion. It expresses a desire to seek self-understanding and to assign meaning to his life as he reflects upon the past in a dialogue with an other. As he reworks that past, it is also a deliberate attempt to bring himself into being and to identify himself to others who confirm his existence and that of the life narrative he has elaborated as they read him. It is an act of self-creation 'that binds us to others at the very moment we affirm our identity' (Rose, 1989: 240).

Like Quaque's, Nash's letters are initially in support of his mission but soon become increasingly revealing about his own understanding of the deeply contradictory nature of his situation. Nash's first encounter with Liberia is through the eyes of the Manichean discourse of white moral and cultural superiority and black savagery, which he has made his own. His first letter home, however, introduces early on a fracture within that perception of reality. Far from finding in Liberia the dark, brutal, primitive African world of the Western imagination, Nash encounters, with some surprise, a land 'where persons of color may enjoy their freedom', and whose 'laws are founded upon justice and equality' (Phillips, 1993: 18). As time goes on, further cracks appear in his vision of white America as the land of 'civilization' when he meets with greed and corruption among the white, Christian population. Most distressing of all is the painful discovery that, not content with brutal attacks on the natives, the white 'civilised settlers are still involved in the barbaric slave trade under the protection of the 'Star Spangled Banner' (41). Such an act violates all that the country he was until now so proud to call his own stands for.

Believing himself to have been forsaken by Edward who fails to answer any of his letters, he finally adopts an African way of life and marries a 'native woman' for, he asks defiantly, 'Are we not in Africa?' (40). Though born of despair, such a stand demonstrates his growing disillusionment with America as 'a beacon of civilization' (id), prompted in part also by the hypocrisy displayed by those he regarded as his fellow Americans but who now shun him for his African ways. In his

final letter to Edward, he proclaims his allegiance to Liberia, 'his' country and that of 'his' ancestors and finally severs all links with Edward, with Christianity and Western ideology. Ledent writes that 'his wholesale adoption of African customs is as inappropriate as his former exclusive allegiance to Christianity' (2002: 128). Whilst it cannot be denied that such a decision is to be viewed as a desperate response to the hurt caused by his father's abandonment, I would like to argue that Nash has nevertheless acquired an awareness of an 'other' reality, of 'other' realms of meaning and being. He has also been confronted with the subversive nature of the Western world and of its civilizing mission and the role it has played in his alienation and that of his fellow Africans. He now feels free to assert his rights as a proud black man of African descent:

We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in your America. Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia had provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely the whole course of my life. (Phillips, 1993: 60-3)¹⁵⁸

In *West*, Martha's story comes from a desire on Phillips's part to challenge the male-centeredness of historical accounts of slavery which until recently assumed the male subject as seminal and tended to posit resistance as an exclusively male phenomenon. Demanding that the voices of women slaves be heard and forcing us to recognise them as an essential part of the experience of slavery 'enlarge our conventional assumptions about the nature and function of literary tradition' (Pryse, 1985:5). Their stories, often in the form of oral narratives, reveal that the harsh physical conditions the male slaves endured were also the fate of the female slaves who also had to suffer the added burden of sexual exploitation. Whilst the male slave's narrative is often written as a form of protest and resistance to affect social change within the dominant white society, the black woman's 'ponders the personal, expresses the intimate, salvages the emotional highs and lows of female experience' (Birch, 1994: 16). The *West* narrative, with Martha as the storyteller is to be read

¹⁵⁸ He echoes Edmund Blyden's protest about the European proselytizing of Africa who declares that 'owing to the vicious ideas which entered into our training in captivity, and which we are unfortunately transmitting to our children...we (blacks) remain in isolation, in poverty, in obscurity... because, though citizens of a free, sovereign and independent state we are slaves to foreign ideas... Liberia cannot be a free, independent state when her religious development is limited to the views of a foreign race thousands of miles away...The Liberian government has no right to ally itself with the church...when that church is not the expression of the life of the people...Christianity (must be) forced to retire'. (1909: 11-12; 20; 30).

within this perspective. As well as interrogating the slave narrative in its classic form, Phillips also wanted to rewrite the ‘West’ of John Wayne from the point of view of people who have been ‘nominally written out of it or portrayed as the losers or victims’.¹⁵⁹ Little has been written, he discovered, on black female pioneers and their role in the West, which is why Phillips wished to write Martha’s story as it ‘allowed more latitude for the imagination’.¹⁶⁰ Above all, it is to be seen though as a way of making ‘slavery both intelligible and legible’, of ‘mediating terror by means of narrative’ (Gilroy, 1993a: 220).

Like Seth in *Beloved* whose echoes resound throughout *West*, Martha suffers from the terrible loss of her daughter and from the insufferable burden of having failed to protect her from such a wretched fate. However, mother and daughter are forever united across the boundaries of time and space by the power of her undying love: ‘My daughter. The energy of youth once more stirred within her. I know I’m going to find my child in California’ (Phillips, 1993: 89). Her endless journeying across America in search of her daughter is a further affirmation of that love, a transcending force, which she is able to extend to others on the way, to Chester, her second husband, and Lucy, ‘both friend and sister to me’ (83). It is also the force which enables her to connect, like her ancestral father, to voices calling out to her, to be remembered and loved, ‘voices from the past. Some she recognized. Some she didn’t. But nevertheless, she listened’ (79). Unlike her ancestral father though, she does not suffer the pangs of guilt, for she has never abandoned her daughter, she has always been with her if only in spirit, always cared for her. She refuses to accept the label of a victim, of the ‘helpless black slave’ of white mythology, and her tale is one of immense strength, courage and a stern determination not to be broken by the ruthless regime: ‘I done enough standing by myself to last me most folks three or four lifetimes’ (75). Having known relative freedom in Kansas, she prefers the dangers of the unknown to the prospect of being sent ‘back across the river...to hell’ (80) and runs away. She is sustained in her venture through internal dialogisation, by inner spiritual chants which intimate a wider black community in whose bosom she can feel secure. The invocation of Lucas’s voice also reconnects her to a husband she has lost but whose love she has not forgotten and whose memory gives her strength in a time of great need:

¹⁵⁹ Phillips in Jaggi (2004: 115).

¹⁶⁰ id p114.

That night, Martha packed her bundle and left the house. For where, she was not sure (don't care where)...behind the drifting clouds she knew the sky was heavy with stars. (Feeling good.) And then Martha heard the barking of dogs, and she tumbled into a ditch. (Lord, give me Lucas's voice.) She waited but heard nothing, only silence. (Thank you)...Never again would she stand on an auction block. (Never.) Never again would she be renamed. (Never.) Never again would she belong to anybody. (No sir, Never.). (Phillips, 1993: 80; parentheses in the text)

Her escape is a powerful act of resistance, a refusal to accept the mindless essentialism of the colonial discourse of slavery which has imprisoned her in its tight, unrelenting, grip. The desire for freedom, for Lucy's friendship and a community of free slaves, finds her later on the pioneer trail west for she had heard, she tells us, that places existed she could call home and where you could be free of the demeaning prejudices, 'where your name wasn't 'boy' or 'auntie' and where you could be a part of this country' (74).¹⁶¹ It is on that trail that, unable to 'mother' the pioneers any more, her health failing, she has to be abandoned in Denver where she is offered refuge by a white woman. She dies dreaming of her re-union with her long lost daughter somewhere west in California, home together at last for 'here, in the field of dream, you are at home' (Lacan, 1991:44), and 'she had a westward soul which had found its natural-borne home in the bosom of her daughter' (94).

In Hamilton's narrative, countless incidents of rebellion among the slaves are reported, posing a constant threat and intimating that they were far from being the passive victims they are so often portrayed in historical records: 'made a timely discovery today that the slaves were forming a plot for an insurrection' (114). Those acts of resistance inscribe the black presence and at the same time displace the voice of white authority within the discourse of the Abolitionist movement. Indeed, Dabydeen suggests, these acts of resistance on ships, the revolts on shore and the activism from black writers 'made more impact on the dismantling of slavery than the poems issued by English writers' (1985: 46).

Travis has survived but he is an ethereal presence, for his story is narrated in the last section, *Somewhere in England*, by Joyce, a 'matter of voice', Phillips

¹⁶¹ This also echoes the words of D'Aguiar (1994: 1) in *The Longest Memory*: 'You do not want to know my past nor do you want to know my name for the simple reason that I have none and would have to make it up to please you...I was just a boy, mule, nigger, slave or whatever else anyone chose to call me'.

explains.¹⁶² Linking questions of gender and class with the whole question of race has also been very important to him for women's position, often on the margin of society, seems to him to 'mirror the rather tenuous and oscillating relationships that all sorts of people, in his case, black people, have in society'.¹⁶³ He agrees she is one of his favourite characters because, amongst other things, she adds a new dimension to the novel which could have easily revolved around 'in its narrowest sense, the iniquities of the slave trade and its legacy'.¹⁶⁴ Joyce also brings herself into being through writing for she is a diarist, like one of those thousands of 'ordinary people' who 'volunteered to be part of the Mass Observation project in the 1930s and 1940s' (Joannou, 2007: 203). Her diary covers this period but also extends beyond that point for it covers twenty-five years. In her narrative, the past and the present interweave in a backward and forward movement in which memory, continually threatened by lapses, voids, and distortions, takes on a critical role in its challenge to the strictly linear concept of time's progression:

By enabling certain experiences to be 'stretched' over time, memory endeavours to counteract the tyrannies of cultural erasure instigated by historical genocides such as slavery and the Holocaust. Within the (sub) consciousness of that which is 'past', the fragmentation of memory and the paradoxical vulnerability of such shattered histories are both acknowledged and envisaged as a process of survival. (Thomas, 2006: 8)

Joyce is another marginalized character with little control over her village society but her native, at times acerbic wit, her ability to see beyond mere appearance and rhetoric, to defy convention, are a way of 'shoring up her crumbling identity',¹⁶⁵ but also useful tools for disrupting the established order:

In the struggle against conventions, and against the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being, these masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right...to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage. (Bakhtin, 1981: 163)

It is her naivety, her non-conformity, her refusal and inability to compromise which enable her to uncover the deceit behind the official war rhetoric, and disclose its

¹⁶² Phillips in conversation with Jaggi (2004:117). As he explains: 'I tried to find a voice for Travis ... I couldn't find him anywhere, but I wasn't prepared to invent a voice ... One thing I know is that Joyce was speaking to me forcefully, powerfully, in the dialect I grew up speaking, which is Yorkshire. I understood it intuitively'.

¹⁶³ Phillips in conversation with Davidson (1994: 93).

¹⁶⁴ Phillips in conversation with Clingman (2002: 131).

¹⁶⁵ Id.

cracks and its telling omissions: 'I was getting good at learning the difference between the official stories and the evidence before my eyes...I was learning to disbelieve' (Phillips, 1993:164,165). They also position her as an outsider: 'I have my own corner...that nobody else seems to sit in' (136). It is however this innocence, this lack of prejudice, 'both a strength and a weakness',¹⁶⁶ which make her relationship with Travis possible. It is only far into the narrative that there is a passing comment about 'Coloureds' in regards to Travis, but she is much more aware of the gap in his teeth which she likes because 'it was different' (162). Significantly though, it is through the power of the voices that emanate from the church that she first finds herself drawn to Travis as he and his black companions sing in a way she has never heard before, 'like they mean it' (146). Like Martha, like the ancestral father, those voices pervade her whole being and transport her into a beyond, outside herself: 'I forgot all about the trees and winter. I found myself just staring at the church and listening to the sound of their voices and their clapping hands' (id). She is also aware that relationships need to be built on the ability to understand and trust each other, and that prejudice is born of a lack of knowledge, and an unwillingness to get to know, to understand the other: 'I wanted him to try and understand that I needed to know more about him' (208). She is also prepared to brave the town's hostility and confront the American officers when she feels Travis has been unfairly treated and racially abused though it means that she will be ostracised by the community: 'Both inside the camp, and outside, I was attracting attention. But for the wrong reasons' (206).

However much she appears to be immune to racial and social pressures, it is these very same forces that compel her to give up her beloved son, Greer, after Travis's tragic death in Italy on the eve of VE day. Greer's appearance on Joyce's doorstep eighteen years later breaks the cycle of pain, of suffering, of separation and is suggestive, not of the restoration of familial bonds for 'there is no return' (237), but of a new relationship born of mutual acceptance and understanding: 'he said he understood. The silences had become more awkward, but at least, they remained free of accusation' (223). Indeed, as Phillips declares:

I perceive a healing force that comes out of fracture... I have seen some connectedness and celebrated the qualities of survival that people in all sorts of predicaments are able to keep hold of with clenched fists. I didn't want to leave this novel as an analysis of fracture...There is an underlying passion which informs the ability to survive, and it's that word that most people shy

¹⁶⁶ Phillips in conversation with Jaggi (2004: 119).

away from...which is love, an affirmative quality present everywhere I looked in those children of the African diaspora...I have always been interested in what makes people survive the most vicious upheavals: the two qualities of faith and love, rooted in a family love. In the voice of the father is a love for all those who have crossed the river – a scattered diaspora and family.¹⁶⁷

Slavery might be ‘the biggest shadow’ on the black psyche but it also haunts the white ‘other’ as both find themselves inextricably linked into the trauma of the Middle Passage when the history of Europe meets that of the Americas.¹⁶⁸ This is a path already trodden by novelists such as DuBois, Wright and James who stress, throughout their work, how much modernity is deeply embedded in the vital memories of the slave past, which must be viewed as ‘a legitimate part of the moral history of the West’ (Gilroy, 1993b: 70). This in turn, Gilroy believes, nurtures a ‘redemptive’ critique of the present and it is this possibility of redemption through affirmative, cross-cultural connections out of the trauma of slavery which, this research argues, has inspired Phillips’s imaginative return to the past in *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge* and *Crossing the River*. It must however be a re-visiting of the past which works not along ‘a rhetoric of blame’ (Said, 1994: 19) or shame (Bewes, 2011) or an immutable linear temporal order, but one which is performative and creates, through its ‘narratives of loss and exile, and journeying... an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding’. (Gilroy, 1993b: 198)

4.4 Crisscrossing the River¹⁶⁹

Right now
I’m as divided
as you were
by that sea.

but I’ll
be able to
find my way
Home again

¹⁶⁷ Phillips in conversation with Jaggi (2004: 121).

¹⁶⁸ Gilroy (1993b: 17). He argues that getting on board the slave ship does provide ‘a different sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper a self-conscious sense of Western civilisation’. See also James: ‘The West Indian Intellectual’ in *Fraudacity* (Thomas, 1968: 23-48). Also Phillips, in conversation with Swift (1992:5), who argues that, like himself, ‘the Caribbean contains both Europe and Africa’ for this is ‘where Africa met Europe on somebody else’s soil’.

¹⁶⁹ I have borrowed the title of Davison’s interview with Phillips (2009: 19)

for that craft
you launched
is so seaworthy
tighter
than you have ever been

dark voyagers
like me
can feel free
to sail.¹⁷⁰

Crossing the Atlantic is a journey fraught with dangers, a watery world of swirling currents where histories are drowned, people bound in chains, families dispersed and futures annihilated. If we survive the journey, these ‘ineluctable ribbons of water’¹⁷¹ are also what binds us together, for they help us to navigate the memories of an elusive, fractured past. They help us to transcend the despair of the dispossessed, and to envisage a future ‘beyond’, for ‘you are not lost’, the ancestral father tells his children, ‘you carry within your bodies the seeds of new trees’ (Phillips, 1993: 2). Those survivors are the unsettling presence of the other that interrogates and questions the assumptions of the established order, that disrupts foundations we once believed were secure and introduces us to ‘the uncanny displacement of ambiguity’. It is a presence that ‘cannot be effaced, that draws me out of myself towards the others’ (Chambers, 1994:6). It is a point of departure, not of arrival:

The true capacity of marginal and disadvantaged cultures resides in their genius to tilt the field of civilization so that one may visualize boundaries of persuasion in new and unsuspected lights to release a different apprehension of reality, the language of reality, a different *reading* of the texts of reality. (Harris, 1999: 183)

The emergence in *Crossing the River* of a plurality, of an interweaving of discourses, of a polyphonic text in which no one person has control of the whole story does not, I claim, suggest the ‘impossibility of speaking’ as Bewes argues (2011: 63). Instead, I contend, it is used on the one hand to challenge and subvert the authority of the ‘monolithic text’¹⁷² which obfuscates, represses and suppresses by offering the illusion of total inscription. On the other hand, it exposes ‘the woven

¹⁷⁰ Senior (1994: 51-52) in memory of Jean Rhys.

¹⁷¹ Phillips in conversation with Clingman (2004: 116).

¹⁷² Bakhtin (1981: 9) describes the ‘monolithic text’ as a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness.

complexity'¹⁷³ engendered by slavery and demands, as implied by the ambiguity contained in Phillips's dedication of the novel to 'those who crossed the river', a reading 'between the lines' which explores the silences and the gaps in the discourses as well as the hidden narratives. Harris contends that we all too often suffer from 'the illiteracy of the imagination' and calls on an open imaginative art founded on *asymmetry* to unsettle the apparent symmetry and the 'masks of universality' of the imperial imperatives (1999: 101). The 'lust for symmetry', which drives the powerful is also, he claims, the tragedy of the dispossessed if they accept the authority of totalities and absolutes (id). *Asymmetry* suggests instead a subversive reading of events or texts, a reading that perceives the ambivalence, the dualities, the fractures of the universal order, and of the singular sense of self. It calls for a mutual interaction, 'an enfolding and unfolding of cultures beyond tamed vision' (id). There also needs to be a close interaction between the past, 'the closed, living eye', and the present, for 'the past remains locked away unless it can be re-visualized ... rehearsed profoundly at another level to release new implications, a new kind of thrust' (87). It is only if we 'panic', the ancestral father warns us in *Crossing the River* that we shall 'break (our) wrists against Captain Hamilton's instruments' (Phillips, 1993: 237) but if we:

immerse ourselves in a new capacity ... of sensibility between alien cultures, we will bring into play a new variable imagination or renaissance of sensibility steeped in *caveats* of the necessary diversity and the necessary unity of man'. (Harris, 1999: 169)

It is from this perspective of Wilson's 'asymmetry' which demands a new apprehension of reality that displaces the universal order through the interweaving and interaction of cultures, histories and identities that I would like to examine Phillips's vision of a 'new world order' (Phillips, 2002) in *Crossing the River*.

Ambivalence is to be celebrated because it allows us to enter the 'puzzling grey area', and it reminds us that 'those old loyalties and certainties are, in our modern world, subject to fluidity and transformation irrespective of what the authorities above us...might have us believe' (Phillips, 2003: 3). It is the role of the writer to provide people with an alternative story to lock into, with another way of

¹⁷³ D'Aguiar (1994: 33) who continues: 'There is simply too much history between us all...What began as a single thread has, over the generations, woven itself into a prestigious carpet that cannot be unwoven. There is no good in pretending that a single thread of cause and effect exists now when in actual fact the carpet is before us with many beginnings and no end in sight'.

viewing themselves. Though the 'I' of the narrator disappears most of the time, it is, I believe, contrary to what Bewes may argue (2011: 64), in those bridges he constructs for the reader that we may find him. It is 'a tradition in depth which *returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have vanished* ... The spectral burden of vanishing and re-appearing is at the heart of the writer's task' (Harris, 1999: 77, italics in the text). Within the dialogic interactions at the heart of the novel, there is, as Bakhtin argues, 'no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category' (1984a: 18). The readers therefore cannot be but active participants who, by exploring the gaps and the silences in the fragmentary narratives, 'louder than any noise' (Phillips, 1993: 229), will, in a leap of the imagination, insert their own meanings, their own understandings so that past and present can be re-negotiated.

Asymmetry is to be found in the ambiguity in which the characters are mired, a situation that 'historical narratives do not capture',¹⁷⁴ but which testifies to the plurality at the heart of our selves. From the outset, the prologue questions and upsets received versions of history by portraying an African father who is complicit in the enslavement of his own children. Like Philip Quaque, Nash has a very ambivalent sense of home for, though Liberia is the land of his ancestors, he does not feel he really belongs there. He has lost his secure mooring in the world and pleads with Edward to be allowed 'home' to America as soon as possible (35). Though Nash appears to have severed all his connections to his former country as well as to his faith, this is in part because he believes Edward has rejected him, rather from a feeling of deep allegiance to the country of his forefathers, in spite of his protestations to the contrary. The ambivalence of his position is powerfully conveyed through the juxtaposition of a discourse of slavery to one of free will within the same semantic field: 'having no means to return to America and being therefore *bound to* an African existence, I must now suspend my faith and I therefore *freely* choose to live the life of an African' (62: my emphasis). Indeed, there can be no 'return' to Africa for, as the ancestral father tells his children, 'There are no paths in water. No signposts' (237). The idealised portrait he paints of Liberia is also not borne out by the corruption, the racial tensions and the persistence of slavery he has uncovered or by his images of a land 'not free from famine, war, sickness and death' (61). Furthermore, as Ledent comments (2002: 130), Nash's wish and hope of establishing

¹⁷⁴ Phillips in conversation with Schatteman (1999: 95).

his family in Africa might be soon shattered if Edward succeeds in his mission to take his children back to America in order to offer them ‘the possibility of a proper Christian life amongst civilised people’ (Phillips, 1993:68).

The use of the third person and the juxtaposition of two opposing discourses in Edward’s narrative in ‘The Pagan Coast’ obfuscate the presence of its author and makes it ‘doubly difficult to get at who is controlling narrative presence’.¹⁷⁵ It is through the ambivalence that such a strategy brings to the fore that we are offered the paradox of Edward’s manifest enjoyment of a wealth accumulated from the proceeds of the slave trade whilst claiming an apparently genuinely-felt, intense loathing for the system that produced it (Phillips, 1993: 13). As a Christian, his motives in his support of the repatriation of free slaves to Liberia as ‘an ideal opportunity to divest himself of the burden...of being a slave owner’ (13), an occupation which, he claims, runs counter to his Christian convictions, also need to be interrogated in the light of the American Colonization Society’s own rationale. Could, it is suggested, sending slaves to evangelise Liberia be instead ‘an ideal opportunity’ to remove the ‘cause of much social unrest’ from American soil and ‘civilize’ Africa at the same time? (9). As Edward’s homosexuality and sexual attraction towards young boys are also revealed to the reader, though tellingly only at the end of the narrative, Nash’s closeness to his ‘beloved father’ intimates a relationship which is very different from the one that, in his letters, he had led us to believe existed between them. As a ‘surrogate’ father to Nash whom he claims to love deeply and whose well-being he professes to have at heart, he has abused and corrupted the ties of kinship. As a Christian and a husband, he has transgressed the moral code of his faith, the master discourse ideals of ‘truth and honesty’ (21) that he has instilled in his surrogate son. His wife’s suicide is the tragic outcome of a life lived in self-deceit, and which leaves him blind to the misery he has wreaked all around him:

He simply craved to be offered the unconditional love of a child, could she not understand that?... Her accusation that in the wake of Nash’s departure he was making a fool of himself by lavishing an excess of affection upon a new retainer, was this again not met with forgiveness? That she had subsequently chosen to flee his home, then his mind, then this mortal world at the instigation of her own hand, was a tragedy the responsibility of which could not reside at Edward’s doorstep. (Phillips, 1993: 55-6)

Edward’s decision to travel to Liberia is also shown to be prompted as much by a desire to discover the truth about Nash’s fate as by the need to reinforce his own

¹⁷⁵ Phillips in conversation with Clingman (2004: 136).

sense of worth, 'to confirm that his life's work, and more importantly, that his own life, had been of some worth' (14).

The inclusion of Hamilton's two letters to his wife written in an eloquent, flowery, romantic language which contrasts sharply with the prosaic, clipped style of the rest of his journal also brutally interrupts the dominant discourse: 'I feel a serenity I never imagined till I was able to call you mine. To win your love was my principal desire' (110). It is through the interplay of writing styles, through the use of signs which at one and the same time conflict and conflate, that the duality of the character is made evident. His capacity for love adds an unexpected dimension to our perception of a man which we imagined, from the reading of his log, incapable of such feelings. Yet, he is still unable to extend such care and affection to the slaves who, through his vile commerce, will never know the comfort and love of family bonds he himself so desperately craves for. He is shown to be enmeshed in a cultural tradition with strict codes of behaviour which read the world in a 'uniform kind of way, a uniform kind of narrative, a uniform kind of frame' which fix a particular insensibility (Harris, 1999: 77). The love letters, however, displace the discourse of authority and its historical narratives, which accords with Phillips's view of the complexity and the multi-faceted aspect of our selves:

I look at John Newton's *Journal of a Slave Trader* and I think, this is an interesting document but let me write my own version of it. But let me also add something that shows the huge paradox of this guy's mind, some insight into the mind of a slave trader...He can't see, can't recognize his own contradictions, but hopefully we can. That's the larger point I wanted to make.¹⁷⁶

Symbolically, Hamilton's whereabouts, are shrouded in ambiguity as there is a blank next to his name on the crew list on the first page. He is left 'suspended in the act of crossing the Atlantic' whilst the children, we know, have survived and reached the bank (Ward, 2007: 27).

The beauty of asymmetry, Harris argues, lies in 'its subtle transformations of phenomena bound or tamed within a mask of universality' (Harris, 1999:101) and is made evident in the novel's use of reversals, in the metaphorical river crossings, to portray racial, sexual, cultural and national boundaries, not as fixed and immutable but as arbitrary and fluid. The crossing into Liberia is for Nash a back and forth movement between estrangement and reconnection, between West and Africa in which notions of civilisation and savagery, of black and white identities are

¹⁷⁶ Phillips in conversation with Sharpe (1995: 159).

constantly being questioned and reconfigured. In the land of his forefathers, he is regarded by the natives as a white man and has now himself set off on a civilising mission to 'carry the word of God to the heathens' (Phillips, 1993: 19). Martha is ceaselessly displaced and in constant motion across the Missouri river, an ambiguous and symbolic place, where slavery and freedom, despair and faint hope, live on one or the other side. Like Nash, she too has to confront 'partial interchanges of character and carnival usage of pigmentations' (Harris, 1999: 103). On the other side of the Missouri river, black pioneers are seen as 'dark white men' (Phillips, 1993: 91) by the American Indians who are themselves decimated by the 'colored troops', the formerly oppressed who, Martha comments, now 'behaved like the men whose uniforms they wore' (93).

In his voyage into Liberia, Edward is confronted with the power and the fragility of man-erected boundaries. His journeying into Africa is fraught with dangers and he finds himself close to death. It is an ordeal which is rendered through an oppressive landscape of 'somber banks, cluttered with trees, shrubs and vines..., pressed by a thick, brooding undergrowth that was heavy with years' (Phillips, 1993: 65-6). It is an apt metaphor for a puzzling and disturbing voyage into the dark depths of the self, and of the alien world of the other, a place of fracture and disconnection. It resounds with echoes of *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad, who is himself, like people of the Caribbean:

'A man of the water...a man of travel...a man who reinvented himself (who) understood within himself...the fragility of identity when it comes up against a new society...how fragile one's name is, how fragile an allegiance to religion can prove to be, the importance of language, ...of *which* language, questions of gender'.¹⁷⁷

It is a journey into alterity which takes him beyond the secure frontiers of the 'rational Christian mind' (Phillips, 1993:9) so highly prized by the dominant colonial discourse. His veneer of philanthropy and Christian benevolence soon gives way to a racist discourse as he finds himself face to face with the African subjects whose cause he claims to support:

Edward attempted to paint his face with a benevolent smile but realized he was ill-equipped to disguise his true feelings of disgust in the midst of this spectre of peopled desolation. (69)

¹⁷⁷ Phillips in conversation with Clingman (2004: 122). See also Benitez-Rojo A (1996: 11) who claims that 'water is the beginning of all things'.

With Edward now posited as the outsider, the encounter with Africa shatters the seemingly solid foundations upon which his sense of self rested for, not only is he lost in a world he fails to understand, but he also has to endure rejection by his former slave, Madison, who, unlike Nash, is no longer duped by Edward's offers of friendship and publicly humiliates him. There is a poignant carnivalesque reversal of fortune as he seeks refuge into the hitherto secure and familiar world of his faith by singing a hymn to 'calm his beleaguered mind' (69). All pretence at authority and control vanishes as deserted by all, even by God, for 'no sound was heard' (id), he meets with the uncomprehending and piteous gaze of the African other who looks on at this 'fellow being' who seems 'to have lost his way and his sense of purpose' (69-70). Like Hamilton, his fate is left deliberately unknown for it is on such an ambiguous note that his narrative ends.

In her Yorkshire village, Joyce has to navigate the turbulent waters of local bigotry, of hostility towards the outsiders in its midst, of racial and social discrimination which exclude, deceive and can ultimately destroy. In her narrative, there is another thought-provoking reversal of fortune, as Travis, a black GI, comes over to liberate the now beleaguered continent of Europe which enslaved his own peoples centuries ago. Most particularly, Joyce is shown to be alienated and vulnerable because, like the other three children in the novel, she is fatherless, but it is not slavery but war which has torn her family apart. Her narrative explores its dynamics and its traumatic and devastating aftermath which, like those of the slave trade, stress how transient power is, how fragile our identities, how tenuous the foundations of our institutions. War, like slavery, means the silencing of the parent's voice, the pain of abandonment, the unbearable and senseless loss of lives, of bodies and minds trapped, as on the slave ships, by a force beyond their control, powerless to escape: 'It occurred to me that I was lost. That all the familiar landmarks had gone' (179-80).

Those lines of nationality, those lines of race, those lines of religion, those lines of language, those lines of cultural point of departure – they have been set up there to trip us up by making us think reductively.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Phillips in conversation with Clingman (2004: 136). This echoes Glissant's views of Western logic (1997: 190): 'In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with the grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce'.

Our sense of self which we imagine to be whole can only be realised by letting the other in, for identity is not static but is shaped on the move, 'at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture' (Hall, 1987: 44). To move into dialogue with others means, as Phillips does in the novel, opening ourselves to other texts, other narratives which reflect other cultures, other memories, other histories, other perspectives which challenge the authority of universal thought as a fixed and homogeneous entity. In this manner:

'Writing can become a travelogue, a constant journeying across the threshold between event and narration, between authority and dispersal, between repression and representation, between the powerless and the power, between the anonymous pre-text and accredited textual inscription'. (Chambers, 1994: 11)

Intertextuality, through the interweaving of texts and discourses is a useful strategy, for as 'echoes of all sorts of people' penetrate the narrative, it is able 'to change gear or switch direction, shift perspective'.¹⁷⁹ The ambiguity which necessarily results from such a tactic and which pervades *Crossing the River* enables subversion as it 'turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention' (Bhabha, 2004: 160). The multi-voiced, multi-accented aspect of the novel across space and time, in which several consciousnesses, several fields of vision, 'each full and of equal worth' interact, threatens the single consciousness of the monologic canon (Bakhtin, 1984:16). The widespread use in the novel of intersecting documents from a variety of historical perspectives, of fiction and non-fiction, disrupts the linearity of the master narrative and the singularity of the text. Indeed, African diaspora slave narratives themselves testify to a multi-voiced, hybrid, complex presence as they were also frequently incorporated into other texts. Furthermore, as it reclaims 'as (its) own, and as (its) subject a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush' (Cliff, 1998: 59), the slave narrative challenges a singular totalising history breaking in the process 'the apparition of tyranny, the habit of conquest' (Harris, 1999: 86).

One may also see in Nash's use of the coloniser's language in his letters a deliberate attempt by Phillips to use mimicry, not to signal the impossibility of speaking as Bewes proposes (2011: 66), but to disrupt the authority of the colonial discourse. Written in the style of nineteenth century English from an educated

¹⁷⁹ Phillips in conversation with Davison (1994: 94).

emancipated slave to his master, it introduces into Nash's discourse, through the use of parody, a 'semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one' (Bakhtin, 1984: 193). In this way, the 'second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims' (id). Nash enters into a linguistic space in which he has to take on the master's language and find his own space, his own voice in that language. It is from this position, I argue, that Nash is seen to challenge the assumptions of the dominant discourse, to displace and dismantle its edifice and to partly liberate himself from its grip.

It is in this particular context that we need to consider Phillips's decision to use John Newton's journal as a model for Hamilton's narrative. Such a choice has obviously been the cause of much controversy, not least from those who point to the incongruity of a slave trader's narrative taking pride of place in the novel which deals with the cruelties of the slave regime. Others, such as Marcus Wood, offer a particularly sharp critique of the choice Phillips makes to parody Newton's journal. He argues that, however repellent the records contained in the journal might be, 'those words cannot be changed, except in their smallest details, because they have an authority which a late twentieth-century consciousness desperate to reclaim the past cannot mimic'.¹⁸⁰ I would like to suggest that one of the reasons behind Phillips's decision to reproduce Newton's log might be found in his awareness of the subversive element inherent in parody itself, for 'the menace of mimicry is its double vision which, in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority' (Bhabha, 1984: 86). Another might lie in Phillips's desire to challenge our understanding of historical narratives themselves which, from this perspective, may be shown not to offer straightforward, unadulterated portraits of the past as is often assumed. This would align itself with White's contention that historical texts are indeed themselves works of fiction which, through the modes of emplotment, logical argumentation, ideological implication, and tropological prefiguration constitute specific interpretations of the past from a particular vantage point. A work of history, he claims:

tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thoughts about the events with different emotional valences. The historical narrative does not *imagine* the thing it indicates; it calls to mind images of the things it

¹⁸⁰ Wood (2002: 54). See also Clarke (1998) on the literary nature of the historical text and its implications for Caribbean historiography.

indicates, in the same way a metaphor does. (White, 1986: 402; emphasis in the text)

Though Hamilton's abolitionist leaning is not a dimension of Hamilton in the novel, we cannot dismiss it altogether as Newton is introduced by Phillips himself as a model for the character of Hamilton. I would like to suggest that this too fits into that main line of argumentation which is that the role of fiction is to challenge our own feelings and our own assumptions 'through an engagement with a character whose views (we) don't share for that engagement gives us an insight into their mind'.¹⁸¹ It is in that movement towards the other that we may truly find ourselves:

I feel much more compassion for and interest in the slave ship captain because not only do I have the evidence that some slave ship captains deeply repented and in the end wrote narratives against the slave trade, I could also imagine the slave ship captain finding himself in this position through no fault of his own ... I can understand a variety of motives.¹⁸²

It is through the portrayal of marginalised characters, 'travelling furiously across borders and boundaries' (Phillips, 2002: 5), through their interaction within the same discursive universe, that Phillips disrupts the binary construction of identity and exposes his vision of a trans-cultural reality. All the characters are bound together by that 'shameful intercourse' (Phillips, 1993:1), by the betrayal of a now repentant father hoping to be re-united with his children in 'a brief, painful communion' (2) and by Hamilton and his loathsome trade. 'To exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness' (Bhabha, 1994: 44), and Martha is connected to diaspora 'via the pain of original loss' (Low, 1998: 78), but also via her undying love for her daughter, a symbol of the diaspora's enduring power of survival. In *The Pagan Coast*, Edward's and Nash's narratives intersect with an interweaving of third and first person narratives highlighting the characters' interdependence while at the same time signifying fracture at the heart of that interaction. It is through his 'filiation' with Edward that Nash is alienated from his African past and it is through that same relationship, but through the pain of abandonment, that he is able to re-scribe the past, to 'cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed (him) all too securely the whole course of (his) life' (Phillips, 1993: 61-2), accept his African heritage and inscribe himself into history. Edward's own sense of worth is dependant upon his emancipated slave carrying out his Christian mission and suffers the same sense of rejection when he realises that Nash has deserted his faith for, to survive, the

¹⁸¹ id (160).

¹⁸² Phillips in conversation with Schatteman (2001: 102).

colonial identity depends on the subordination of the black other. As he ventures into Nash's territory, Edward himself begins to cast some doubt over the decision to encourage men 'to engage with a past and a history that is not truly their own' and suffers severe pangs of anxiety and even 'a profound guilt' (52). We are left wondering however about whose past and whose history. It is in that question that, to my mind, the power of the text resides.

Ward somewhat provocatively suggests that it is Hamilton's ignominious enterprise which makes Joyce's and Travis's relationship possible for otherwise, she argues, they would not have met (2007: 21). What is not in doubt is that it is because she is prejudice-free that their love can blossom but it is also a union which, because of the legacy of slavery, is fraught with the pain of exclusion: 'Your father and I, Greer. We couldn't show off'. (Phillips, 1993: 223). It would have collapsed into tragedy with the death of Travis and with Joyce giving her child up for adoption but for Greer's return. The reunion between mother and son is a tentative, strained occasion, rendered by a deliberate distancing of the bodies: 'he stepped by (me), dipping a shoulder as he did so in order that (we) did not touch' (231). There is however a hope that a new relationship might emerge, through Greer's desire to engage with his mother and with a past which had been so tragically obliterated. It is also in that movement towards the other, and through the power of Joyce's love for her son, a love which has never wavered though she has abandoned him, that reconnections are performed: 'My God, I wanted to hug him. I wanted him to know that I did have feelings for him. Both *then* and *now*. He was my son. *Our* son' (224; my emphasis). Greer stands for all the descendants of the slaves, the 'many tongued chorus' who have endured the crossing of the river and have arrived on the far bank 'loved' (237) for:

The future belongs to the impure, ... (to all those) who claim more than one tradition, one nation, and one community ... who reside at the crossroads of cultural traffic and thrive on the possibilities of metamorphosing cultures. (Juneja, 1996: ix)

Phillips too shares in this vision, not a rhetoric of blame, not a desire for violent retribution, but an understanding of the forces which have led to the oppression of innocent people all those centuries ago and whose repercussions still live on today, for 'ghosts of time infuse the spectre of humanity' (Harris, 1999: 183). It is a trans-cultural vision which challenges the 'screen of universal thought' with the reality of a 'world broken down into complexities, diverse bodies, memories,

languages, histories, differences' (Chambers, 1994:70). It celebrates survival and acknowledges that the past can never be effaced, must never be forgotten for it is part and parcel of our history and of our selves. It is also a vision in which identities and narratives intersect and open up the space of a dialogue in which 'neither trajectory is reduced to the direction of the other' (123). It is a vision which is echoed in the ancestral father's incantation in the epilogue, the 'many-tongued chorus of common memory', which resonates with Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream', with the refrains of black music, with all the voices of the diaspora, 'hurt but determined...Survivors all', like those of his children Nash, Travis, Martha and Joyce:

For two hundred and fifty years, I have listened. To voices in the streets of Charleston...To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean... To the haunting voices. Singing: Mercy, Mercy Me...Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom...I have listened to the voice that cried: I have a dream...A many-tongued chorus continues to swell. And I hope that amongst these survivors' voices I might occasionally hear those of my own children. My Nash. My Martha. My Travis. My daughter. Joyce. All...Only if they panic will they break their wrists and ankles against Captain Hamilton's instruments. A guilty father. Always listening...A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my beloved children... But they arrived on the far bank of the river, loved. (Phillips, 1993: 235-237)

5. DAVID DABYDEEN'S *DISAPPEARANCE* (Dabydeen, 1993)¹⁸³

The ancestors curl and dry to scroll of parchment.
They lie like texts
Waiting to be written by the children
For whom they hacked and ploughed and saved
To send to faraway schools...
Me dead...
Got no story to tell...
Still we persist before the grave
Seeking fables.
We plunder for the maps of Eldorado
To make bountiful our minds
In an England starved of gold. (Dabydeen, 1988: 14; italics in text)

5.1 'On not being Milton'¹⁸⁴

'What is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew, so that mongrel that I am, something prickles in me when I see the word 'Ashanti' as with the word 'Warwickshire', both separately intimating my grandfathers' roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian' (Walcott, 1998:9).

'The notion that identity could be ... told as two histories, one over here, one over there, never having spoken to one another, never having anything to do with one another ... is simply not tenable any longer in an increasingly globalised world' (Hall, 1991: 48)

The contemporary Black English, Gilroy argues, 'stands between (at least) two great assemblages' and he highlights the 'special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once' (1993b: 3; parentheses in the text). As a cultural crossroads, the Caribbean can also be a space of re-imaginings in which cultures are required not only 'to revise their own systems of reference, norms and values' as Bhabha suggests (2000: 141), but where new regimes of reference, norms and values born of the interweaving of cultures may be allowed to be elaborated and to thrive. David Dabydeen's writing is to be found at the confluence

¹⁸³ All further references to the novel are to this edition. *Disappearance* is David Dabydeen's second novel. Dabydeen is a leading Caribbean author with three collections of poetry to date and seven novels, many of which have won prestigious awards including a Commonwealth Prize for *Slave Song*, three Guyana Prizes for Literature, the 2004 Raja Rao Award for Literature, and the 2008 Anthony N Sagba award for Literature. He is also the author of several works of non-fiction and criticism researching the depictions of blacks and Indians in English Art and Society and the history of indentured labour in the Caribbean. In addition, David Dabydeen is Professor of Literary Studies at the University of Warwick and has published an extensive range of scholarly articles throughout his academic career.

¹⁸⁴ Essay by David Dabydeen (1990: 21), both a reference to and parody of Tony Harrison's poem 'On Not Being Milton' (1987: 112).

of these two viewpoints, which perceive hybridity as both burden and a site of creative transformative potential. As with Phillips and Levy, issues of belonging lie at the heart of his writing, a dynamic back and forth journeying in time and space between England, Guyana and India. Born on a plantation in Guyana of Indian parentage, Dabydeen later grew up in New Amsterdam, a largely Afro-Guyanese town, with early images of 'cordial' relationships between the different ethnic communities and with 'half-eclipsed memories of India' (Birbalsingh, 1997: 177). As riots broke out in the early sixties and as racial tension grew, his sense of Indianness intensified in the environment of his grandmother village where his family had taken refuge. Although still young, he grew however increasingly aware of the inherent contradictions and ambiguities at the heart of this newly-found 'Indian consciousness', as the images of a 'glorious', opulent India, as portrayed in the Bombay movies, contrasted sharply with the daily reality of 'cows and wooden houses on stilts' (178).

It is his contention that the Indian contribution to the creolisation of the language in the Caribbean, and in Guyana in particular, is to be found not only in the use of Indian language, but particularly in this agricultural, rural setting. It was while still studying at Cambridge, on his return from his first trip 'home', that he wrote *Slave Song* (2005), his first collection of poems, out of the 'tension' between his Guyanese environment and his location at the heart of British society, out of the creative energy which was released by being 'both insider and outsider' in both of these locations (Birbalsingh, 1997: 182). At the same time, by showing in the poems how 'Indian the Creole is' (186), he also wanted to redress what he perceives as the Afro-centric 'flawed conception of the region' (Dabydeen, 1987: 10). With its use of fragmentation, its transgression of linguistic and cultural boundaries, its immersion in the Creole and the carnivalesque for the subversion of the imperial norms, *Slave Song* serves as a pertinent introduction to the study of *Disappearance*.

In the way that, for Wilson Harris, the limbo dance is to serve, not as a reminder of a history of oppression, but as a gateway into other ways of seeing (Harris, 1999: 159), I want to argue that for Dabydeen, the brokenness of Creole, with its raw energy, has the same transformative power. It is a Caribbean response to, a re-ordering and a re-writing of the imperial centre whose authority is performed, he contends, through an English poetic tradition which, from the seventeenth to the

nineteenth century, regards ‘Milton’s ornate, highly structured, Latinate expressions’ as ‘the exemplars of English civilization against which the barbaric, broken utterances of black people are judged’ (Dabydeen, 1990: 26). In a world given to the ‘centrality of the Word’, the apparent ‘confused Gabble’ of the African slaves is held to testify to the bestiality and barbarism of the black population. Indeed, it is argued, if ‘their distinguishing characteristic as men is their use of language’, they have little in common ‘with that race of beings which boasts of a Newton and a Milton’.¹⁸⁵ Yet, it is out of his encounter with, on the one hand, ‘antislavery pieces in highfalutin Miltonic rhetoric and cadence’ and, on the other hand, English medieval alliterative verse that Dabydeen was inspired to write *Slave Song*. Whilst the former ‘wrapped’ the ‘barbaric experience of slavery’ in a ‘napkin of poetic diction’ and ‘converted’ it ‘into civilized expression’, the latter, with its ‘sheer, naked energy and brutality’, its ‘thew and sinew’ reminded him of the Creole of his childhood (22). This simultaneous habitation, within English and Dabydeen’s writing, of paradoxical but nevertheless interwoven perspectives stresses the dualities, the ambiguities, which are to be found at the heart of both Caribbean and English identities.

For Dabydeen, it is the brokenness of Creole and the same raw energy as that to be found in the medieval verse which allow for the ‘brokenness and suffering of its original users’ to be heard and experienced (2005:13). Such a claim has been disputed by Benita Parry, who argues that ‘speaking for’ others takes us into the realm of ‘fiction’, and that Dabydeen’s poetry is but a reinvention, not a re-enactment of the slaves’ experiences (1997: 49-50). However, it is not Dabydeen’s intention to provide an authentic ‘transcript of reality’ (2005: 10), nor an expression of grievance at ‘a history of untold oppressions’, as Parry suggests. What he stresses instead are the liberating powers of the Caribbean poet’s imagination and of the creativity inherent in the creolised language, born out of the tragic interaction between Britain and its colonised ‘others’. He celebrates its capacity to ‘recreate sensuously the kind of stories that allow suffering and grief to come through’,¹⁸⁶ and for Caribbean and English identities to be redefined in this new configuration. It is a collective undertaking for, in this way, he finds himself participating in:

a West Indian literary tradition that seeks to subvert the English canons by the use of lived nigger themes in lived nigger language. Their strategies of ‘rants,

¹⁸⁵ From *The Observer*, 21st June 1847, quoted by Dabydeen (2011: 26)

¹⁸⁶ Dabydeen in conversation with Dawes (1997: 202). He also makes a clear distinction, quoting Seamus Heaney, ‘between the expression of grief which is art and the expression of grievance which is social/ political protest’.

rudeness, and rhymes' look back to half a century of West Indian struggle to establish black expression... To write in creole was to validate the experience of black people against the contempt and dehumanising dismissal by white people. Celebration of blackness necessitated celebration of black language, for how could black writers be true to their blackness using the language of their colonial masters? ... The use of creole involves recognition of the vitality of the oral tradition surviving from Africa, the earthiness of proverbial folk speech and energy and power of gestures which accompany oral delivery, and the insistence of the drumbeat to which the living voice responds (Dabydeen, 1990: 30-1).

The use of Creole in *Slave Song* emphasises orality as source of meaning since, in an oral language, it is tone which 'creates meaning' (Dabydeen, 2005:13). It is also a move away from the Western tradition, for the sensuous nature of the language does not permit abstraction and 'you cannot have the *Four Quartets* in Creole' (Binder, 1997:170).¹⁸⁷ As Dabydeen warns in his introduction to *Slave Song*, 'one has to get accustomed to the unsheathing of the tongue and the contact with raw matter' (2005:13). It is for this reason that his use of notes, translations and plates with reproductions of English eighteenth-and nineteenth century engravings suddenly confound the reader, for they appear to return us to an English literary and visual tradition. Indeed, as Welsh suggests, such notes in 'fine, elegant, English prose' are reminiscent of the white affidavits which introduce black texts such as slave narratives and 'authorize' the texts for 'white and non-creole-speaking consumption' (1997: 41). Furthermore, they attenuate, dampen, 'civilise' the Creole voice which loses its potency, its kinetic energy and is once again traduced, colonised and marginalised. As the notes and translations insist themselves upon the readers, forcing their author's interpretation upon them, a rigid, unbridgeable gap is now established between poem and audience where before vibrancy and close intimacy had taken place. Benita Parry's contention that there might indeed be a need for a translation (1997: 64) draws our attention to the problem of audience reception which, Mark McWatt contends, modifies the craft so that the Caribbean poet writing in Creole has to bear 'the multiple burden of messenger, translator, apologist, explicator' (1989: 87). This is poignantly expressed by Dabydeen in *Coolie Odyssey* as he portrays a white audience who expect 'folksiness', and thrive on a diet of poverty, exoticism and suffering, which they 'consume' avidly, leaving the poet

¹⁸⁷ Dabydeen in Binder (1997: 170).

‘naked’ before them, with ‘a dead grandmother’ and ‘a useless’ poem’, a ‘painful and shameful experience’:¹⁸⁸

We mark your memory in songs
Fleshed in the emptiness of folk,
Poems that scrape bowl and bone
In English basements far from home,
Or confess the lust of beasts
In rare conceits
To congregations of the educated
Sipping wine, attentive between courses –
See the applause fluttering from their white hands
Like so many messy table napkins. (2006: 15)

If however, as Dabydeen playfully proffers, they are a spoof, a literary joke in the tradition of Eliot in the *Waste Land* and earlier, of Pope, they open up, I suggest, an enunciative space for a critically dissonant Creole perspective which interrogates the colonial discourse as well as the relationship between ‘the artist and the critic, the creative work and the critical work’.¹⁸⁹ All then becomes illusion, re-interpretation, confusion as the writer adopts a series of masks, ‘Look, I am just rendering history; Look, I am the critic’.¹⁹⁰ Through this tactic of ‘diversion’, Creole reinserts itself insidiously into the English texts since, Glissant argues, it is an inherent characteristic of Creole to use ‘camouflage’ and ‘trickery’ and ambiguity to subvert the authority of the ‘master’ text (1999: 20-1). The wearing of masks is also a strong allusion to the tradition of the Carnival in the Caribbean as a subtle instrument of subversion and liberation, as Dabydeen comments in an interview: ‘by becoming a master in your own mind, you are closing the gap between what a slave is and what a master is and, ultimately, this resulted in the struggle for freedom’ (McLeod, 2011). This recourse to opacity, this strategy of concealment from the oppressive presence of the other brings to the fore the image of the ‘forest of the maroon’ which was the ‘first obstacle the slave opposed to the *transparency* of the planter’ (Glissant, 1999: 83, emphasis in the text). It is dictated by Dabydeen’s desire to counteract the re-colonisation of the Caribbean text by Western theory in which ‘some of the anguish and some of the delight in the writing get lost’.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ In interview with Binder (1997: 172). This also brings to mind the scenes at the 1924 Exhibition in *Small Island*.

¹⁸⁹ Dabydeen in an interview with Birbalsingh (1997: 183).

¹⁹⁰ Dabydeen in interview with Binder (1997: 169). See also McWatt (1997: 15-26) on the technique of masking in *Slave Song*.

Similarly, I argue, the inclusion of the brutal visual images of slavery in the form of eighteenth and nineteenth-century engravings used, not as illustrations but as pre-texts for the poems, rework the representational power of the dominant colonial code. By juxtaposing, for instance, the print of ‘a piece of sugar cane’ as a phallic image of pestilence and decay, with a Creole poem in which the canecutter dreams of sex with the white woman, Dabydeen brings to the surface the ‘latent eroticism of the encounter between black and white’, the ‘pornography of Empire’, which, he argues, is a ‘relatively unexplored aspect of imperial relations’.¹⁹² Furthermore, by contextualising it ‘in English medieval traditions of romantic expression’, he also calls for English and Englishness to be reconfigured.¹⁹³ The sugar cane, as metaphor of colonial authority and power, finds itself fractured by the ‘very violence committed in the act of transfer’ to the Caribbean space (Döring, 2002: 73). In the same way, as Döring demonstrates, the English language finds itself lacking when transplanted into the Caribbean, inadequate to render the realities of the Caribbean landscape, for ‘the hurricane does not roar in pentameter’ (Brathwaite, 1984: 10). Indeed, in his study of Grainger’s poem *The Sugar Cane*,¹⁹⁴ Döring shows how the proliferation of English names for the same type of Caribbean plants in Grainger’s explanatory footnotes, not only exposes ‘a history of conquests and settlements’, but also deconstructs colonial naming which was essential to the success of the imperial project. It evokes instead, as with the use of prints in *Slave Song*, a Caribbean space as a space of contestation, of anxiety, of ambiguity and uncertainty for the European Other, where all ‘natural phenomena somehow seem familiar, but their resemblance to the Old World conjures up false references, confusing the categories and blurring conceptual boundaries’. (Döring, 2002: 74)

In a similar fashion, as Dabydeen positions himself as both poet and critic, both inside and outside the text, as he claims allegiance to and recognition from both Creole and English literary traditions, from both oral and written modes of

¹⁹¹ Dabydeen in interview with Davey (1994: 176). This is a recurrent theme in essays by and interviews with Dabydeen. His concern is perhaps best expressed in one essay when he writes: ‘Such lament for lost primitivism recurs in many other reviews by different hands, in different guises. Words like ‘primitive’ (sometimes disguised as ‘naturalistic’), ‘charm’ and ‘childlike’ are common, even as the reviewers take up politically correct positions against colonial exploitation. With the notable exception of Francis Wyndham, reviewers sought in West Indian fiction what was apparently absent in post-war Britain: colour, gaiety, innocence, virility. Such poignant desire for the characteristics of the Noble Savage ensured that West Indian writing was eagerly received by the literati, even as the real thing – the nigger – was being hunted down and hounded out of the neighbourhood’ (2000: 75)

¹⁹² In interview with Birbalsingh (1997: 184)

¹⁹³ id (185).

¹⁹⁴ Ironically, this is one of the poems which Dabydeen uses as an illustration of the ‘antislavery pieces in highfalutin Miltonic rhetoric and cadence’.

articulation, he displaces the boundaries and the authority of the Western text and critical discourse, and of British and Caribbean identities constructed by this discourse. He calls into question the integrity and validity of the Western articulation, its emphasis on the fixity and singularity of identity whilst also enquiring as to its nature and where its meaning is to be found. It also demands a re-reading of Englishness itself, as Grainger himself seems to suggest when he exhorts the planter to be 'unprejudic'd, then learn / Of ancient modes to doubt, and new to try' (1764: 23). As Döring concludes:

Such intimate yet reversed engagements of Caribbean and English cultural space, and such reconfigurations of their identifying narratives would lead us also to construct a different history, a history of kinship for Caribbean-English writing in a postcolonial tradition. James Grainger's text, at any rate, has dramatized the ways in which the powers engaged in plantation projects act on one another. Englishness itself may finally be seen not as the planter, but the product of the colonial culture it seemed to have transferred elsewhere. (2002: 76-7)¹⁹⁵

If the notes, translations and images are, as Dabydeen insists, an integral, essential part of the whole book, then, I would like to argue that *Slave Song*, just as the sugar fields it so poignantly and powerfully renders, is shown to stand for the 'point of entanglement' (Glissant, 1999: 26) when English and Caribbean narratives and histories came to impact upon each other, to interweave and interact. This means that they can no longer be viewed as separate entities, and that the aspiration to 'revert', the 'obsession with a single point of origin' has to be rejected for 'to revert is to consecrate permanence, to negate contact' (16). Born out of these cross-cultural processes, this 'move between and among modalities', this refusal to 'be pinned down to one or the other' (Tuma, 1998: 255), creolisation is shown to not only represent 'the constant affliction' of the Caribbean, but becomes 'creative potential', an 'unceasing process of transformation' (Glissant, 1999:142). This differs, I contend, from Bhabha's approach which focuses solely on the disruption of colonial discourse through an ambivalent and hybrid third space. As different realities interrelate, it is this ceaseless dynamic, 'not prompted solely by the defining of (our) identities but by their relation to everything possible' (Glissant, 2006: 89), which liberates the Caribbean self, making her/him feel that s/he is 'on the threshold of some capacity'.¹⁹⁶ Such an approach is echoed by Bakhtin's analysis of the

¹⁹⁵ See also Gikandi in *Maps of Englishness* (1996).

¹⁹⁶ Dabydeen in interview with Birbalsingh (1997: 195).

seriocomic genre whose characteristics are a reliance on ‘experience’ and ‘free invention’ and:

a deliberate multi-styled and hetero-voiced nature ... a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; ... wide use of inserted genres ... a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons ... and various authorial masks make their appearance. Alongside the representing word there appears the *represented* word; in certain genres, a leading role is played by the double-voiced word. And what appears here, as a result, is a radically new relationship to the word as the material of literature. (1984: 108; emphasis in text)

Within this poetics of relation, ‘errantry’, the essence of the Caribbean, which for Dabydeen is defined as a ‘constant sense of travelling’, challenges identity as ‘totalitarian root’ (Glissant, 1997: 11-22).¹⁹⁷ It posits instead identity as ‘rhizome’ which, whilst maintaining ‘the idea of rootedness’, ensures that ‘each and every identity is extended in a relationship with the other’ (Glissant, 1997:11). It defies linear narrative conventions in favour of an imaginative, subversive and at times painful exploration of new horizons of being and of meaning. It calls instead for ‘transgression and abandonment, and the confusion of metaphor, and opaqueness, and multiply-fused yet contradictory perspectives, and revelling in contradictions, muddle, wrong-headedness, hydra-headedness’, all that is at the heart of writing.¹⁹⁸ Within this context, too, the loss of history may be subverted through the power of ‘imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention’ (Walcott, 1974:6), so that ‘amnesia’, not as a negative concept, but as the start of other possibilities, becomes ‘the true history of the New World’ (Walcott, 1998:39). Such a perspective is, as Dabydeen comments, an integral part of his work:

I like the idea of disappearance. The absolute absence of bodies – which ... emerges from a recognition that for black people, or for people from the colonies, ... your existence was because of your physique: to cut cane ... So therefore, what you want to do now is not to write the body ... but to write the absence of body ... figures that want to disappear ... You are trying to escape from landscape, body, history, by having a kind of unborn foetus in the sea as a way of just disappearing from concepts. (Härting and Döring, 1995: 40).

The ‘spectral burden of vanishing and re-appearing’ is, Wilson Harris claims, ‘at the heart of the writer’s task’ (Harris, 1999: 86). This is a theme which Dabydeen has taken up in his second novel, *Disappearance*, and it is within the contexts highlighted above that I would like to undertake a study of the text. For Falk, the

¹⁹⁷ Id.

¹⁹⁸ Id, p 209.

narrator's story in the novel is seen from the standpoint of 'a confession, delivered' 'in a 'ritual sequence of shame' for which he expects to receive the forgiveness of the sinner by the interlocutor – or the reader' (2007: 122). Falk makes use of the themes of 'straight' and 'sinuous' which prevail throughout the novel to contrast a vision of a stultifying modern rationality with an intertextual performance which 'displays a means to negotiate the language regimes that mould the subject' (123). Such a rhetoric of shame brings to mind Bewes's arguments in his analysis of postcolonial writing and *Crossing the River* in particular, as outlined in Chapter Four. I would like to argue that, far from suggesting shame or eliciting forgiveness, this 'confessional' style is being used as a subversive ploy by Dabydeen as trickster figure, 'a latter-day Anancy', the shape-shifter of Hindu and Caribbean mythology, a 'three or four-footed creature'.¹⁹⁹ Through it, he draws the readers in, making them both witnesses and actors in the discourse and drama of imperialism that unfolds in front of their eyes. Whilst I align myself with Falk's discourse of the 'seamless straight line' (Dabydeen, 1993: 29), versus 'the curved, the circular, the zigzagged' (75), I do so from the perspective of a Caribbean, Carnival-like re-ordering of a reality, of a history, and a subjectivity hitherto defined 'along ruler's edge' to contest imperial notions of fixity and homogeneity, and introduce new realities, new fields of meaning and of being (36).

It is important, Glissant argues, that the strategy of 'diversion' should not be understood in terms of negative opposition or of recrimination for past ills for this would 'lead nowhere' (Glissant, 1999: 23). Instead, it is to be found 'in the subtleties of understanding, analysis and creation', in a dialogue across diversity, and the focus then must be on taking 'responsibility for a *'complete break'*, for the elaboration of new forms of being (25-6; emphasis in the text). The creative re-appropriation of the trickster's strategies of parody, mimicry and subversion is, I suggest, already deployed in the outline of the novel. It tells the story of an elusive, unnamed Afro-Guyanese engineer who has been sent by his revered English professor, Fenwick, to help shore up, at the request of the villagers themselves, the crumbling coastline of a village near Hastings, 'a victim of piracy and plunder by foreign barbarians' (Dabydeen, 1993: 21). His elderly English landlady, Mrs Rutherford, who has spent some time in Africa, assumes the role of guide, exposing him to the rituals of England and its ghostly imperial past. Forever transgressing the borders of writing,

¹⁹⁹ Dabydeen in interview with Birbalsingh (1997: 188).

criticism and theory, Dabydeen has incurred the censure of some postcolonial-critics whose ‘expectations – of which Dabydeen seems painstakingly aware – are at once heeded and frustrated in his work’ (Stein, 2004: 153). Mark McWatt denounces *Disappearance* for its ‘self-consciously post-colonial text’ and for its ‘literary gamesmanship ... with the narrative disappearing ... up its own aporia’ (1997: 121-2). The author’s decision to write in an ‘elegant, chiselled and restrained English prose’ (Davey, 1994: 189) also exposes him to the accusation that it is the adoption of ‘Cambridge English’ which creates ‘historical and cultural amnesia’ (Parry, 1997: 90-1). Indeed, as During suggests, ‘to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth a problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence’ (1995: 125). This prompts a number of questions which this study attempts to address: ‘How can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language and in an English rural landscape in which blackness is a sign of absence?’ (Gates, 1988: 169) What is the subversive and the imaginative potential of a Creole ‘re-writing’ of the archives of an exclusive tradition? Can the Caribbean postcolonial writer distance himself from the tyranny, the ‘habit of conquest’ of the Western articulation?

5.2 Living ‘ruler’s edge’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 36)

Turner crammed our boys’ mouths too with riches,
 His tongue spurting strange potions upon ours
 Which left us dazed, which made us forget
 The very sound of our speech. Each night
 Aboard ship he gave selflessly the nipple
 Of his tongue until we learnt to say profitably
 In his own language, *we desire you, we love*
You, we forgive you ...
 And we repeated in a trance the words
 That shuddered from him: *blessed, angelic*
Sublime, words that seemed to flow endlessly
 From him, filling our mouths and bellies
 Endlessly. (Dabydeen, *Turner*: 1994: 38)

The nameless narrator’s intrusion into the English rural landscape in Dabydeen’s *Disappearance* is seen by Mark Stein to echo in many ways Naipaul’s novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (Naipaul 1987).²⁰⁰ Indeed, both works mark a move away from previous Caribbean fiction which until then had mainly been set in cities. As an ‘archetype of English identity’, the English village is an environment which

²⁰⁰ See Stein (2007: 163)

the Caribbean writers are reluctant to confront, for it is one in which their status as immigrants, as outsiders still strongly prevails.²⁰¹ In an apparent reversal of both the colonial situation and Caribbean literary tradition, it is this very essence of Englishness that the black Guyanese engineer is ironically asked to protect from the ravages the sea has wrecked upon it. It is 'the real truth' about England which the narrator is hoping to find (Dabydeen, 1993: 160), a reality which so far in Guyana has been embodied for him in Professor Fenwick, to whom he 'owes' his 'being' (20; 80-1). If such a quest appears central to the novel, as Jean Popeau argues (1997: 99), the prominence the narrator gives, at the very start of the novel, to his English landlady's enquiry, 'Why, Mrs Rutherford wanted to know, did I become an engineer?' (Dabydeen, 1993: 3) foregrounds, I suggest, a journey of a much more personal nature. To his engineer's mind, such a request has 'the force of a machine' (64) which relentlessly digs out images which he had hitherto allowed to be buried deep into his subconscious. In this way, *Disappearance* is shown to inscribe itself within a post-colonial Caribbean tradition which, for writers such as Harris and Naipaul, Sharrad argues, emphasises on the one hand 'liberation from the tyranny of history which denies them a past (and thus a *presence*)' and, on the other hand, an 'immersion in history to recover / recreate a past' (1992: 110; emphasis in the text).

It is to the sea in Guyana that the narrator first returns in imagination, a wild, perilous sea which, as it breaks through the coastal walls erected by Dutch engineers, seems to mock all human endeavours to tame it. It is symbolic of the savagery which, he feels, is inherent to Guyana, an obscure, barren space, 'absent of data', a wild environment 'teeming with insect life' that devours human flesh (Dabydeen, 1993: 16). This is in sharp contrast to what he has been led to believe is a 'more mannered and restrained England', 'rich in historical markers' (20; 22). The uncouthness, vulgarity, boisterousness of its inhabitants is made all the more striking when opposed to Professor Fenwick's 'appearance of quiet efficiency and studiousness' (90). Mastery of the sea with the use of the tools of modernity will, he believes, enable him to escape the shameful condition of non-history, of invisibility, of silence and unbearable void which, in his eyes, is the hallmark of the land and its people. With the adoption of a modern discourse of rationality, he will inscribe his 'concrete' presence like a 'dam' against the forces of nature in the unfathomable and

²⁰¹ See Dabydeen in Hand (1995: 80).

treacherous landscape (132). He appropriates the colonial language of slavery to expose his own desire for domination and control:

It was the sea ... that made me a civil engineer ... there was no space for the sorrow of ancestral memory ... However much it fetched towards me, threatening to drench me in contempt, there was no question of withdrawal ... into silence... I plotted my life in relation to the life of the sea. How to *shackle* it with modern tools was the challenge before me, how to *enslave* it to *my will* and make it work for me.' (17-8; my emphasis)

The Caribbean is the site of fractures, of turbulence to which a modernist discourse opposes order and discipline which is exemplified in the novel by the dominance of the scientific tools and the 'seamless straight line' (75) which, the narrator believes, will provide him with the sense of solidity, of permanence he so desperately craves. Indeed, as his autocratic teacher has so powerfully stated, an engineer 'is a man who builds a dam against the wild sea ... makes things spick and span... straightens out whatever is lopsided' (60). To the Caribbean narrator whose 'ragged, untutored landscape seems as uncultured as (its) syntax' (Walcott, 1998: 26), the engineer offers an understanding of the rules of 'grammar' which mocks the coarseness, the 'fractures and breakages' of Creole.²⁰² As everything else 'crumbles' around him, Professor Fenwick, a man 'anchored steadfastly in the knowledge of his craft' (Dabydeen, 1993:19) offers him stability against a world that threatens to overwhelm him. In an echo of *The Tempest*, Fenwick appears as a seemingly benevolent modern-day Prospero, 'surrounded by books', who initiates the narrator into 'the secrets of the craft' (id). The rules and the scientific instruments become irrefutable referents which point to a 'true reality' in a sea of uncertainty and chaos and enable the narrator's identity to be safely fixed and secured within the discourse of rationality. They provide him with the protection he needs against a sea which 'destroyed and mocked the records of human effort inscribed in the land' (18), so that the past and its humiliations can thus be put to rest, forgotten and become redundant. He believes he is now free to invent himself, for he is 'always present, always new' (10).

Yet, ironically, it is a reiteration, a re-enactment of a pre-determining history that the narrator performs when, having acquired Prospero's books and been initiated into the Magician's secrets of his Art, he joins the ranks of those earlier 'coloniser-pioneers'. The colonial theme of 'terra nullius' is evoked when, with the digging of

²⁰² Dabydeen who, in an interview with Raney (2011: 195) speaks about the 'absence of recognizable grammar' in Creole.

his canals and dams, the narrator expresses his delight at the prospect of inscribing his presence into 'virgin territory', into a 'primeval mud and swamp' (18). It is not however, as Popeau suggests, a gentle 'domination of nature through patient science' (1997: 107), but a violent irruption into the landscape as his bulldozer digs its 'steel into the soil' and rips 'the vegetation in an upward snap', and defiles the earth as it had done once before early in his childhood (Dabydeen, 1993: 39). Then, he had expressed horror at this act of violation whilst at the same time, feeling seduced and fascinated by the 'perfect rectangle' of the basketball pitch the Americans had created with its four poles standing 'imperiously' in an attitude of reproof against the crookedness, the 'unruly growth' of the 'real coconut trees' (40). In a fit of rage at what he saw as a symbol of rebuke and defiance by a perceived 'civilised' other against his 'backward' counterpart, he had smashed the four lamps on top of the posts: 'God's eyeball had shrunk' (64), and let another pupil, Jamal, take the blame. The reaction of the villagers, of his teacher and particularly his own mother only served to confirm his belief in the innate baseness, the wretchedness of his black condition: 'Why everything black people handle become ruination and ash?... Is King Midas in reverse. What he touch turn gold but we convert things to bush and blackness like we own skin' (63).

The spectre of the ignominious machinery of slavery looms once again as, with the possession of these newly acquired skills, he believes he has now been given a 'pharaoh's authority' to rule over a new wave of 'slaves' (25). They are the 'coolies', the indentured labour who have been shipped over by the British post-emancipation. To the engineer's imperial-like eyes, they are but an anonymous, nameless mass, 'all lumped together in a brown porridge' (id). Their lives are governed by the 'inflexible lines' of his drawings, which shackle them 'like poles in their ankles' (id). It is with the same detachment, the same ruthless rationality embodied in his scientific instruments, that he views his relationship with Annette, his Caribbean lover: 'all the time I was calculating a mode of entry into her body...to break her down to manageable parts like the equations I was learning by rote' (89). Only Swami, whom the other coolies look up to 'like a god', fails to show reverence for the apparently impregnable authority of the edifice the narrator has constructed around himself. Swami, 'who had groomed his body in wildness' mocks the futility of his 'all-you-know book' and his living 'along ruler's edge', and cautions him against the dangers of that loathsome inheritance from the erstwhile 'white man' who

he reminds him, used to rule him (28-9; 36). Swami also condemns the bulldozer's raping of the land as 'one straight clean-cut fuck' thus hinting once again at the 'pornography of Empire', as we saw earlier in the analysis of *Slave Song*. He warns the narrator of the fragility, of the transient nature of his enterprise, and of the wretchedness that awaits him should the ruler be taken away: 'Without the edge, you'll wander off in the bush and get lost and howl like a pregnant mule' (36). The narrator's Newtonian 'single vision', 'so if you don't respect the straight line, how do you live?' (36), is momentarily shaken by Swami's Blakean invocation of another Guyanese world, that of the spirits of the land, 'at the end of the ruler, where the straight line run out and only mystery left' (36).²⁰³ However, blind to the catastrophic destructive power of his scientific endeavour, his faith in the well-founded nature of his enterprise is restored when, after Swami is crushed by the very bulldozer he so reviled, even the treacherous sea refuses to condemn him and seems to stand in abeyance:

I expected the sea to flood into the land ... but the sea was no more restless than usual ... I had momentarily believed that there was something monumental about him, a presence as unmanageable as the sea before us and the bush behind ... my self confidence restored, I pored over my graphs and books with even greater zeal. (37)

In spite of his failure at conquering the sea in Guyana, it is the singular authority of his technological knowledge that this 'one-tongued creation' is intent on using to 'calculate' and 'harvest' the 'forces meeting against' him on the English coast (15). However, from the time of his arrival in England, it is not the power of the sea which is unleashed against him but the past in the shape of the pots and masks Mrs Rutherford, his English landlady, has brought back from Africa and forces upon his consciousness. The gentility of the English tea ceremony with its 'assortment of cakes... neatly arranged', the clockwork order of their 'early evening sessions', the look of 'venerable', 'natural dignity' of the English cottage, are brutally disrupted (4-10). He can only express horror at their ugliness and the brutal initiation rites they invoke, images he 'had buried piecemeal' in his mind, and which now 'surfaced in a ritual sequence of shame' (39). The fragile identity he has so carefully constructed with his scientific tools finds itself annihilated by the image

²⁰³ In his poetry, Blake (753; 818) has argued against Newton's 'single vision', a privileging and separation of the conscious from the unconscious: 'May God us keep / From Single vision and Newton's sleep!' and accuses him of neglecting the power of the imagination and of the unconscious: 'This life's dim Windows of the Soul / Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole/ And leads you to believe a Lie / When you see with, not thro' the Eye'.

they proffer of ‘a Negro, his large black hands carefully holding up a sacred bowl almost in an attitude of worship’ (7). The masks also impose a ‘single vision’, and the ‘empathy’ Popeau suggests (1997:102) Mrs Rutherford displays towards this image of Africa which she inflicts upon the narrator, as she urges him to return to ‘his own colonial roots’ (Dabydeen, 1993:105), exposes instead, I argue, a singular and essential vision of otherness on the part of a supposedly ‘enlightened’ individual:

So now we are entering the ‘African’ phase with our pathetic carvings, poems, and costumes ... The romantic darkness which they celebrate is thus another treachery, this time perpetrated by the intellectual. The result is not one’s own thing but another minstrel’s show. (Walcott, 1998: 8-9)

Indeed, Glissant contends, it is the totalitarian drive for a ‘single, unique root’ which evolves away from ‘nomadism’, when movement not root was important, into the need for fixity and nation-building which pits ‘citizen against barbarian’ (1997: 14). It is language itself which enforces such intransigence, which yields this fiction of absolute knowledge, for the root has to be ‘monolingual’ if fixity is to be achieved (5). It is a tradition which rejects the irreducible difference of the other and is hierarchical and reductive, for it needs to measure the ‘solidity’ of the other with an ‘ideal scale’ which provides it ‘with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments’ (190). The narrator is trapped within this ‘savage’-‘civilised’ binary rhetoric, in which ‘cultures are enmeshed in codes to invert or overturn each other’ (Harris, 1999: 98). It elides all his referents and precipitates a crisis of identity, for although McWatt argues that the narrator ‘feels no allegiance to Eurocentric values’ (1997:118), his sense of self is shown to have nevertheless been constructed out of a belief in their intrinsic pre-eminence: ‘I was no African though and my fetishes and talismans were spirit-levels, bulldozers, rivets. I was a black West-Indian of African ancestry, but I was an engineer, trained in the science and technology of Great Britain’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 7).

Who in the New World, Walcott asks, ‘does not have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was torturer or victim?’ (1998: 39). The vision of progress inherent in Fenwick’s Western rational discourse conceives of history as ‘sequential time’, as a uniform text of unquestioning synchronicity. That ‘Medusa of the New World’ enslaves the narrator in its rhetoric (36), and eclipses him in its fiction of absolute knowledge. The imposed language through which it is articulated further divides him, for ‘our bodies think in one language and move in another’ (27).

However, revenge in nostalgia, as that offered by Mrs Rutherford, which sends the Caribbean mind in search of the 'African experience', of an 'Eden that existed before its exile', can only lead to further enslavement in the totalizing hold of a perfect original order (18). Ultimately, Walcott argues, the narrator would only experience despair in his quest for a point of origin in some idyllic African past for 'we cannot return to what we have never been' (1974:9). Memory, in the 'historically hungover' Caribbean, is overdetermined and emerges as a 'ground stampeded by herds of foreign men ... a territory occupied, crowded and controlled by outside forces' (Döring, 2002: 166). It is not the absence of history, but this excess, this confusion of representations which call the narrator into being and make him 'a slave to nothingness' (Dabydeen, 1994: 39), 'rootless on his own earth, chafing at its beaches' (Walcott, 1998:19).

Yet it is out of this nothingness that, Walcott forcibly argues, the Caribbean self can transcend the prison-house of the fiction of the past in which s/he has been hitherto confined. He violently condemns Naipaul's infamous dictum that 'nothing was created in the West Indies' (Naipaul, 1962: 29) for, as he writes:

Once the meridian of European civilization has been crossed ... we have entered a mirror where there can only be simulations of self-discovery...The Old World, whether it is represented by the light of Europe or of Asia or of Africa is the rhythm by which we remember. What we have carried over... is language. When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, mina birds, apes'. (Walcott, 1974: 7)

Instead, in a re-reading of Naipaul's assertion, Walcott posits mimicry and nothingness as the very act of creation, of imagination (Walcott, 1974:10) since in time 'every event becomes an exertion of memory and thus subject to invention' (Walcott, 1998: 37). The creative potential of the Caribbean lies, he asserts, in the power of language as mimicry, not in using new names for old things, or old names for old things' but 'old names anew', an 'Adamic vision' which 'annihilates history' (Walcott, 1998: 8-9; 38). Naipaul's 'nothing' is ironically mimicked, subverted, redeemed and elevated to the very essence of the creative imagination: 'nothing will be created in the West Indies for quite a long time, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has never seen before' (Walcott, 1974:9).

The ritual of Carnival itself is born of the creative spirit of nothingness for all its various elements 'originated in imitation...and ended up in invention' (Walcott, 1974: 9). More significant even maybe, as last year's costumes, sculptures, and tunes

are discarded, there is a perpetual sense of renewal, of regeneration so that ‘at any moment, the simultaneity of historical legends, epochs, characters, without historical sequence or propriety is accepted as a concept’ (10). Thus, creative amnesia is not absence but the re-inscription of cultural memory, a ‘*disremembering*’ (Döring, 2002:167) through this Carnival art of ‘infinite rehearsal’, of texts playing with and against each other, of a ‘different *reading* of texts of reality’ (Harris, 1999: 85; 183), of looking ‘thro’, not with the Eye’ (Blake, 1969: 818). Linearity, the singular system of domination, gets lost in the carnivalistic, Anancy-like web of cross-cultural horizons, of multiple diverging paths, in the ‘tangle of relationships’ that is the Caribbean. Therein lies its creative potential for, Glissant asserts, ‘we are the roots of a cross-cultural relationship. Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches’ (Glissant, 1999: 67). As Bakhtin writes, Carnival is ‘the feast of becoming, change and renewal’ (1984:10).

Dabydeen too rejects a reductionist perspective of revenge and remorse and it is in the potential that the past has for throwing up ‘a bewildering array of stories’, in what Harris calls the ‘unfinished genesis of the imagination’ (1999: 248-60), in the rejection of ‘one point of departure’, that he believes the burdens of history can be ‘transfigured’ (Eckstein, 2001: 172). The plurality, the diversity of discourses, in contact and in reaction to each other against the tyranny of a single universalizing truth, are as central to Dabydeen’s writing as they are to Glissant’s. Writing, for him, is not about putting ‘dams’ and ‘canals’ in your imagination but about using ‘words that startle and disturb and move people’ (169). This, I want to argue, is to be achieved through the use of creolisation, of a carnivalistic rhythm and attitude to life which, like Creole itself:

hops and limps and has all kinds of fractures and breakages and absurdities and meaninglessness in it ...confuses the past and the present and the future...dancing and pissing around on the page and jumping here there and everywhere, confusing people and coming back and making sense’.²⁰⁴

It is, Dabydeen claims, through an endless layering of images, of stories that ‘multiply and teem’, of ‘a narrative that changes upon itself, sets up other narratives within the one frame’, that memory can be re-worked, re-imagined (Eckstein, 2001:165). This dual perspective, this ‘double over’ in the imagination, this ‘intimate yet far-reaching mutuality’ (Murray, 2008:194) which is the heritage of the

²⁰⁴ Dabydeen in conversation with Raney (2010: 195).

Caribbean, permeates all of Dabydeen's writing. It is this entanglement of the problematics of memory, identity and history, and the capacity of the 'living text' to 'revise itself' (Harris, 1992:117), to 'invert signification' and fashion 'new and composite sites of definition' (Gquola, 2007: 137), through the carnival mode which I would like to explore in *Disappearance*.

5.3 'I am an allusion to an allusion to an allusion'²⁰⁵

My sign was Janus
I saw with twin heads,
And everything I say I contradicted.
(Walcott, 1992: 281)

There is something
About sugar cane
He isn't what
he seem – (Nichols, 1990: 32)

For Glissant, Relation is an ever-changing, a dynamic process which rejects synchronicity and 'the primacy of the same' and introduces the notion of chaos, of quantum indeterminacy.²⁰⁶ Indeed, as has already been suggested above, it is the encounter with the other, in the form of the question which opens *Disappearance*, that precipitates the narrator into the 'unimaginable turbulence of Relation' (1997: 138).²⁰⁷ I would like once again to return to the metaphor of the sea in the novel, as its sense of constant renewal, its ceaseless movement which resists enclosure, is, I believe, the energy that overturns the tyranny of singular perceived 'reality' and identity. It also offers the possibility of new layers of meanings and of new beginnings as the narrator himself understands:

Here was something more restless than myself, belonging nowhere and everywhere, having no uniform shape or colour, constantly changing upon itself yet remaining the same. Nor could it be confined to the dogmas of history ... each new wave was a previous page turned over and forever

²⁰⁵ Dabydeen in an interview with Dawes (1997: 210)

²⁰⁶ Glissant argues that diversity is the prime value of Relation (from the French 'relater' which means telling a story). Since the chasm that was the Middle Passage, the only relevant history is that of the world in its diversified oneness, in which the history of each human being is criss-crossed by the history of all others: 'History is fissured by histories' (1999: 230). Relation is the dialectic of cultural differences, the accepted fact of the presence and the difference of the other: 'Diversity leads to Relation: it is the modern implication of cultures in each other, through their wanderings' (191). Relation is never fixed but in constant movement which leads him to associate Relation with *chaos-monde*, derived from chaos theory which 'renounces linearity's potent grip and in this expanse/extension, conceives of indeterminacy as a fact that can be analyzed and accident as measurable' (1997: 137). See also Benitez-Rojo (2001: 36) whose reading of Chaos is of the 'dynamic regularities – not results – within the (dis)order that exists beyond the world of predictable pathways'.

²⁰⁷ As Glissant asks: 'Is it meaningful, pathetic, or ridiculous that Chinese students have been massacred in front of a cardboard reproduction of the Statue of Liberty? ... Simply to ask the question is to imagine the unimaginable turbulence of Relation.' (1997: 138).

dissolved ... I was seduced by its endless transformations. (Dabydeen, 1993: 132)

The ambivalence at the heart of the carnival sense of the world is to be found at the outset in an epigraph taken from Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: 'what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence' (Derrida, 1976: 159). It is in particular reference to this epigraph, from which ironically the novel takes its title, that McWatt is prompted to argue vigorously against the 'author's self-conscious manipulation of the 'fiction' to accommodate the requirements of the theoretical positions he is exploring' (1997: 111). Indeed, it appears that the novel, with its constant 'play' between the sign and the reality it is believed to refer to, which is endlessly deferred, and its constant 'tension between disappearance and appearance' (Mitchell, 2006: 212), is to be viewed, as McWatt contends, as a fictional illustration of Western postcolonial theory. The instability of the written text is perhaps best illustrated by the books on Mrs Rutherford's shelves which have suffered from the ravages of time and whose now faded messages have in part been eaten away by insects.

However, if we now consider Dabydeen's deliberate stance as both writer and critic as instanced in *Slave Song*, we may be led instead to view the inclusion of Derrida's epitaph as a deliberate and mischievous undertaking, as with the notes in the collection of poems, not only to pre-empt a Western critical appraisal of his text, but also to problematise Western postcolonial theory itself. Indeed, in his essay 'Teaching West Indian Literature in Britain', Dabydeen launches into a violent attack against what he considers to be an attempt by the Western academic establishment, with figures such as Lacan and Derrida as its 'brand names and market leaders' (1997: 45), to privilege Western critical theory over other forms of interpretation.²⁰⁸ Their valorising of 'absence' and 'aporia', their dismissal of the notion of representation and referentiality, which 'sunders the link between word and world', erases, he claims, the 'native' voice of resistance which is born out of particular material, historical and social circumstances, 'possessor of an-other knowledge and producer of alternative tradition' (47).²⁰⁹ The eighteenth century African-British

²⁰⁸ Dabydeen (2011: 45) quotes Wole Soyinka who argues that 'we have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation – this time by a universal – humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history and *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems' (emphasis in the text).

²⁰⁹ See also Benita Parry (1987: 34).

writer Olaudah Equiano knew only too well, Dabydeen argues, the condition of *non-being*. Writing himself into *being* was no mere ‘dance of the pen’, but must be viewed as a transformative move away from ‘absence’ and ‘disappearance’, a vital act to assert a presence hitherto denied. It had profound personal significance for it was bound up with ‘his own personal salvation and the Abolitionist cause’ (49). In a move away from surrendering the agency of resistance to the power of Western intellectual systems, Dabydeen calls instead for a ‘post-colonial poetics of disturbance’ (Huggan, 1989: 37) through the process of creolisation, through the interweaving of cultural influences. It is within this perspective that I would like to contend that Derrida’s epigraph is an important pointer towards the reading of the text not, however, so that we may read *Disappearance* within the framework of Western postcolonial theory, as we might be led to believe. Instead, I contend, it asks us to consider how, whilst not dispensing with nor exclusively subscribing to European models of literary and cultural analysis, West Indian cross-cultural poetics can offer other possibilities of meaning and interpretation, as well as participate in the revision of the post-colonial field for:

If the landscape of post-colonial literature is necessarily marked by the inscriptions of dominant Western critical practice and its technologies of interpretation and control, it is also infused with a pulsating, though often silenced, subterranean energy which speaks to the post-colonial reader of *another* realm of semiotic ‘meaning’, *another* ground of interpretative community’. (Slemon and Tiffin, 1989: xxi)

Counterpoetics is to be found in the creation of a ‘counterorder’ which mocks the language that is used and subverts the original meaning (Glissant, 1999: 165) and it is in the structure of the novel itself that, I suggest, such a concept is first introduced. At first reading, *Disappearance*, with its three parts and twelve chapters, reveals itself, as Dabydeen himself suggests in a parodic rendition of his narrator’s voice, as ‘a very English novel’ and ‘a piece of engineering’ (Kanaganayakam, 1995: 30). Subversion is to be found though, I argue, in this very notion of ‘engineering’ itself which, if it conveys a sense of order and control, also implies some deliberate and artful alteration and manipulation. Indeed, writing, Dabydeen contends, is ‘arbitrary, accidental, anarchic activity’ (Eckstein, 2001: 171), and Caribbean postcolonial writing in particular is about disorder, fragmentation and multiplicity. The insertion in the novel of a Creole rhythm and of a re-created Creole diction, with

their sensuous energy and their ability to confuse all concepts of time, fracture the character of the elegant, chiselled, restrained English prose and the flow of an apparently controlled, linear narrative. Furthermore, I think it is also worth drawing particular attention to the division of the novel into three sections of varying length, which uncovers an Indian influence which adds to the layers of meaning and influences in the novel. As the Guyanese writer Persaud points out, such a technique, ‘corresponds to the three rhythms of the classical Indian raag, with the reversal of rhythms informed by the yogic view that there is no beginning and no end, just cycles to and from consciousness’.²¹⁰ As the ‘look of surveillance returns as the displacing glaze of the disciplined’ (Bhabha, 2004: 127), this mimicry of the mastery of the English model disrupts the authority of the Western values and attributes inherent in the sacred status of the written word. In turn, ‘this ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity*’ and, by inserting elements of cultural difference, shatters its unitary essence (id; emphasis in the text).

The introduction of a vocabulary of ‘deviance’ from the ‘seamless straight line’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 75) by the narrator’s landlady, Janet Rutherford, is also shown to liberate Englishness from its fixed meanings and opens it up to ambivalence and ambiguity. In answer to the narrator’s marked concern about the apparent absence of stories in England, she urges him to abandon his ‘blocks of stone fitting neatly beside each other’ and to engage instead with ‘the sinuous, the curved, the circular, the zigzagged, the unpredictable, the zany, the transcendental and the invisibly buried’ (id). She further undermines attempts to fix ‘reality’ as a rigid, hierarchical discourse by satirising, through renaming, the very essence of Englishness which is seen by the narrator to reside in the names of its flowers ‘so essentially English’ in his eyes, ‘in their evocation of the lyrical’ (72). So ‘devils’-bit scabious’ and ‘Dane’s blood’ introduce the pupils she once taught in Africa, as well as now the narrator, to a disturbing sense of Britain, ‘every bit as dark and diseased as we told them theirs was’ (72). Through this ‘ritual act of decrowning’, she highlights the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 124;

²¹⁰ Dabydeen (1997: 54) quoting Persaud (1994: 15-28). In the course of the novel, the narrator is recalling a time as a boy when Albert asked him to go to the sea wall to watch for three days and report three things that he has seen in detail. Mitchell (2007: 155) offers another association with the number three, this time taken from alchemical and Jungian literature in which three is seen as an imperfect number. It reminds the reader that ‘Newtonian physics...found its limits in the study of turbulence which has now led through so-called chaos theory to a revelation that underlying patterns based on bifurcations leave islands of order in seas of apparent chaos’.

emphasis in the text). This, in turn, shatters the narrator's perception not only of his landlady as a genteel 'English pensioner in a calm setting of cottage and garden' (Dabydeen, 1993: 72), but also, through her, of 'Englishness' itself.²¹¹ Her delight in the creative power of the 'meandering' finds a resonance in the coolie Swami's assertion that 'I does stray about in circles...curl and disappear like smoke ring and reappear somewhere else' (36). As two people, hitherto distanced by impenetrable hierarchical barriers, enter into a free and equal contact on the Carnival scene, Bakhtin argues, all forms of reverence and awe towards an ordered vision of 'reality' are suspended, and an understanding of a new form of relationship between individuals can thus be contemplated:

This is a very important aspect of the carnival sense of the world...Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. *Eccentricity* is a special category of the carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits – in concretely sensuous form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves. (1984: 123; emphasis in the text)

The intertextuality which pervades the novel also allows for a plurality of consciousnesses to enter into relationship with each other against the background of the narrator's singular vision of the world. McWatt argues that it is *Heart of Darkness* 'more than any other text that resonates' in *Disappearance* (1997: 117). However, I would like to suggest that the literary echoes which abound in the novel, and which are introduced to the reader in the first three epigraphs, seem to offer worlds of meaning and resonances which go beyond those offered by McWatt. Indeed, in 'writing back' to Naipaul's *Enigma of Arrival* (1987) which sets the scene and tone for *Disappearance*, Dabydeen distances himself from a Caribbean postcolonial tradition of re-casting Western 'masterscripts'. Acknowledging in this way his literary ancestral 'ghosts', the 'masters who had the original task of rewriting the canonical texts of the West', has 'radical potential' for Dabydeen (Davey, 1997: 189). It enables a sense of a Caribbean tradition of literature to develop which is now to be viewed 'as part of a seamless tradition of writing in English' (Mitchell, 2007: 152), and allows for new representations to enter the English imagination. Döring uses the term 'parabiography' to describe this placing of a work of fiction '*next to and opposed to*' what has been written before (2002: 134; emphasis in the text):

²¹¹ As Dabydeen (Davey, 1994:185) himself suggests, she is a much more Creole character than the narrator 'in her passions, in her outbursts, in her hatreds, self-hatreds and self-contempt'.

The term parabiography is proposed here in a double sense. On the one hand ... the rhetoric of parabiography repeats and employs the same strategies identified in postcolonial writing vis-à-vis colonial discourse, turning the dominating topoi into tropes of resistance. On the other hand, the targets and effects of such strategies have now been displaced and critically changed. The construction of a postcolonial tradition in Caribbean-English writing thus involves both ruptures and continuities. (134)

Though Dabydeen's intention in *Disappearance* was to break away from Naipaul's fiction and undercut it with 'a series of disappearances and revelations of traumas' (Davey, 1994: 189) that were not to be found in *The Enigma of Arrival*, there are also some continuities that need to be explored. Both nameless narrators displace all notions of centre and margin through the vision of shattered dreams, of the impossibility of planting roots in an inhospitable, disorientating nature, through allegories of decay, of an English world on the brink of collapse, of shifting boundaries and identities. As all the characters in the novels disappear and appear within the English landscape, migrancy is no longer to be seen as the exclusive condition of the once exiled Caribbean but is now part of the human condition. The creative potential which arises out of this situation lies in discovering new 'ways of seeing reality, new frontiers of difference' (hooks, 1991: 148).

Dabydeen's distancing from *Heart of Darkness* is evidenced by only an indirect reference to the novel through a quote in the third epigraph, 'The Hollow Men': 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead', by the poet Eliot. Though Dabydeen is at times highly critical of Eliot for his racist tendencies, he nevertheless also acknowledges him as another literary father, thus attesting to the multiplicity of allegiances and resonances at the heart of Caribbean and English writing and identities:

Eliot is fragmentation, Eliot is the disembodied consciousness. Eliot is the great escape artist, Eliot is Anancy in the way that he escapes from Victorian verse, from meaning or from epistemologies, and in a peculiar sense Eliot is the parent of Caribbean poetry... But these are some of the beautiful ironies of literature. (Dawes, 1997: 211)²¹²

I would also to contend that echoes of Harris's novel, *The Secret Ladder*, resonate far beyond, as suggested by McWatt (1997:117), the name of Fenwick and the first epigraph which reads: 'All at once he leaned down and splashed the liquid extravagantly on his face to clear away all doubt of concrete existence' (Dabydeen,

²¹² Mitchell (2007: 152) hears an echo of Eliot in *Disappearance*, not only in 'The Hollow Men' and its flavour of disillusionment but also in 'the mysterious presence in the rose garden' in the *Four Quartets*: 'the unheard music hidden in the shrubbery, And the unseen beam crossed' which is 'England and nowhere. Never and always' (1969: 172; 192).

1973: 141). As in *Disappearance*, ‘reality’, as symbolised by the gauge graduated above and below the surface of the water, is portrayed in the *Secret Ladder* as an elusive concept whose hidden side matters as much as what is visible. Mirror and reflection images are used to reveal the complexities, the contradictions at the heart of the self, to expose the interweaving of the conscious and the unconscious, and the necessity to move away from fixed definitions of identity.²¹³ Through the use of intertextuality, and as a plurality of discourses enter the novel, no one voice has control of the whole story, so that ‘the rigidity of elucidating history gives way to the pleasure of stories’ (Glissant, 1987: 176). For the writer, Dabydeen maintains, the intrusion of those literary voices into his present also allows him to ‘contemplate that which is other in (him), that which owes its life to particular rituals of ancestry’ (1992: 32).

Carnival celebrates a protean vision, and I would like to suggest that, in *Disappearance*, Dabydeen offers us an ironic trans-cultural vision of worlds penetrating each other, as names of characters circulate and attach themselves to other characters who shift from identity to identity within the nucleus of the self.²¹⁴ As Bakhtin argues, carnivalisation, by destroying barriers between self-enclosed systems of thought, ‘brought closer what was distant, and united what had been sundered’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 134-5). Thus, Janet Rutherford may be a reference to Anna Rutherford, the founder of the *Kunapipi*, a journal of postcolonial writing which published a number of Dabydeen’s works.²¹⁵ Mitchell suggests that her name could also allude to the nuclear physicist Ernest Rutherford who is buried next to Newton (2006: 213). For Dabydeen himself, she may also be Prospero’s wife, a ‘tactic of revenge’, because he no longer believes in the ‘potential’ or the ‘promise’ of relationship between Miranda and Caliban (Davey, 1994: 178). There are also resonances between Janet Rutherford and the character of Janet, the narrator’s girlfriend in Dabydeen’s first novel *The Intended*. They are revealed not only in the name itself but also in the complexity and the contradictions of their ‘colonial’

²¹³ As Harris writes (1999: 80): ‘As an imaginative writer I work with a narrative which I revise by scanning each draft for clues which lodge themselves in the draft, clues that may appear to have been planted by another hand...The unconscious mind has come up, has addressed the conscious mind, and the ramifications of that dialogue become of immense importance’.

²¹⁴ Dabydeen (Birbalsingh 1997:198) uses the metaphor of the amoeba in preference to Lamming’s ‘castle of skin’ which he finds too constraining: ‘I prefer to think that the boundary of your skin is not immovable or made out of stone. It is something that you have to blow trumpets at and smash down like the walls of Jericho. It’s amoeboid’.

²¹⁵ Dabydeen (2001) paid tribute to Anna Rutherford in an obituary in *The Guardian*, 13th March 2001.

perspectives. Whilst both profess to hold profoundly liberal and anti-colonialist views, they nevertheless perform a reversal of that stance when, in a parody of the imperial gaze and the language of straightness, each attempts to ‘civilise’ the main protagonist of the novel. Janet in *The Intended* provides her lover with a shirt before his move to Oxford, admonishing him to ‘wash it *properly* and keep it *white*’ (Dabydeen, 1991: 244; my emphasis). Janet in *Disappearance* sends the narrator off to his work on the cliff with ‘freshly laundered clothes’ of her own choosing, having previously discarded those he had brought with him for their ‘coarse sewing or design’, suggestive of a deviance from the imperial norm. The mother figure, both real mother and mother culture, is another disappearance which haunts and inspires Dabydeen’s writing.²¹⁶ Its re-incarnation in the character of Janet is tinged with further ambivalence as the narrator finds himself contemplating with some repugnance another form of relationship, ‘the possibility of her embrace, the closing of her fulsome creased flesh around mine’ (Dabydeen, 1993:76). Janet and the narrator’s real mother, in their respective affirmation-repudiation of the black self, are also emblematic of the carnival image which ‘strives to encompass within itself ...both members of an antithesis’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 176).

Jack, Janet’s elusive husband, is an intertextual echo of Naipaul’s own character, Jack, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, whose garden the narrator at first sight believes to be emblematic of an ‘unchanging’ England steeped in ‘literature and antiquity’ (Naipaul, 1987: 25). In *Disappearance*, Dabydeen’s critique of the pornography of empire is borne out by the figure of Jack sexually exploiting African women, driven by a ‘bulldozer mentality’, and who testifies to the violence inherent in the affirmation of a singular world view for ‘there was one unequivocal straight line between his lust and the fulfilment of it’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 75-6). Jack’s disappearance one day ‘in a puff of smoke’, the way ‘magicians’ do (5), is an oblique reference not only to Dabydeen’s own father’s desertion and disappearance but also to that of another magician, Prospero, who also used the ‘straight line’ to conquer, dominate and enslave. All images of carnival are dualistic and Swami, an ironical reference to Dabydeen’s cousin’s novel *Wizard Swami*, is another type of magician, a trickster, a shape-shifter who has ‘already done convolute and circumnavigate the world before (he) come to this spot’ (36). He haunts the narrator’s memory alongside

²¹⁶ See Dabydeen in conversation with Dawes (1997: 221): ‘I grew up without a mother so that the absent mother is probably what moves me very deeply and creates writing. *Turner* is about the absent mother, too. So there are those moments of autobiography’.

Albert / Mr Roosevelt, the village drunk, himself a reincarnation of Mr Griffiths - a grandfather figure in Dabydeen's own childhood - and of his primary headmaster.²¹⁷ In this way, the inner world of the imagination and the outer world of conscious perception and representation interweave and coalesce, fashioning new sites of signification and definition.

It is Albert himself who fires the narrator's imagination with his tales of 'big-big stories' to be found abroad where 'nothing straightforward, all is twisting and turning' (51; 49). In a re-enactment of the primary carnivalistic ritual of '*mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*' (Bakhtin, 1984: 124; emphasis in the text), both Swami and Albert are momentarily elevated to the status of a god (Dabydeen, 1993: 29). Swami is revered amongst his fellow coolies as a man 'golden in speech', a man of 'princely words and enchanting stories' who wanders 'all over the place, up and down, in and out, by and by, hither and yonder' before being crushed to death by the bulldozer (33). Albert inadvertently scores the first and only point on the basketball pitch whilst in an alcoholic daze, an action for which he is 'immortalised along the Berbice coast' and invested with magical powers until the demon drink strikes again (41):

Crowning / decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, ...Carnival celebrates the shift itself, the very process of replaceability...It absolutizes nothing but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything. (Bakhtin 1984: 124-5)

Christie, the Irish worker whom the narrator befriends,²¹⁸ is another trickster who, I contend, does not so much 'cling to the life raft of his Irishness', as McWatt suggests, (1997:120) as consciously hide under the camouflage of a colonial construction of the 'Paddy' to elude comprehension, to outwit and ensure his own survival by secrecy and cunning: 'Playing Paddy is our national pastime: I joke, I grin, I talk in a bog accent, I get drunk and slur my grammar, I plot...I believe in fairies' (Dabydeen, 1993:164). It echoes the use of Creole by the slaves as a subversive language, as 'a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression... nonsense that could conceal and reveal at the same time a *hidden* meaning' (Glissant, 1999: 124-5; emphasis in the text).

²¹⁷ Dabydeen (Gramaglia, 2009: 176) recalls how Mr Griffiths, the tailor next door showed him how to put on a tie and how he spent hours in his shop listening to his stories about being a 'pan-boiler in Barbados, and, because he had a smattering of French, learning (his) first foreign words'.

²¹⁸ Mitchell (2006: 216) also suggests that an interweaving of religious perspectives might be considered too since Swami's name recalls a Hindu religious teacher and Christie's a Christian name.

It is Christie who relates to the narrator the rumours which are circulating around the village about a relationship between the elusive, xenophobic Mr Curtis and Mrs Rutherford and who expresses doubt as to the integrity of his revered Professor Fenwick, who might turn out to be a mere fraudster after all. Any hope the narrator might have had of connecting with ‘something real and solid’ evaporates: ‘I’m beginning to think nothing exists in England. Everything is a reported story. You can’t know anything for certain’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 157). The measure of the narrator’s disillusionment with England is in the image of Christie’s own cottage which, from ‘a safe distance’ had all the appearance of a picturesque shambles...in an English fairy tale’, but reveals itself on closer inspection as ‘woodwormed’ and ‘rippled with hatred’ (169). When, in an ironic parody of Mrs Thatcher’s own words, quoted in the last epigraph,²¹⁹ Mrs Rutherford urges him to ‘Rejoice!’ for having ‘carved’ his name in the history of the England (177), the narrator can only bemoan the futility of what he has achieved:

‘The wall of granite disturbed this timeless rhythm of depositing and shifting. It settled monumentally and unnaturally in the sand, refusing to budge. It bore all the traits of the humans who had put it there. It suddenly looked monstrous and cruel, stubborn and brutishly arrogant, an awesome deformity. I regretted that I had made it and half-wished that the sea would breach it, break it down to meek pebbles’ (177)

All that is left for him to do is to leave England, where he had hoped to carry out further studies, for Guyana where ‘there was space to forget’ and ‘where the land was big enough to encourage new beginnings in obscure corners’ (179). If some critics view his departure in the light of the ‘impossibility of reconciliation between erstwhile coloniser and colonized’ (Stein, 2007: 168), I would like to suggest that the appearance of the ‘string of pearls’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 180) that Mrs Rutherford offers him to give to his mother might lead to another interpretation. Both her gesture and his wish to give her ‘something precious’ (id) in return are emblematic, to my mind, of an affiliative bond between the two characters, established through Mrs Rutherford’s determination to refuse to be bound by the limitations of the ‘ruler’ mentality, of a single universalising truth and to open herself to the other: ‘Whatever happens you can always come back. You know you’ll always be at *home* here’ (174; my emphasis). Indeed, as Glissant argues, identity exists only as a shifting term in a

²¹⁹ Words uttered by Mrs Thatcher (26 April 1982) at the news of the recapture by British troops of South Georgia during the Falklands conflict. Mitchell (2007: 151) comments that ‘as part of the discourse of invasion and settlement it is, of course, one of a number of self-images which the novel refracts and undermines as part of its project of ambivalence’.

network of multiple relations with the others who constitute it ‘without fixing it under an oppressive force’ (1999: 169).

It is also, I suggest, a return which needs not to be viewed in nihilistic terms, as many critics have claimed, for his journeying into ‘the real truth of England’ has exposed the narrator to the disintegration and the fallacy of fixed notions of meaning, of knowledge and of identity elaborated through a reliance on a discourse of linearity. He has also come to understand that, if he is to begin ‘anew’, he needs to go beyond the ‘testimony of the masks’, the ‘ancient specific order’ which has hitherto enslaved him, and to which the villagers, in their refusal to grant him visibility, still seem to be bound (Dabydeen, 1993: 131). His wish to disappear, I would like to argue, is triggered, not as Stein contends, by ‘his engineer’s desire for factuality, corporeality and certainty’ (2007:177), but stems instead from a yearning for a loss of memory, for an escape from a determining history, for a ‘kind of emptiness from which one could emerge creatively’.²²⁰ The fragile blue flower he had picked up on his way to work and which he finds still lying in his pocket, ‘dried and grown flat, yet still retaining some of its violent colour’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 180), is, with its romantic resonances,²²¹ an intimation that through the power of the imagination, through artistic creativity, the past can be transfigured and new beginnings can be envisaged. Gathered ‘like a lover’s memento’ (108) for Mrs Rutherford, it must also be seen as symbolic of the relationship which irremediably binds them to each other.

Fiction, Dabydeen argues, should be able to ‘create and dissolve simultaneously’ (Zimra, 1999: 150) and *Disappearance*, as a ‘fantasy of effacement and depletive reading, and of raping the archives’ can be viewed as ‘a novel of transformation’ which ‘ingests texts and therefore recycles them while at the same time punching holes in them’ for ‘destruction and recirculation go hand in hand’ (Stein, 2004: 156). *Disappearance* is testimony to the recreative power of the human imagination to transmute historical tyrannies into affirmation of possible freedom. Its contestation of universal norms, its exploration of ‘the hidden workings of this fragmenting process’ (Glissant, 1999: 235), its celebration of the plural, the fluid, the ambivalent within the self through the medium of the carnival form and at the confluence of the oral and the written, exposes:

²²⁰ Dabydeen in conversation with Davey (1994: 186).

²²¹ See Mitchell (2006:149) on its correspondence with the Blue Flower of the Romantic Imagination.

a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry. (Glissant, 1997: 35).

As Dabydeen himself argues: ‘if West Indians have anything to give to this society, it is a vision of...the possibility of being plural within a single character’ (Davey, 1994: 188).

6. ANDREA LEVY’S *SMALL ISLAND* (2004)²²²

6.1 ‘Negotiating the ship’ (Dawes, 2005: 255)

As citizen
Of the English tongue
I say remember
the ship in citizenship
for language
is the baggage we bring—...
I am here to navigate –
not flagellate
with a whip of the past...
for is not each member
of the human race –
a ship on two legs...

²²² All further references to the novel are to this edition.

and diversity
shall sound its trumpet
outside the bigot's wall... (Agard, 1998: 258)²²³

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* follows the lives of four main characters, two of whom, Hortense and Gilbert, are part of that new wave of immigrants from the Caribbean. Like her own parents, they arrived in England on board SS Empire Windrush in 1948 to help rebuild a British economy devastated by the ravages of the Second World War. Agard's poem, written to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush, returns us to the theme of the sea and of journey which is to be found at the heart of the Caribbean diaspora, and seems an apt introduction to my study of *Small Island*. The ship is a powerful metaphor, not only for the horrific memories of the Middle Passage it conjures up, but also because, as the poem implies, it 'continues to link generations brought into new relations by the legacies of slavery' (Mullaney, 2010: 11). As 'ships on two legs', all of us, Agard argues, perilously 'navigate' the oceans of history and memory and find ourselves ceaselessly challenged and transformed by the journeys and the encounters we make on the way. These migratory moves, this mingling of interconnected perspectives can be viewed as a poignant and painful reminder of the fragility of our sense of identity and belonging. If, however, we embrace diversity and interdependence as essential and energizing constituents of our selves, this may pave the way for 'Europe's new voyage to begin' (Agard, 1998: 259):

We need to be able to see how the presence of strangers, aliens and blacks and the distinctive dynamics of Europe's imperial history have combined to shape its cultural and political habits and institutions. These historical processes have to be understood as internal to the operations of European political culture. They do not represent the constitutive outside of Europe's modern and modernist life. They can be shown to be alive in the interior spaces and mechanisms through which Europe has come to know and interpret itself, to define its passions, paths, and habits. (Gilroy, 2004b:157)

Gilroy's call for a move towards 'conviviality', the 'cohabitation and interaction' of cultures and histories, is echoed in Agard's concept of citizenship. For the poet, citizenship is located, not in the image of nationhood, but in language, for 'we do language. That may be the measure of our lives' (Morrison, 1993b). Language has the power to divide and to drive at times unbridgeable barriers and

²²³ It was written whilst Agard was on a writer's residency at the BBC.

rifts between individuals when it engages in a rhetoric of exclusivity, of racial and national purity. It also has the potential, if we are prepared to see beyond ‘the bigot’s wall’, to help us negotiate together ‘life’s tidal rise and fall’ and move towards a ‘kinship which knows no boundary of skin’ (Agard, 1998: 259).²²⁴ Imaged as a ‘weight of words to ground and give us wing’ (258), language returns us to the etymology of the notion of diaspora, to diaspeirein, from *dia* (over, through) and *speirein* (sow, scatter), both suggestive of dispersal. On the other hand, as Procter contends (2003: 14), whilst the discourse of diaspora has tended to privilege the journeying aspect, it has paid scant attention to the act of depositing, of settling implied in the act of sowing.

This means that diaspora needs to be seen as evocative of ‘both routes (scattering) and roots (sowing)’ and that travelling, for migrants such as Hortense and Gilbert in *Small Island* who set up ‘home’ in Great Britain, is then ‘inseparable from, and dependant upon dwelling’ (Procter, 2003:14). This also provides us, I believe, with the means of examining ‘the politics of place, location and territory within diaspora literature, a politics that ‘gets endlessly deferred with its journeying metaphors’ (id). In the analysis of *Small Island*, I would like to consider how the arrival of the *Windrush* generation on British soil on 22 June 1948 was to change forever the national, cultural and political landscape of Britain. As it challenges prevailing ideologies, it engenders feelings of displacement not only in the migrant population, but also in those among whom they came to dwell. It also has the power to offer new relations, new affiliations which allow for the emergence of new identities in Britain. In this way, as Brah argues, the concept of *diaspora space* is to be understood as ‘the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (1996: 181) and it is from such a perspective that I would like to explore *Small Island*. As Mike and Trevor Phillips powerfully declare, the *Windrush* ‘sailed through a gateway in history, on the other side of which was the end of Empire and a wholesale reassessment of what it meant to be British’ (1998:6).

This is a view which finds an echo in Andrea Levy’s provocative declaration, as a ‘bastard child of Empire’ (1999: 327), that ‘if Englishness doesn’t define me, then redefine Englishness’.²²⁵ In it, she proclaims, much to Dawes’s disapproval (2005: 266-7), her desire to be English, to belong in England but she also refutes an exclusive view of an Englishness in which she can play no part, which does not

²²⁴ See also Stein (2004) for similar views on that theme.

²²⁵ Cited in Jaggi (1996:64).

represent her, or at times even fails to acknowledge her presence. Levy's decision to write was born from the dearth of black British reading material and, after the death of her father, from her desire to embark on a voyage of self-discovery, to bring her story, but also that of her parents and of 'their parents' parents' into the mainstream of British thought and British understanding' (2009: 329). She is also keen to inscribe a feminine perspective for, as she declares, 'black' and 'woman' are the 'two lenses' through which she 'explores' herself and the rest of her 'fellow human beings'.²²⁶ As Fernandez states, 'her dual heritage becomes the mediating lens through by which she understands and negotiates her writing' (2010: 29). Home is the point of departure for her novels, and, as with Caryl Phillips, it is a contested, ambiguous space, which resonates in the present with the legacies of a traumatic past. *Small Island* needs, I argue, to be considered alongside her three previous novels which signify upon each other and offer us an exploration of the issues of belonging. Within this context, writing is shown to be a 'process of continuous negotiation' (Knepper, 2012:8), which also enables a reimagining of Britain to be elaborated. As Kureishi contends, being British 'is now a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time' (1986:38).

In *Every Light in the House Burning* (Levy, 1994) Angela, the daughter of Jamaican emigrants, relives significant moments of her childhood as her father is dying, and tries to make sense of her father's life and of her own. The novel highlights the confusion and distress experienced by her family in a country where skin colour becomes the visible marker of difference, of exclusion, of 'unbelonging' with all the negative images that this entails. Through the acquisition of cultural knowledge, attained through 'years of grammar school and college education...of eating lunch instead of dinner and supper instead of tea' (id), Angela appears much better equipped than her parents to challenge the state authorities: 'I knew this society better than my parents ... I had grown up in its English ways. I could confront it, rail against it, fight it, because it was mine – a birthright'(88). She refuses to be marginalized and ignored, and instead demands recognition, unlike her parents 'whose strategy was to keep as quiet as possible in the hope that no one would know they had sneaked into this country' (id). She destabilises the notion of a 'Great'

²²⁶ Levy in Greer (2004).

Britain with the portrayal of the NHS, as signifier of the nation state, as a crumbling institution, symbolised by the doctor's surgery where 'the once-beige patterned walls were stained grey with neglect' (id). Humour is also used to great effect to undermine notions of stability, of power, of order, of singular concepts of identity, which institutions such as the Monarchy and the Church are meant to represent. However, whilst Lima suggests that 'she seems to come to terms with herself, her family and her place in British society' (2005: 53), belonging, to my mind, still remains largely problematic as she finds herself unable to protect her father from the humiliations suffered at the hands of an inadequate National Health Service.

The difficulty of crossing over the boundaries of race and class is a theme which Levy explores further in her second novel *Never Far From Nowhere* through the voices of two sisters, also of Jamaican parents.²²⁷ As unhappy, frustrated 'dark-skinned' Olive's story interweaves with that of the seemingly more successful, confident, 'light-skinned' Vivien, we are confronted with the picture of an English society and culture which 'assigns radically different fates to people based on colour' (Lima, 2005: 63). Whilst her sister enjoys academic success, Olive believes she is imprisoned by her physical appearance. It is a feeling which, for her, is confirmed when she is stopped for a minor traffic offence and the police plant 'ganja' in her bag and take her into custody. Advised to play guilty by her solicitor, she reflects upon the way imperialism's enduring legacy is still very much in evidence today:

'My England shakes underneath me with every step I take... I was born a criminal. She didn't understand I could be innocent. Oh no. I was born a criminal in this country and everyone can see my crime. I can't hide no matter what I do. It turns heads and takes smiles from faces. I am black' (Levy, 1996: 272).

Her dream of going 'back' to Jamaica, 'to live somewhere where being Black doesn't make you different. Where being Black means you belong' (272) can only live in her imagination for, as her mother tells her, 'How you go back? You were born here...I can go back but you children can't' (281). The impossibility of 'returning' highlights one of the elements which distinguishes the first generation of

²²⁷ See also interview with Susan Alan Fischer (Levy, 2005b: 365-66) when Levy analyses the importance that class as much as ethnicity played in the difficulties which Olive encounters. Andrea Levy herself, having grown up as a working-class child identifies with her situation: 'If you grow up in a middle-class house and you've got books, and you've read, you show signs of that...and because you couldn't give all these codes...you were completely dismissed...That's where the work has to be done – to cross out of the everyday, you just get into this much more difficult and rarefied world of learning. I had to make that transition and it is a very painful one. You leave a lot behind that you know, a lot that's familiar, and it's easier by far to stay where you were'.

immigrants from that of their children born in England. As Gilroy argues, it is the concept of diaspora itself which ‘introduces the possibility of an historical and experiential rift between the location of residence and the location of belonging’ (1997: 10). Olive is also acutely aware that even for light-skinned Vivien, home is a precarious, ambivalent space and that ‘one day she’ll realize that in England, people like her are never far from nowhere’ (Levy, 1996: 273). This is echoed by Vivien’s growing sense of unease at the racist attitudes of her predominantly white friends and their attitude to class when she starts moving into middle-class circles whilst at college. As she surveys her familiar surroundings, symbolised by a photograph of ‘two little girls with identical yellow bows’ in their hair, she reflects: ‘I had grown too big for the council flat, but not sure where else I would fit. Where did we belong?’ (281). As Stuart Hall writes:

Identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of a history, of a culture. And since he/she is positioned in relation to cultured narratives which have been profoundly expropriated ... the colonized subject is always ‘somewhere else’: doubly marginalized, displaced, always *other* than where he or she is, or is able to speak from’. (Hall, 1987: 44; emphasis in the text)

It was after the writing of her second novel that Levy made her first journey to Jamaica, a defining moment for, as with Caryl Phillips, she found out that she had a big family and a past which stretched far beyond the time her dad ‘stepped off the ship into this family in 1948’ (Levy, 2005a). It is the inspiration for her third novel, *The Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), a novel of transition,²²⁸ in which Faith, the British-born black protagonist, suffers a nervous breakdown as the foundations of the fragile world she has constructed or which has been constructed for her suddenly give way. After witnessing a particularly nasty racial attack, she retires to the comfort of her bed where she is confronted by the reflection of her black self. She feels suddenly estranged from it and wants to erase it, as she believes it is this aspect of herself which is denying her existence: ‘I covered the mirror with a bath towel. I didn’t want to be black any more. I just wanted to live... *Voilà!* I was no longer black’ (Levy, 1999: 160). Unlike Olive’s mother in *Never Far From Nowhere*, her parents believe that a visit to Jamaica would enable her to regain some form of equilibrium, for ‘everyone’, her mum tells her ‘should know where they come from’ (162). Like

²²⁸ I agree with Knepper (2012: 5) who argues that, whilst it may be tempting to see the first three novels as a trilogy, *Fruit of the Lemon* ‘stands as a novel of transition because of its emphasis on the relations between historiography and vernacular storytelling traditions’.

so many of second-generation Caribbean peoples, Jamaica only exists in Faith's imagination as the memories, the fragments of information and the stories she has gleaned from her mother until she 'had a story that seemed to make sense' (5). It is however out of the oral testimonies she herself collects whilst in the Caribbean from her myriad of newly-discovered relatives that, in an act of re-memoration, she uncovers and engages with a 'bitter-sweet' narrative of a past which, in space and time, reaches far beyond the borders of the immediate present. It is also from this new position of knowledge in which a history of Britain is shown to be intricately linked to that of Jamaica, that she can now redefine herself and stand tall as a proud descendant of an extended Caribbean family who has 'swaddled' her 'tight in its stories' (326):

Crucially, such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas...No one...can fail to understand how the 'rift' of separation, the 'loss of identity', which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place. Such texts restore an imaginary fullness or plentitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past. They are resources of resistance and identity. (Hall, 1990: 224-5)

This is no idealised 'return' to a mythical Africa, though, for there is never any doubt in Faith's mind that her home is in England. She is also under no illusion either that, like the fruit of the lemon tree, her home, 'her' England, often has a bitter taste. She knows that her sense of belonging to England 'is not recognized or accepted unanimously', that 'London remains a territory from which to grapple with aspects of multiple belonging, and to negotiate a form of acceptance' (Stein, 2004: 95). However, her visit to Jamaica has given her an understanding of the nature of her earlier alienation and a sense of a wider historical perspective. She has been able to renegotiate her identity in the light of that experience and at last demand the right to recognition, to her rightful place in England as she asserts, somewhat provocatively: 'I am the bastard child of Empire and I shall have my day' (Levy, 1999: 326-7). It is an England which, she believes, needs to heed her story: 'I was coming home to tell everyone...My mum and dad came to England on a banana boat' (339). Indeed, whilst diasporas invoke the 'imagery of the traumas of separation and dislocation' they are also 'potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings' (Brah, 1996: 193).

As her Aunt Coral warns: ‘Well, now you know a little, Faith. But there is more. There is always more’ (Levy, 1999: 325). *Small Island* was born out of this need for ‘learning about other people and other situations, placing yourself in their heads and using your imagination to create new worlds’ (Levy, 2005a). Levy wishes her novel to be a work of fiction which, whilst fully grounded in everyday human realities, can also offer an acute analysis of a society in transition. *Small Island* was conceived as a story of two couples, one black, who have just arrived from Jamaica, Hortense and Gilbert, and whose lives become ineluctably entwined with those of a white couple from England, Queenie and Bernard. Her choice of first person narrative, which she has also adopted for *Small Island*, comes from the need to hear her characters’ voices as she writes and to let them tell their own story. She compares herself to an actor inhabiting these characters and seeing the world from their point of view, whilst being herself absent from the narrative, refusing to take on a totalising role: ‘with Hortense, I would sit up straight and imagine I was wearing a Sunday-best hat and white gloves’ (Levy, 2004c). As with Phillips in *Crossing the River* and with Dabydeen in *Disappearance*, there is also a criss-crossing of narratives, each signifying upon the other, and a switching back and forth between temporal and spatial planes. We travel between 1948 and ‘Before’, an ambivalent and elusive space, between London and Jamaica, and even venture to India and Burma, a journeying which allows for a polyphony of voices to be heard, which in turn disrupts the linear, singular narrative of the dominant discourse.²²⁹

6.2 Dreams of Empire

When Britain first at Heaven’s command
Arose from the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian Angels sang this strain;...

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful from each foreign stroke;

Empire Day is what me rememba, singin
praises to Modder Country, Englan
At home, me put on mi church shoes
And meet other spruced-up distric
Children-them. Stiffly, happily on we go

At school, we have prayers. We recite

²²⁹ *Small Island* has attracted a number of prestigious awards: Orange Prize for Fiction; the Commonwealth Writers’ prize; the Whitbread Book of the Year Award; the Best Book Award. It has been translated into over twenty languages and has slipped from written to cinematic representation as it has just been adapted by the BBC. It has been shown to audiences with a distinguished cast of actors at a time usually reserved for ‘Sunday night bonnet-fests’. Producer Tony Dennis also celebrates the fact that it was ‘a rare opportunity for black audiences to see our lives, histories, challenges, loves and achievements portrayed in the small screen’ (2009). It has also enjoyed national and international recognition by being the text selected in Britain for the ‘Big Read’ project in 2007 and one of the nine diasporic texts circulated across seven countries as part of the ‘Devolving Diasporas’ study.

As the loud blast that tears the skies,
Serves but to root thy native oak...

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine;
And thine shall be the subject main,
And every shore it circles thine...

Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.
(Thompson, 1700-1748)

poems about Englan and Empire. Each
one of us get a likkle Union Jack
and sweets with flags printed
all over the tin.

Other schools join we. And, drilled,
marchin around the schoolyard, aroun
our wide and high, high poinciana tree
covered wid red flowers, our likkle
Union Jack them a-wave and a-flutta.
we sing we heart out, singing 'Rule
Britannia', glowing with all we loyal
Virtue to King, Country and Empire.
(Berry, 2007:49)

Lima and James both contend that the prologue in *Small Island* is the mirror through which the text unfolds and this is a view that I also espouse in my reading of the text. Lima privileges the encounter with the 'African Man' (2005: 77) as its most significant element, whilst James considers that it is Queenie's experience which frames the text for 'it stands in for the Englishman's perception of all colonials' (2007:2). Notwithstanding the importance of these perspectives, I would like to argue that it is through the lens of the 1924 Wembley exhibition itself as portrayed in the prologue, and as a symbol of imperial ideology, that, from the outset, Levy exposes the 'power dynamics which usher racialised social relations and inscribe racialised modes of subjectivity and identity (Brah, 1996: 185). Imperialism 'was a way of seeing things, of arranging space' (Betts, 1998: 94), a space arranged racially across binaries of 'civilized' Britain and 'primitive' others. Many historians believe that it is in the field of popular recreation that the power of the British Empire was at its most pervasive in instilling in the dominant as well as the subordinate societies a sense of 'imperial purpose in British society' (Thompson, 2005: 38).²³⁰

The Wembley 1924 Exhibition was seen as an opportunity to 'put the Empire on display' through impressive displays of raw materials which, it was hoped, 'would proclaim the economic importance of Empire to the British'. Its aim, it also claimed, was to 'make the different races of the British Empire better known to each other' (Mackenzie, 1986b: 213-215). As well as buildings designed to represent examples of native architecture as imagined by the British, indigenous peoples, 'races in residence', as they were described, were also on display. In an effort to

²³⁰ See also Mackenzie (1986a). He examines the way various media in the late 19th century/ early 20th century reflected the nationalist and imperialist ideas current throughout Europe and how popular culture was used as a vehicle for the dominant ideas of its age.

develop ‘a future for the Empire as a united entity’, a weekly newsletter, *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire*, was issued to teachers all over the country as part of an ambitious project to educate British students in the history and resources of Empire (Simonelli, 2009: 8). The Exhibition was also widely reported in the press and thus became a vast propaganda machine whose main purpose was to draw the attention of its millions of visitors to the power and riches of the empire as well as to the noble ambitions of its civilising enterprise:

Your passage through the shining archways of India or under the mud-built walls of West Africa will compel recognition of the Empire’s sovereign sway over distant quarters of the globe, for you will meet here, or elsewhere at Wembley, representatives of all the coloured races that owe allegiance to that Empire. And meeting them you feel how gladly that allegiance is paid, for they greet you with smiling faces and welcoming words, members like yourself, of an Empire that is at the same time a family of free peoples. These are the spiritual attributes of the British Empire and the British race, its vision and its vigour, its invisible might and its gift to govern. All these qualities are shown or suggested at Wembley.²³¹

This imperial ideology, inherent in the Wembley exhibition, is reproduced in the prologue, through the narration of a very young Queenie. Whilst I agree with Ellis’s important point that, as with *Crick Crack Monkey*, it reflects ‘Queenie’s perspective as a child’ but that it is also ‘an account saturated by the adult’s retrospective perspective’ (2012: 74), I also feel we should give due consideration to Levy’s choice of a child-narrator, symbolically dressed in a virginal ‘white organza frock’, to introduce her novel (2004: 2). As I have argued earlier, the child is of great importance in the discourse of imperialism because the ‘invention of childhood’ was coterminous with that of race (Ashcroft, 2001: 37). The ‘primitive’, as yet ‘unformed’ child, in need of nurture and discipline, is the unwritten book on which imperial ideology can inscribe itself:

The child, then, signifying a blank state, an innocent of nature, a subject of exotic possibility and moral instruction, as well as a barbarous and unsettling primitive, suggests an almost protean capacity for inscription and meaning. (41-2)

Through Queenie’s eyes, on a Butchers’ Association trip with her family and their employees, we are offered a vision of ‘the whole Empire in little’, of ‘building after building that housed every country we British owned’, of the wealth of Empire

²³¹ ‘T.N’, ‘The Meaning of Wembley’ in *The Daily Chronicle*, 23rd April 1924, p8.

paraded for all to see, admire and take pride in (Levy, 2004: 2-3; my emphasis). It is also manifest that, for the millions of British visitors, the countries on display do not exist as entities in themselves, but are instead emptied of their inhabitants, reduced to a series of clichés, to miniature caricatures of themselves, to mere objects of consumption: ‘woods of Burma...the coffee of Jamaica...the sugar of Barbados...the chocolate of Grenada’ (4). The ‘races in residence’ too are mere exhibits and are dehumanised by a series of racist stereotypes, reduced to silence and to objects of knowledge which calls to mind Césaire’s equation: ‘*colonisation = thingification*’ (1972). This is nowhere more so than in the ‘African jungle’ with its ‘huts made out of mud’ where Queenie comes across a woman sitting on a ‘dirt floor’ at a loom with ‘skin as black as ink... a shadow come to life’ (5). As Graham, her father’s apprentice butcher declares, in a reiteration of the imperial ideology he has now made his, she ‘can’t understand what I’m saying’ because ‘they’re not civilised. They only understand drums’ (id).

Later on, as she is confronted by ‘a man. An African man’ (6), the force of the imperial language of ‘race’ is further reinforced. The stereotypical images place ‘this big nigger man’ in a world apart, with close connections to the animal kingdom, ‘a monkey man’, his ‘hair woolly as black as a black shorn sheep’ (id). Fanon claims that it is from this perceived, mythical ‘link between monkey and man – meaning, of course, white man’ that stems the treatment of the black as a child: ‘A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening’ (Fanon, 1986: 30-31). He is excluded from Queenie’s familiar white world as he does not conform to its norms, is not ‘recognized and recognizable’ (Butler, 1997: 5): ‘His lips were brown, not pink like they should be’ (Levy, 2004: 6). He is an object of ridicule with again those lips which ‘bulged with air like bicycle tyres’ and ‘his nostrils big as tunnels’ (id). These two encounters with Africa resound with the powerful echo of Fanon’s cry of despair: ‘I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects...’ (Fanon, 1986: 112). Through the medium of the Exhibition, colonialism is portrayed as a ‘desiring machine’,²³² with the ‘African man’ as an exotic commodity which stimulates and appeals to Queenie’s senses, demanding to be consumed, ‘carved’, as he seems to be, ‘from melting chocolate’

²³² See Young (1996: 98,159,167-9,173-5,181).

(Levy, 2004: 6).²³³ As she is encouraged to ‘kiss him’ (id), he is turned into a sexual object with all that this entails in racial mythology.

As evidenced by Graham’s remark, we are also confronted with a racial hierarchy embedded in language as the signifier of difference for, as Queenie is told by her father, ‘when they speak English, you know that they have learnt to be civilised – taught English by the white man’ (7). Morrison refers to ‘the violence of representation’ in which ‘oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence’ (Morrison, 1993). It is also, I suggest, this assumed commonality of a superior language with its ‘civilizing’ connotations which enables the visitors to the exhibition to ‘imagine’ the nation. It is seen as an entity in which they are called into being, interpellated as a ‘we’ for, ‘in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson, 1991: 15). ‘Civilization’ is shown to be defined in antithesis to ‘whatever be the characteristics of what we call the savage life’ and by ‘the qualities which society puts on as it throws off these’ (Mill, 1859-1875: 160). Within this context, the elaboration of that collective ‘we’ which defines itself against an ‘inferior’ other, brings to the fore questions of ‘who is empowered and who is disempowered’ within such a construct. (Brah, 1996: 184). The sight of ‘Victoria Queenie’ surveying her kingdom from the top of the scenic railway, with, her father tells her, ‘the whole world at (her) feet’, serves as a suitable allegory for the way British society viewed itself and its ‘others’ for:

Nations are in part imagined communities, depending for their credibility and identity both on the legitimacy of government and the state apparatus and on invented traditions, manufactured myths, and shared perceptions of the social order that are usually no more than oversimplified stereotypes. (Lima, 2005: 81)

These are words she ‘will never forget’ (Levy, 2004: 7), Queenie tells us of her experience on the scenic railway, and in this way, she positions herself within this imperial dream of a ‘civilised’ society by whose standards and language she finds herself determined. Queenie perceives it as a world in which one’s self-image is defined in class and racial terms, which in turn regulate one’s standing within the context of the nation. She ‘should have been a lady’ (246) she tells us, for she was born of a mother who ‘was an English rose. Flaxen hair, a complexion like milk’ (236), christened ‘Victoria’ and ‘a cut above the miners’ children’ (241). Her hopes

²³³ See also Brophy (2009: 8) for a further analysis of the theme.

of betterment are at long last realised when she leaves behind the 'barbaric' world of her father's 'butchering shed' (246) to go and live in metropolitan London with 'posh' Auntie Dorothy. Her elocution and deportment lessons are, she believes, the gateway into 'polite society' where decency and good breeding are bywords for civilization.²³⁴ She is guided towards her choice of a suitable partner by her aunt and falls victim to the exacting norms of propriety and respectability to which she is supposed to aspire: 'You'll want nothing to do with Cockneys, they're all jellied eels and knees-ups. No, that one's a gentleman. No spivs or ne'er-do-wells ever read *The Times*' (251). This 'gentleman' is Bernard Bligh, a man whose physical appearance, taciturn nature, fastidiousness and meanness far from satisfy Queenie's dreams of love and romance and she rejects his proposal of marriage. The precariousness of her situation is exposed however when her aunt dies unexpectedly and she knows that if she is to escape from a life of brutish drudgery back on 'the stinking farm' (246), she has to marry Bernard, however dull her existence might become.

Bernard's experiences in India and Burma during World War II also need to be considered within the context of the Wembley exhibition. His stereotypical understanding of the world is to be viewed as an integral part and an internalisation of the discourse of power relations that was there on display. Within the context of the exhibition, stereotypes are to be seen as instruments of control which produce 'knowledges' of coloniser and colonised which are 'antithetically evaluated'.²³⁵ As such, stereotypes are 'effective, realistic political weapons capable of generating belief, commitment and action' (Chow, 2002:59). They always involve collective and fixed abstractions of the 'others' whose hallmark is their difference and deviance from the assumed dominant norm. Bernard's use of generalisations to describe the Indian population denies the members of those groups of 'others' a singularity and a humanity, as he can only see 'brown hands...groups of carnival-coloured natives gesticulating...jabbering in mysterious tongues' (341-2). Themes of 'impurity' and 'corruption' also abound, signalling the dangers that too close contact to the 'natives' might represent, and the need to distance and protect oneself from too much intimacy

²³⁴ There was a tendency, within the context of the discourse about 'Dark Africa', to compare the degradation found in Britain's new towns and cities with the 'primitive' state of the African Savage: 'The English governing classes...regarded the non-European native just as they had quite openly, regarded their own labouring classes for many centuries: as thoroughly undisciplined, with a tendency to bestial behaviour' (Semmel, 1962: 134-5). See also Thompson (2005: 38-63) and Young on culture and the history of difference (1996: 29-54).

²³⁵ See Bhabha (2004: 101) but also whole chapter 'The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism' (94-120).

‘these people stank... we had been warned about their oranges’ (id). Their presumed ignorance and barbarism are used as a tool to convince Bernard of the need for continued administration and control: ‘made me smile to think of a bunch of illiterates wanting to run their own country...Only British troops could keep those coolies under control’ (375).

It is also through his identification with this ‘proud civilisation’ that is Britain that a weak and insecure Bernard is able to regain some sense of self-esteem, for the empire fosters a sense of self-affirmation. His confidence had been eroded as a child when his father returned from the battle of the Somme a broken man, rendered mute by his war experiences, another powerful dislocating experience as already observed in *Crossing the River*. Having also suffered the loss of his mother who died young of cancer, he spends a lonely, humdrum existence, dividing his time between looking after his father who barely acknowledges his presence, and working as a bank clerk ‘writing figures in a ledger’ all day (405). For the first time in his life, he is made to feel that he belongs, that he is ‘part of a team’ (397), ‘proud to represent decency’ (379), to be a ‘civilising influence’ (376). He believes he can now return from the war to England with a renewed assurance, as a man Queenie can be proud of, and play his part in the rebuilding of ‘Blighty’ back to its former glory, for ‘Britain needed a new backbone. Men to reconstruct the ravaged land into something worthy of the British Empire’ (365).

The empire also lives in Hortense as the norm by which she defines herself to the exclusion of her Jamaican identity. Her sense of self is performed in and through the language of the empire, for it is by ‘being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible’ (Butler, 1997: 5). It is her innocence and vulnerability within the ruthless colonial system of Jamaica which is at first apparent in her first hand narrative. Born out of wedlock to a ‘government man... a man of class. A man of character. A man of intelligence. Noble’ (37), Hortense has no memory of her mother, Alberta, save for a whispered ‘me sprigadee’, ‘a skirt flapping in the breeze’ and ‘bare black feet skipping over stones’ (id). She is not, however, as perceptive of the dangers inherent in this situation as the child in Kincaid’s short story who declares: ‘I can see a great danger in what I am – a defenceless and pitiful child’ (1983: 23). Steeped from an early age in the myth of ‘England’s supremacy in taste and judgment’, a myth ‘akin to the nutritive function of milk’ (Lamming, 1984: 26-7), she has unquestionably accepted

the racial treatment meted out to her mother, for ‘what could Alberta give me?’, she asks (38).²³⁶ She has learnt from bitter first-hand experience that exclusion and banishment are the sanctions that are handed out to those who, like Alberta, fail to display the moral and physical qualities which a ‘superior power’ has set as its accepted norms.

Sent off to live with her father’s relatives, Hortense’s ‘encounter with Old Blighty’, painted ‘as a parody of the colonial rulebook’ (James, 2007:7), is performed through the medium of language as a discourse of power and as a marker of identity. As she becomes versed in the ‘wonder of the scriptures’ (Levy, 2004:41) and drinks ‘from the fountain of an English curriculum’ (86), she appropriates that alien world and internalizes the standards, values and prejudices of the imperial masters. She abides by their racial norms to distance herself as a teacher from the children in her care whom she demeans and derogates by using the virulent language of the racist ideology that refuses to acknowledge individuality, preferring to consign them to an indistinct, repugnant mass:

Sixty children fidgeting like vermin... sixty nappy-headed, runny-nosed, foul-smelling ragamuffins. Sixty black faces. Some staring on me, gaping as idiots do...their fickle minds would start wandering... at that school for scoundrels I had learnt to despise. (68).

She has assimilated the precepts of the white mythology since, Fanon contends, for fear of disappearing and in order to ‘attain a human level’, the black wo/man has only one desire, that of being white, of ‘lactification’ (Fanon, 1986: 47). The ‘white gloves’ she now insists on wearing are both a poignant and an ironic symbol of the trappings of a ‘white’ perception of a world to which she attributes a divine quality as she looks with reverence upon ‘those white women whose superiority encircled them like an aureole’ (Levy, 2004:69). Concomitantly, she sees black skin as a curse, which limits ambition and ultimately enslaves you, a fate, she believes, she will be spared thanks to her complexion, ‘the colour of honey’ which will assure her, she is convinced, a ‘golden future’ (72). It appears that the imperial masters have succeeded in their mission to create in Hortense a little replica of England and to enslave her in an alien culture which she has now adopted. Yet, though she has made her own the value system and the field of reference of the colonial centre, both deny her any sense of her own history and culture, leading to what Lamming sees as a

²³⁶ Unable to ‘read nor write nor perform even the rudiments of her times tables’ and with her skin a ‘bitter chocolate hue’, Alberta has to leave to find work in Cuba, never to see her daughter again (38-9).

‘cutting down to size of all non-England’ (1986: 27). Bakhtin argues that the power of the ‘authoritative word’, connected with a past ‘that is felt to be hierarchically higher’, is such that it is ‘akin to ‘taboo’ (1981: 342). It is ‘the word of the fathers’, given not chosen, and demands that we acknowledge it, that we ‘make it our own’ and we find ourselves bound by the power it exercises over us (id). In this way, the colony is exposed as:

‘no longer merely a settlement, an adventure, an opportunity, a place for self-creation, self-discovery, and a space of death’ but ‘recognized as a laboratory, a location for experiment and innovation that transformed the exercise of governmental powers at home and configured the institutionalization of imperial knowledge to which the idea of ‘race’ was central’. (Gilroy, 2004b: 46)

The ‘golden future’ that Hortense envisions can therefore only be realised in England, her true home, her ‘destiny’ (Levy, 2004:100), the only place where she feels she can truly belong, her ‘Mother Country’. It is the only ‘family’ who, she believes, has nurtured her, cared for her, when she found herself abandoned at birth, and her only refuge, when later on, Michael, the cousin she loves, is thought to be ‘missing in action’ whilst fighting in the war. Her vision of home, this ‘mythic place of desire’ is a ‘lived experience’²³⁷ in her imagination, performed through language, as it is populated with all the images she has assimilated from her reading of English texts: ‘in my English kitchen roast meat with two vegetables... I sip hot tea by an open window... I walk to the shop where I am greeted with manners, ‘Good day’, politeness, and refinement...A red bus, a cold morning and daffodils blooming with all the colours of the rainbow’ (101). So strong is her desire for England that she is ready to cast aside all thoughts of self-respectability, decency and love as she, like Hortense, enters into a marriage of convenience, a ‘business deal’ with Gilbert, her best friend’s fiancé, to whom she lends the money for his voyage to England.

Gilbert’s long address to the reader perhaps best illustrates the power relationships which have presided at the construction of Empire and which have entrapped coloniser and colonised in its intricate web. It returns us once again to the theme of childhood and to the metaphor of the family, the ‘Big Family’, to the dream of unity expressed at the Wembley exhibition. It is a parent-child relationship, built,

²³⁷ I am quoting Avtar Brah (1996: 192) who writes that “‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination”.

the colonised are made to believe, on mutual feelings of trust, care and respect so that no sacrifice appears too big when 'Mother' calls for help:

Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. Your own mummy talks of Mother all the time. 'Oh, Mother is a beautiful woman – refined, mannerly and cultured'. Your daddy tells you, 'Mother thinks of you as her children; like the Lord above she takes care of you from afar'. There are many valorous stories told of her, which enthrall grown men as well as children. Her photographs are cherished, pinned in your family album to be admired over and over. Your finest, your best, everything you have that is worthy is sent to Mother as gifts. And on her birthday, you sing-song and party. Then one day you hear Mother calling – she is troubled, she need your help. Your mummy, your daddy say go. Leave home, leave familiar, leave love. Travel seas...Shiver, tire, hunger – for no sacrifice is too much to see you at Mother's needy side... After all you have heard, can you imagine, can you believe, soon, soon you will meet Mother? (Levy, 2004: 139)

It has fostered in Gilbert and in all his peers an extensive and exclusive knowledge of all things English of which, like his peers, he is duly proud. However, under the cover of civilisation, it has created a dependency of the colonised upon the coloniser which has been enhanced by an immersion into the history, the geography, the culture of a metropolis far away which denigrates and denies local realities. Gilbert's decision to go to war is however prompted by this special sense of filiation to Mother Country, a special relationship which has been cultivated throughout his schooldays by the colonial education system. There is also an even more pressing rationale behind Gilbert's resolve for, as he tells his friend Elwood: 'I was ready to fight this master race theory. For my father was a Jew and my brother is a black man... If this war is not won then you can be certain nothing here will ever change' (131).²³⁸ This brings to the fore a traumatic Caribbean past and, with it, the destabilising and destructive force of the colonising enterprise.²³⁹

Within the context of the Wembley exhibition, the four characters in *Small Island* are shown to be constructed along the two axes of 'otherness' and 'sameness', inherent to the imperial conception of selfhood. On the one hand, this identity defines

²³⁸ See Robert Murray's *The Experiences of World War II Westindian (sic) Ex-Service Personnel* (1996) which Levy used for the writing of *Small Island* for further insight into the West Indian volunteers' motivation and decision to go and fight alongside Britain in WWII, pp 19-26

²³⁹ Césaire (1972: 10- 15) argues that 'colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him...to awaken him to buried instincts,...to race hatred and moral relativism' and that Hitler 'applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India and the blacks of Africa' (emphases in the text).

itself by its antithetical stance, ‘dependent on the feeling of ‘otherness’ that the colonies helped to create’ (Thompson, 2005: 201). On the other hand, it is constructed out of ‘a feeling of ‘sameness’ that bound metropolitan Britons’ to the colonial communities in the British Empire (id). It is this very ambivalence at the heart of Empire and of the colonial enterprise that I would like to analyse as the four characters find themselves no longer physically separated by an ocean but inhabiting the same spatial reality:

The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha, 2004: 160)

6.3 ‘I thought I’d been to Africa’ (Levy, 2004:1)

Hurricane hits England

It took a hurricane, to bring her closer
To the landscape
Half the night she lay awake,
The howling ship of the wind,
Its gathering rage,
Like some ancestral sceptre,
Fearful and reassuring...

Tell me why you visit
An English coast?
What is the meaning
Of old tongues
Reaping havoc
In new places? (Nichols, 1998: 404)

The power of the colonial discourse lies in its dependence on the concept of a fixed, homogeneous, hierarchical and hermetic belief system and, in this respect, it bears a close relation to Bakhtin’s description of unitary language. Monologic, authoritative discourse, Bakhtin maintains, operates as a centripetal force offering a singular world view, thus ‘insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all

spheres of ideological life' (1981: 270-1; emphasis in text). It only allows for one shade of meaning and does not permit any 'play with its borders', any divergence from the reality it portrays as it is 'indissolubly fused with its authority – political power, an institution, a person' and demands to be accepted in its totality (343). However, there is also a centrifugal force at work within language which, through the medium of 'social and historical heteroglossia', allows for other worlds of meaning in a variety of contexts to be introduced and to interact (263). Dialogism is central to Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia for, he argues, any 'living' utterance is to be understood in the context of a speaker and a listener and the relationship between the two. As the 'word' thus enters a 'dialogically agitated and tension filled-environment' and is confronted with alien concepts and world-views (277), it opens the way for 'uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification' to 'go forward', to relativize, disrupt and displace the authority of the 'official' utterance (272). This dialogization of languages occurs through a process of hybridisation which Bakhtin defines as:

a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (1981: 358)

Both centripetal forces, in the form of 'unitary language' and centrifugal, stratifying forces, in the form of heteroglossia, are at work within every utterance (272) and point to language's fundamental ability to be simultaneously the same but different, at once 'resemblance and menace'.²⁴⁰ Bakhtin concludes that hybridity is an intentional artistic device in the context of the novel for '*bringing different languages in contact with one another*' and for two or more individual consciousnesses to 'fight it out on the territory of the utterance' (360-1; emphasis in the text). The encounter with the other and other consciousnesses is a place of splitting, for it introduces ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse. This is the theme I now wish to explore in my study of *Small Island* alongside Brah's contention that, as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and otherness are contested, diaspora space becomes a site where '*the native is as much the diasporian as the diasporian is the native*' (1996: 209; emphasis in the text).

²⁴⁰ Homi Bhabha's (2004: 123) notion of mimicry can be compared here with Bakhtin's concept of hybridization: 'the effect of mimicry on the authority of the colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For, in 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms' (2004: pp123-126)

Ellis states that ‘error or misunderstanding is built into the very structure’ of the prologue so that emblems of the British Empire such as the Union Jack are shown to belong to different fields of signification, which problematises the discourse of Empire (2012: 75). I would also like to argue that ambiguity is introduced with the very first sentence in the prologue, ‘I thought I’d been to Africa’ (Levy, 2004: 1), through the medium of the Exhibition as ‘contact zone’.²⁴¹ Within this context, Africa is seen as a space of dissonance for the young Queenie as it is linked to feelings of embarrassment for her error in front of the whole class, of confusion when they ‘got lost in Africa’ (5), of arousal too in her encounter with the ‘African man’, which is to prove a defining moment for her. As Brophy argues, as she is brutally asked to kiss him, she is herself constructed as ‘a sexual subject whose public significance is, confusingly, bound up with a visible and tangibly embodied arousal’, in a combination of ‘fear, excitement and shame’ (Brophy, 2009: 9). His fluency in the English language, his dignified, polite manners, in sharp contrast to the boorish attitudes displayed by her companions, confound her:

He could have swallowed me up, this big nigger man. But instead he said, in *clear English*, ‘Perhaps we could shake hands instead?’
Graham’s smile fell off his face. And I shook an African man’s hand. *It was warm and slightly sweaty like anyone else’s...* And he bowed his head to me and said ‘It’s nice to meet you’. (Levy, 2004: 6; my emphasis)

The challenge to the imperial order, to the imputed language inferiority and physical, racial ‘difference’ of the African black other, is at once a disturbing and a liberating experience for Queenie. The close proximity of the other on home ground has forever disrupted the ‘savage / civilised’ binary vision of the world that the imperial ideology was trying to instil in her and this is to frame her sense of identity and her understanding of difference. It enables her to throw off part of the straightjacket of the essentialist established order and move towards a form of cosmopolitanism which renders her more receptive to other world-views. Her first act of defiance is to become a vegetarian, which alienates her irremediably from her family, ‘A butcher’s girl who won’t eat meat. A blithering turnip head’ (247). She is, through this gesture, distancing herself from the brutal world of her father’s

²⁴¹ As defined by Pratt (1992: 6) to refer ‘to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’.

occupation, which she abhors, in order to embrace a more sophisticated world, an ambition she feels she has achieved when she is sent to the metropolis. I would like to argue that it may also be construed as an ironic attempt on Levy's part to disrupt a 'beef-eating John Bull' iconic image of English identity.²⁴²

Like Joyce in *Crossing the River*, she is also prepared to forcibly confront her husband's and neighbours' middle-class sensibilities and prejudices when they refuse to welcome into their homes bombed-out families from the East End of London. She challenges and rejects their language of exclusion which, in its undertones, 'they'd be happier among their own kind...they're not our sort' (Levy, 2004: 269,77), intersects with that of racial discrimination. When defiantly working at the rest centre against her husband's wishes, she is also aware of the importance of naming as a mark of identity, of being-in-the world as an individual, something she believes those poor families have been denied: 'That's how some saw them - population, not people. Not mothers called Mavis...Not a ten-year old called Ralph...' (278-9). As Brah comments: 'Structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality cannot be treated as 'independent variables' because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other – is constituted by and is constitutive of the other' (1996:109). She antagonises her neighbours even further when, after the war, and with her husband still not returned from India, she welcomes 'darkies' such as Gilbert and later on Hortense into her home. Home as 'stairwell', in contrast to Bhabha's vision of a place of 'symbolic interaction' that opens up the 'possibility of a cultural hybridity' (2004:5), is often a fraught contact zone where black and white identities come into conflict. It was within this space in the aftermath of WWII that the white tenant / landlord felt most threatened by the perceived savagery of the black Caribbean lodger as evidenced in the novel: 'His concern...was that they would turn the area into a jungle...They washed in oil and smelt foul of it...Morris blushed scarlet telling me of their animal desires' (Levy, 2004: 113-8).²⁴³

Queenie, I argue, is able to position herself outside those concerns and distance herself from them because of her experience with the African man at the Exhibition which ultimately allows her to enter into a relationship with Hortense's cousin, RAF officer Michael Roberts, billeted at her house for a few days whilst her husband is away at war. As she opens her door to him, she is 'lost in Africa again at

²⁴² For further discussion on the theme of 'roast beef' and English identity, see Rogers (1983).

²⁴³ For further discussion on the theme of the stairwell as a key symbolic location, see Procter (2003: 31-45). It is also to be found in Lamming's novel *The Emigrants* and in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*.

the Empire Exhibition, a little girl in a white organza frock with blood rising in my cheeks turning me red' (291). She is awakened to all the sexual desires that Bernard has failed to arouse in her, but also to the lure of exoticism that she experienced all those years ago. It is symbolised by the 'humming-bird' which, Michael explains, is 'our national bird', and which becomes one with her lover's body, as 'his hands made tender movements close to (her) face – his fingers the fluttering wings, his pinched lips the still beak' (299).²⁴⁴ Her sudden use of the third person conveys an estrangement from her body experiences and also signals, Brophy suggests, a form of imperial 'fetishistic distancing', as if watching from afar on the 'silver screen' (2009: 14): 'It wasn't me. Mrs Queenie Bligh, she wasn't even there...The zebra of their legs twined and untwined together on the bed...Mrs Queenie Bligh would never do such a thing' (Levy, 2004: 301). As Susan Brophy further comments: 'the coexistence of the prosaic and the exotic establishes diaspora space as a palpable... space of contact, one haunted by imperial history but in which a cosmopolitan desire for variety and expansiveness is also being enacted' (2009:14). The encounter of the white and black worlds has for both Michael and Queenie the force of the hurricane which, symbolically, was raging the night Michael was found to have engaged in 'an ungodly act' with the white, married headmistress of the local school, and which saw him banished for ever from country and family. As Queenie finds herself with child after Michael leaves without even a backward glance, she knows her world too has been turned upside down:

The war had been an enormous bomb blast. Everything thrown up, tumbling, turning and scattering high into the air. Now it was over; the whole lot was coming down to land. But it was settling in different places. (Levy, 2004: 497)

England is also a place of dislocation for her lodger Gilbert, who is on his second visit to England and knows from bitter experience that the journey Hortense will have to undertake when she eventually joins him will be as painful as his own. Like him, she will have to suffer the pangs of physical, cultural and psychic displacement and, like him, she will have to reappraise, redefine herself in the light of that experience. Though fighting alongside his British countrymen against Nazi oppression, he finds himself confronted and oppressed by the weight of his

²⁴⁴ Ellis (2012:78) also points out that her intimacy with Michael develops when he offers her a 'much coveted orange and a bar of American chocolate', taking us once back to the Exhibition and to how the importance of commodities, 'associated with colonial production, underpins Queenie's desires'.

blackness, by prejudices and rejection at the hands of a white world he has been taught to regard as his own. He is displaced and constructed anew by a racist discourse which is performed through him and which derives its existence from deep-seated binary constructs which enslave him and his 'race', in the Other's imaginings, and which threaten his identity. As Fanon poignantly declares: 'I am given no chance...I am the slave...of my own appearance...I am being dissected under white eyes...they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare' (1986: 63). As he is assailed by a mass of racist stereotypes, he finds himself banished to the margins, outside the imperial discourse of belonging, and made to inhabit a much vilified collective space which denies him individuality, and one in which the 'I' and the 'We' become interchangeable. As Brah recounts of a similar personal experience: 'the insult and denigration implied in the word 'Paki'... felt real, became part of my reality precisely because its enunciation reiterated an inferiorised *collective* subject through me' (1996: 11; emphasis in the text).

It is an aberrant racist discourse which insults his intellectual faculties as he ironically remarks: 'every action we took confirmed to this man that we all West Indian RAF volunteers were thoroughly stupid. Eating, sleeping, breathing in and out! Cor blimey, all the daft things we darkies did' (Levy, 2004: 135). He is also assaulted in the very essence of his being: 'this woman come to the door brandishing a hot poker in my face yelling that she wanted no devil in her house' (168). Like the 'African man' at the Exhibition, his physical appearance positions him outside the 'human' race: 'white urchin faces blackened with dirt, dried snot flaking on their mouths – who yelled, 'Oi, darkie, show us yer tail'' (141). The world of work is a particularly contested place in an England impoverished by the war and Gilbert, having freshly arrived on the Windrush, finds himself the subject of violent verbal abuse by his fellow workers who demand that he goes 'back to his jungle'.²⁴⁵ As insult upon insult rain upon him, he knows he cannot retaliate for fear of losing his job, and he ends up a broken man, crippled with shame, tortured by the weight of the hatred his bodily presence appears to have inspired:

What a forlorn desire to seek indifference...What else could this Jamaican do? I dropped my head...And then I cringed craven until my submission

²⁴⁵ See Murray (1996: 97-124) who recalls such experiences as being commonplace: 'rumours were being spread that we came from jungles, lived in trees, had tails and so on...'. As Fanon (1963: 30) also remarks, the white man wants the world for himself alone, for he has elevated himself as master of the universe and the encounter with the other contests and threatens his authority. It is essential for the colonial self that boundaries between him and his colonised other should be maintained at all costs for he believes that 'they want to take our place'.

cause this man to leave hold... I stood pitiful as a whipped dog... I kept my eyes at his feet... and went about my business with a gunfire of cuss words popping and pinging around me, while the postal sacks and an aching shame stooped me double. (315-318)

It is, Bhabha contends, in that 'act of epistemic violence' perpetrated on the black man's body that 'emerges the displacement of the colonial relation' as 'its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed' (2004: 60). Gilbert feels abandoned, fearful for his future, at a loss in a world he does not recognise, does not understand, and which refuses to acknowledge his presence. The discourse of sexuality intersects with the discourse of racism when Gilbert defends his right to sit next to Queenie in a segregated cinema, to the indignation and fury of the American troops. Colonialism, Young writes, was always 'locked in the machine of desire' for, at the basis of all the scientific accounts of race, 'a central assumption and paranoid fantasy was endlessly repeated: the uncontrollable sexual drive of the non-white races and their limitless sexuality' (1996: 181). The violence that suddenly erupts between the white and black soldiers, seemingly united in fighting a common enemy, is portrayed in all its futility when an innocent and symbolically mute man, Arthur, Queenie's father-in-law, loses his life. Though Fanon claims that decolonization 'will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the protagonists' (1963: 28), Gilbert is only too painfully aware that, with the death of Arthur Bligh, such a measure is far from a liberating experience for both sides of the racial divide:

As an MP his baton thrushing hard into my chest...delivered the words, 'Get away from her, nigger'... Only then did I experience the searing pain of this fight – and not from the grazing on my face or the wrench in my shoulder. Arthur Bligh had become a casualty of war – but come, tell me, someone, ... which war? (2004: 193)

Even Queenie's attitude is open to questioning after the war for, whilst he is grateful that she took him in when so many doors were slammed shut in his face, his relationship with her has changed from one of friendly intimacy to one which closely resembles that of the imperialist master-servant encounter, as one of his friends comments: 'Cha, me thought you say she your friend. So why the woman act like bakkra?' (223). England, the Mother Country, is a disappointment, as it has deceived and humiliated him and failed in its duty of care. Moreover, as he questions the authenticity of the world view the Empire has portrayed and which he has been made

to absorb, he is also aware that it is his own identity, constructed by the same ideology, which is being challenged and he too is lost. It is expressed in the contrasting images of an inhospitable England and a sensuous Jamaica where, he believes, he might now have become a figure of fun:

Perhaps Elmoor was right. 'Stay in Jamaica, he had begged me. 'Stay and fight till you look 'pon what you wan' see'...My boyhood friend, what was passing before his eye now...Sitting on the verandah, he was watching the Jamaican sun...sucking on soursop, the juice sticky on his chin, the flesh fat between his teeth. The cicadas singing...he calls for his friend Aubrey to join him. And the two men share a joke...And you know what the joke was that they share? Gilbert Joseph. It was I that was their merriment. See me walking in the London street with the rain striking me cold as steel pins. My head bent low, wrapping my arms round me to keep the cold from killing me. (325)

Gilbert is under no illusion that Hortense, 'Miss Mucky Foot', with whom he has entered into a marriage of convenience, will soon have to learn that 'not everything the English do is good' (328) and that this might be an even ruder awakening for her than it was for him. It is within the realm of language that Hortense is to find a challenge to her idealised vision of England and to her identity, for 'we use language to get recognised as taking on a certain identity or role' (Gee, 2005:11). From the moment Hortense sets foot on English soil, she is met with total incomprehension: 'I put on my best accent. An accent which had taken me to the top of the class in Miss Stuart's pronunciation class...but still this taxi driver did not understand me' (Levy, 2004:16-17). The colonial desire for mimicry from its colonised others 'reverses 'in part', Bhabha argues, the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence', '*almost the same but not quite*' (2004: 126-7; emphasis in text). In so doing, it becomes a seat of resistance for it 'liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty' (id). It is, I argue, through the parody of an archaic, elaborate form of English that, not only 'little Miss High-class' Hortense, but also the imperial civilising enterprise which has presided over her education and introduced her to such a linguistic form, are marked out for ridicule: 'I have not seen Gilbert ... but this is perchance where he is aboding?' (Levy, 2004: 13).²⁴⁶ Whilst, in Jamaica, her use of High English was the acknowledged sign of a 'superior' identity, in England, it constructs her as outside the main discourse, at odds with a more

²⁴⁶ As Homi Bhabha argues, the colonial presence is always ambivalent for it finds itself 'split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference' (2004: 153) and as its authority becomes problematic, this creates a fertile ground for subversion.

colloquial form of English, such as the one used by Queenie and her English peers. It is a language which she does not recognise and which does not recognise her: “Cat got your tongue?” she said. What cat was she talking of? ... The impression I received was that she was talking to me as if I was an imbecile. An educated woman such as I’ (227).

This prompts a ‘silly dance of miscomprehension’ (332) between the two protagonists, each presuming ignorance and inferiority in the other. It is an exchange where irony, the interweaving of class and race discourses, and of high and low registers of English are used as an effective device to destabilise Hortense’s own sense of self but also to force us to question all preconceived notions of ‘cultural purity’ and the fixity of national identities. As Queenie seeks to reassure Hortense that she will ‘soon get used to our language’ (228) and regally offers to take her to the shops, Hortense is incensed by Queenie’s presumptions of superiority as she haughtily declares, ‘I was a teacher and she was only a woman whose living was obtained by the letting of rooms’ (231). The shopping expedition is however an exercise in humiliation for Hortense who is ultimately silenced by the incomprehension with which her English utterances are met. Caribbean writers use a variety of strategies from code-switching to vernacular transcriptions as a means of subverting and disturbing the dominant discourse as well as enabling marginal voices to be heard and new cultural realities to emerge. Thus liberated from ‘within’, this new linguistic code, ‘english’, ‘constructs difference, separation and absence from the metropolitan norm’ and becomes the instrument through which old certainties can be challenged and a new world order can be imagined (Ashcroft, 1989: 44).²⁴⁷ Hortense’s code-switching to creole can be seen within this context. It intervenes to echo Gilbert’s cry of despair, ‘How come England did not know me?’ (141), but also to mock Queenie’s presumptions of imperial superiority.²⁴⁸

Then she tell me loud for all to hear, ‘This is bread’.

She think me a fool that does not know what is bread? ... Mrs Bligh was a punctilious teacher. The shop with meat in the window she tell me is a butcher... And each time she tell me she want me to repeat the word. Instead I tell her, ‘I know, we have these shops in Jamaica’. She nod. She say good. Then seeing a shop selling fish she tell me this is the fishmonger. (332-333)

²⁴⁷ See Ashcroft’s analysis of the Creole continuum (1989: 44-59) and the distinction he makes between ‘standard’ British English inherited from the Empire and the English it has become in post-colonial times (8; 121-3; 195-7). Also Shebba and Tate (2002: 75-89) who describe the Caribbean Language as originating ‘in the ‘space’ between self and Other’, and in the ‘shared, negotiated and disavowed meanings’ of Black British speakers (83).

²⁴⁸ See also James (2007) and her analysis of language as a ‘battleground’ in *Small Island* on which ‘British and West Indian cultures and identities clash and make accommodations’.

England, far from being the welcoming, 'pure' home of her dreams, is slowly turning into an alien, insalubrious environment where all her cultural, social and linguistic referents are being challenged and displaced: 'Is this the way the English live?', she complains to Gilbert as she, uncomprehending, surveys their shabby room (22). Far from the gentle English sun's heat 'caressing' her face (11), she is met with a grey, dispiriting, soulless, leaden sky. Two different worlds are thus displayed side by side, apparently speaking the same 'language', and yet failing to communicate for: 'language is ... a heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the 'taste' of a ... genre...a particular person...Contextual overtones... are inevitable in the word'. (Bakhtin, 1996: 293). Thus it is that the 'bright Caribbean colours of the blanket' Hortense spreads on the bed so 'miraculously' brighten up the cheerless, grey morning light in her dismal room that a bird bursts into song (Levy, 2004: 226). Happening upon the same blanket, Queenie can only see an object which blinds her and whose intensity she wants to subdue. As Bhabha remarks, 'the English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: ... the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission' (Bhabha, 2004: 243).

Dismissive of both her husband's 'rough Jamaican way' and of Cockney, the 'low-class slurring garble' spoken around her, Hortense is more convinced than ever that her admission into the bosom of Mother Country is dependant upon her mastery of the English Language, as spoken by the BBC, to which she avidly turns for instruction in 'fine diction' (449). Disregarding Gilbert's warnings that 'this is not the way England work' (450), she believes that there are now no more obstacles to her obtaining gainful employment as a teacher, a position for which her two letters of recommendation declare her to be highly suited. The 'slap from the Mother Country's hand' (458) is therefore all the sharper when she finds herself summarily dismissed without as much as a glance at her letters: 'You're not qualified to teach here in this country' (454). There is a pantomime, carnivalesque aspect to the whole scene in which the betrayal of Mother Country is conveyed through its representatives' sham geniality: 'Her comely smile belied the rudeness of her tone... all gladness her left her eye and remained only at her mouth... Her smile was stale as a gargoyle' (453-4). Hortense's sudden and painful awakening to the reality of the country she has called her own since childhood, but which has now betrayed and

rejected her, is portrayed through the final humiliating scene which, under the cover of a farce, exposes the poignancy and the tragic nature of her situation. She has now lost all her bearings: 'I opened the door to leave...Suddenly everything was dark. I was staring on a ladder, a mop and a broom...For one moment I wondered how I could find my way through all this confusion' (455).

Bernard's army experiences are also a time of upheaval for him, for though war offers him welcome relief from his humdrum existence, it is also a time of dislocation when all values need to be reassessed. Not only is Bernard faced with the brutal reality of war, with the ugly spectacle of its dismembered bodies and its contempt with human life but, as he encounters the other on his own territory, he also has to be confronted with assaults on his hitherto solid assumptions of imperial superiority. The failure of the colonial discourse to produce docile others is most effectively expressed in Bernard's fateful encounter with Ashok, an Indian guard on duty with him. It is through the use of 'double-entendre', of 'hidden polemic' that 'centred' discourses of cultural authority are being called into question for, 'in a hidden polemic ... the other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic discussed, is what determines the author's discourse' (Bakhtin, 2009: 195):

The British have taught me so many useful things ... All the things the British are giving us in India ... ah, yes, tax and cricket ... The railways ... A gift from the British to an ignorant people ... Just like your Lancashire cloth. Better than homespun, my mother says. The rule of law...are we not defending quality British goods from thieving Indians? Without your rule of law what are we? ... Your British bulldog understands there is nothing worse than foreigners invading your land ... A dreadful thing to have foreign muddy boots stamping all over your soil ... We must learn to live in peace ... like you British when you are not at war with your neighbours'. (Levy, 2004: 385-6)

As with the other tragic incidents in the novel, such is the climate of mutual misunderstanding, so violent is the nature of colonial subjugation that the stage is set for brutal retribution. It is in a fire which, Bernard believes, was deliberately started by the 'coolies', that the only friend he has ever made perishes, and that Bernard is sent to prison for having abandoned his post and his rifle as he goes to his rescue. It is also as a result of this experience that an embittered Bernard, just out of prison and sexually taunted by British troops, violently assaults a young Indian prostitute. Shame overwhelms him for he feels he is a traitor to the standards of decency and

‘civilized’ behaviour that, to his mind, define him as an Englishman. Syphilis, which he believes he has contracted as a result of his deviant behaviour is, he feels, the ‘inevitable result of my sexual relations with the *wrong kind*’ (418; my emphasis). Indeed, Young asserts, racialism operates ‘both according to the same-Other model and through the ‘computation of normalities’ and ‘degrees of deviance’ from the white norm’ so that racial difference becomes identified ‘with other forms of sexual and social perversity as degeneracy, deformation...’ (1996: 180). No longer able to contemplate a hero’s return and in constant fear of losing his mind, his world too is turned upside down as he goes into voluntary ‘exile’ in Brighton for two years until a doctor assures him he was ‘as fit as a fiddle’ (427). Relief is tinged with apprehension, however, as he reflects that he must now abandon the comfort of his ‘transient’ life to be ‘thrown back’ into an England devastated by the ravages of war (427). He too, like the other protagonists in the novel, feels a stranger in a world he no longer recognises with its ‘buildings decaying and run down’, but worst of all, with his home now invaded by black ‘hotheaded blighters’ who, he believes, make a mockery of all his war efforts:

The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone has a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people ... I fought war to protect home and hearth. Not about to be invaded by stealth’ (Levy, 2004: 469-70).

Britain after the war and with the arrival of immigrants from the Caribbean has become a contested place where outsider and insider identities are being continuously redefined and renegotiated for both the immigrant and the indigenous population, as each has left its mark on the other. It is a space where notions of belonging and identity can no longer be interpreted along fixed, linear narratives but are shifting concepts which allow for a plurality of world-views to interweave and engage with each other. It is however this ‘fusion of horizons’ which highlights the ‘inadequacies of reductive... approaches’ and urges us to accept instead that ‘knotted intersections’ constitute the ‘very fabric of our relationship with the past’ (Silverman, 2009: 9).²⁴⁹ Can we, through the experiences of disruption and displacement that we all face, learn to redefine notions of centring and marginality and ‘negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities’? (Brah, 1996: 194). This is what I would

²⁴⁹ Silverman is quoting Paul Gilroy who asks why so many people still find it so difficult to ‘accept the knotted intersections of histories produced by (a) fusion of horizons? (Gilroy, 2004a: 78).

now like to consider alongside Gilroy's notion of 'multiculture' in this study of *Small Island*. Gilroy views 'multiculture' as a convivial society which is 'no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to strangers or otherness' and which is 'distinguished by some notable demands for hospitality, conviviality, tolerance, justice, and mutual care' (Gilroy, 2004b: 108). Can diaspora space, this 'entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'', be also a potential site 'of hope and new beginnings'? (Brah, 1996: 181; 193)

6.4 Entangled horizons

In the land and sea culture-crossed
we call to hearts of difference.
Restless, we widen our boundaries.
Expansion may be for self-loving, yet
our world is smaller and closer
and, in gesturing, we touch different other.

A voice in me says:
Completeness comes from
a balance of allness.
All faces and conditions you not
only inherit but with them must find
agreement and oneness. (Berry, 2007: 77)

Immigration, Levy argues, is 'both a clash and an accommodation' (2005c), a contested space in which cultures interact, transgress and transform each other and which allows for the concept of 'difference' to be re-defined and for colonised and coloniser identities to be re-shaped within this new configuration. In it, 'difference' can no longer be read as the 'reflexion of *pre-given* ethnic and cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition' but must be viewed instead 'as a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural identities that emerge in moments of historical transformation' (Bhabha, 2004: 3; emphasis in text). From this perspective, identity becomes a constant repositioning from a particular place and time, from a particular history or culture in relation to a criss-crossing of narratives along lines of similarity and difference. New spaces and selves come into being which reflect this plurality of experiences and the 'simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell' (Massey, 2005:11). James suggests that Hortense is the 'window into the text' and that the other characters only serve to

‘give relief to her experience’ (2007: 7). I would like to argue that it is the criss-crossing, the interweaving of all four narratives along the lines of similarity and difference which are at the heart of the novel. It is symbolised by the weaving black African woman, a far from ‘shadowy’ figure, but instead emblematic of the whole novel with its ‘intricate tapestry of displaced and re-woven fictional threads’, and its cultural ‘cross-stitching’ (Woodstock, 2008: 51)

Both the title of the novel itself and the book covers use the same dialogistic device at work throughout *Small Island* to introduce ambivalence and to challenge ‘centred’ discourses of cultural authority. On one such cover, two beautiful proud women, one white, one black are seen striding away from each other with St Paul’s, the divine, and the Oxo building, the secular, in the background. In front of them stands a wall ‘which might have been destroyed by a bomb or...is in the process of being rebuilt’ (Greer, 2004).²⁵⁰ Duality is to be found in the title which is a play on the disparaging remarks Jamaicans, Gilbert included, make about all the other ‘small islands’ in the Caribbean and about their inhabitants’ assumed parochialism: ‘We Jamaicans, knowing our island is one of the largest in the Caribbean, think ourselves sophisticated men of the world. Better than the ‘small islanders’ whose universe only runs a few miles before it falls into the sea’ (131). On his return from the war which had taken him to Europe and America, Gilbert finds that his big island has shrunk and that it now constrains him: ‘I was shocked by the realisation that, man, we Jamaicans are small islanders too!’ (196; 209). Britain too is a small island, a fragile edifice as is evident in ‘the Empire in little’ which is on display at the exhibition and whose authority, as portrayed in the effigy of ‘the Prince of Wales made in yellow butter’ (4), is on the verge of collapse.²⁵¹ After WWII, Britain is no longer a nation which ‘coloured the world pink’ but has been cut down to size, as Bernard remarks on his return from India: ‘England had shrunk. It was smaller than the place I’d left...I had to stare out at the sea just to catch a breath’ (424).

Intertextuality also introduces ambivalence at the heart of the novel, which needs to be studied within the comparative framework of the texts which Levy

²⁵⁰ See Appendix.

²⁵¹ In her essay, ‘Thunder at Wembley’, Virginia Woolf (1925: 185) also intimates the collapse of Empire which she sees reflected in the rainstorms which rage upon the Exhibition: ‘Pagodas are dissolving in dust...Colonies are perishing and dispersing in spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates...The Empire is perishing’.

acknowledges at the back of the book and which are embedded in *Small Island*. In this affiliative gesture, Levy transports us beyond the text in order to ‘make visible, to give materiality to, the strands holding the text to society, author and culture’ (Said, 1991: 175). Within this context, intertextuality is also a diasporic condition, for it is another form of travelling into other times, other cultures, a way of exploring different ways of being in the world for:

That is the law of the human position: the spectator or interpreter has to live with, and within, the knowledge that “somebody began it” – the story, the web of human relationships, the *inter*-rest, the (painting), the installation, the verse, the critique – while acknowledging that nobody is the author’. (Bhabha, 1996b: 15; emphasis in the text)

As texts signify upon and intersect each other, they allow for narratives other than the characters’ to permeate the novel, enabling new interpretations, and new readings to come to the fore. *Small Island* is structured alongside an official account of the Wembley exhibition in *The Lion Roars at Wembley* (Knight and Sabey, 1984) that frames the novel and is parodied in the prologue. It is through the mirror of that text that Levy opens us and destabilises its discourse of Empire, which finds itself transposed and re-defined from the perspective of those who were excluded from its archives.

Intertextuality can also be a way of returning and of paying homage, and this Levy does in Gilbert’s narrative, which echoes with the voices of the West-Indian ex-servicemen in Robert Murray’s recording of their experiences during and after the war. Inherent in the novel is also the servicemen’s desire that the history which is thus recorded should be used as ‘part of the heritage of the wider community and of the Westindian people in particular’ and that it might bring to light ‘the unique experiences of the Westindians serving in the Armed forces’ (Murray, 1996: 16). The oral stories of the *Windrush* generation recorded for posterity in Mike and Trevor Phillips’s celebratory *Windrush* edition and those of Levy’s own parents also find an echo in Hortense’s and Gilbert’s portraiture, in their experiences in England, in the rhythm and content of their speech.²⁵² It is through the lines of Winston Churchill’s speech, ‘Never in the field / of human conflict has / so much been owed by / so many to so few’, through that ambivalent message of the epilogue, that the novel is shown to honour all those men from the Caribbean who, like Gilbert bravely volunteered to go and fight alongside their fellow British counterparts. It also celebrates all those

²⁵² See Mike Philips’s review of *Small Island* (2004).

from the *Windrush* generation who came over to Britain and who, she argues, have made such a contribution to the country we know today.

For a diasporic writer such as Levy, intertextuality is also a means of forging connections with writers of other generations, whose texts are like ‘beacons and buoys when traversing an ocean of words’ (Stein, 2004:96), as well as a way of inscribing herself in a literary tradition. In her writing of *Small Island*, Levy was, like many other writers of the Caribbean diaspora, influenced by Lamming’s *The Emigrants* and Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*. There is a strong identification with some of the characters in those novels, such as Queenie, a black West Indian character in Lamming’s novel, who is on the way to a life of dissipation in London, in an ironic form of reversal. However, whilst Levy echoes some of the feelings and the experiences Lamming and Selvon portray in their novels, theirs is almost exclusively a masculine narrative of Caribbean arrival in Britain. Levy’s novel sets out to inscribe a female perspective as well as female experiences which lay particular stress on the notion of inter-racial encounters. It is something which is absent from Lamming’s and Selvon’s novels in which ‘women stories are left untold, abandoned like their characters on buses and street corners’ (Courtman, 2012: 90).²⁵³ Also, as Stein acknowledges, whereas writers like Lamming and Selvon have preserved a very strong relationship with their birthplace, for British-born writers ‘the echoes of ancestral home cultures may be present but the echo chambers are filled with other sounds too; the heritage is a complicated and multilayered one’ (2004: 100). Intertextuality is a backward and forward movement into past, present and future and we cannot study *Small Island* without also reading it alongside Levy’s other novels which allow us a glimpse of the fate that may be awaiting Gilbert, Hortense and Michael’s generation. At the same time, *Small Island* enables us also to view the characters of her other novels with the added dimension of the historical framework of individual and communal memories of that critical moment in British and imperial history. In this way, *Small Island* illuminates our understanding of the interweaving and the plurality of British and Caribbean identities. As Michael and Trevor Phillips declare:

Listening to the survivors of the *Windrush*, their stories, interwoven as they are with our own experience, remind us once again that they and their successors are a diverse group of individuals, shaped by a specific and peculiar history, moved by their own rational calculations, impelled by the

²⁵³ See also Courtman’s essay (2012: 84-104).

rich and complex history they now share with the people among whom they came to live. (1998:7)

The title of the novel defines the characters too for, as Levy argues, they themselves are also 'small islands' who have their own stories to tell and who, with the arrival of the *Windrush*, have to learn to live with or at best alongside each other (Levy, 2004d). Queenie's life is changed for ever by her experiences in the war and by her social and sexual encounters with the 'African' other. The delivery of her baby is a highly charged symbolic scene, from which Bernard and Gilbert are excluded, but in which a reluctant and innocent Hortense is forced to assist, binding the two characters together in the intimation of a fragile new world order. At the same time, it is a brutal episode and the blood from the placenta which splatters Hortense's white wedding dress is an ambivalent, carnivalesque image in which birth and death, innocence and depravation, past and present are inextricably linked. It takes us back to a little girl in a 'white organza frock' desperate to escape the brutal, butchery world of her family. It stands as a powerful metaphor for all the acts of violent aggression and violation in the novel in which innocent blood has been spilled. It also adumbrates Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968) and the possible difficult future which awaits the innocent newly-born child as racial tensions are soon to explode into savage riots. This is an image which still threatens our present since, as Boateng remarks: 'This is an England and a world far removed from our current experience... And yet, Burnley is not so very far away... We have come far and yet difference still has the capacity to stir up fearfulness' (2004). Hortense's cutting of the umbilical cord, at Queenie's command, presages the agonising decision Queenie will have to make – and in which Hortense herself is implicated, be it against her will – in a society which holds miscegenation to be one of the worst forms of perversion. One of its representatives is Bernard himself and, in one of the most chilling moments of the novel, Queenie exposes how her husband's lack of awareness, his inability to feel and imagine the brutalities of colonial rule, the suffering it inflicts upon its unwitting victims at home and abroad, make it impossible for her to consider keeping her child:

Had he really no idea why we, two white people, could not bring up a coloured child? I was winded. I never expected that – Bernard questioning was so obvious... 'You might think you might do it now... But what about when he grows up... And people snigger at you in the street and ask all sorts of awkward questions. Are you going to fight for him?... Are you going to punch other dads 'cause their kids call him names? Are you going to be

proud of him...One day, he'll do something naughty and you'll look at him and think, The little black bastard, because you'll be angry. And he'll see it in your eyes. You'll be angry with him...because the neighbours never invited you round. Because they whispered about you as you went by... And all because you had a coloured child ... I can't face it, and I am his blessed mother'. (Levy, 2004: 520-1)²⁵⁴

As Queenie's dreams of a possible new future in Canada with her illegitimate child, of defying social and moral conventions, are thwarted with the unexpected return of her husband, she turns for help to the only two people who, she feels, will have Michael's well-being at heart. The vision of Queenie on bended knees begging Hortense and Gilbert to look after her child, turns up on its head the image of a proud little girl with the whole Empire at her feet at the beginning of the novel. It also destabilises the Empire itself as Britain, which Queenie symbolically represents, is now seen as a nation on its knees, crumbling from the assault it has suffered in the war and from the increasingly loud demands for independence emanating from its colonies. The cracks and the fallacies at the heart of its civilising mission are also made apparent in the implacable, racist attitude that Britain displays towards its 'brown babies' and their mothers. Queenie believes that she will not be able to provide for her child's needs in a society which discriminates on grounds of skin colour and which would only offer him a singular narrative of culture and identity: 'I want him to be with people who'll understand...I've never seen a humming bird, not even in a book. Who'll tell Michael what one is like?' (521-2).²⁵⁵ The novel pivots the centre²⁵⁶ as Queenie is now left defenceless and dependant for her welfare upon Gilbert's and Hortense's benevolence. Her future is also now irremediably entwined with that of her erstwhile lodgers who, she hopes, might one day let her have some news of her son so that he may learn to understand why she chose to abandon him. The 'blameless' child, 'unaware of the accursed situation it had squeezed itself out into' (485), becomes the tragic allegory of the absurd drama engendered by a racist ideology which touches erstwhile colonials and colonised alike. Family is

²⁵⁴ See also Ellis (2012: 75) who argues that 'the inability to understand the meaning of events is also seen as symptomatic of imperial ways of thinking, speaking and acting'.

²⁵⁵ Sarah Brophy offers another reading which expresses doubts as to the purity of Queenie's motives. She writes that 'in appealing not only to the common sense of racial group unity but also to the benefits to all involved of respecting difference, while simultaneously registering an awareness of the self-interest that motivates her argument ('Honest to God, it's not for me'), Queenie exemplifies how the white ethnic posture of 'benign tolerance' remains 'cathected to advantage' (2009: 16).

²⁵⁶ I borrowed the expression from Lima's essay, "Pivoting the Centre: The Fiction of Andrea Levy" (2005:56)

both ‘theme and metaphor – the story of the Jamaican family in London, and the metaphor of Empire, the Big Family, which turns out to be betrayer and, in some cases, destroyer’ (Greer, 2004).

It is also through his harrowing encounter with ‘Mother Country’ as betrayer that Gilbert is able to apprehend the weight of colonial history and the impact it has had on his life and that of the people from the Caribbean. He becomes slowly aware of all the misapprehensions his upbringing in the shadow of Empire has forced upon him. He has now realised that the imperial country which has brought him up in the respect of its traditions and its culture has no knowledge of its colonised ‘children’, cares little for their welfare and, most distressingly, is a world from which his own history and that of his country have been obliterated. Like the brooch he finds in the street and bends to admire, and which turns out to be ‘no more than a cluster of flies’, Empire, that precious ‘shimmering precious jewel’ is found out to be but an illusion (213). Although this discovery is painful, it also liberates him from the enslavement into which he has been held. It is through the use of ‘carnivalistic parody’ that Gilbert is able to dismantle the authority of the imperial edifice for himself and regain some form of control. At the heart of the carnivalistic act, Bakhtin declares, is the ‘*mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*’ which expresses the ‘*joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position’ (1984: 124; emphasis in text). Ambivalence is the essence of carnival images which are dualistic in nature uniting within themselves ‘both poles of change and crisis: birth and death...blessing and curse...’ (126). In a world turned upside down, carnival laughter itself, ‘directed toward a shift of world order’, signals both ‘negation and affirmation’ (127). The ‘decrowning’ of ‘Mother’ whom Gilbert has hitherto worshipped is to be seen in such a light, a deriding of the imperial myths and a hope of rebirth:

After all you have heard, can you imagine, can you believe, soon, soon you will meet Mother?

The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. Can this be the fabled relation you heard so much of? This twisted-crooked weary woman. This stinking, cantankerous hag. She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet, she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, ‘Who the bloody hell are you?’ (Levy, 2004: 139)

It is only once he becomes aware of his subjugation to a mythical entity which has imposed assumptions of white superiority over him that he can start on the road to recovery. Liberating himself from the yoke which has held him prisoner for so long is a painful undertaking, and one in which humiliations and doubts have to be overcome with pride and dignity. If he is to survive, as he is determined to do, he knows that he must resist any attempt to dehumanise him and that he must struggle for recognition: 'No wife of mine will be on her knees... no one will watch us weep in this country' (319; 459). In an ironical reversal of fortunes, it is the deceit at the heart of the imperial edifice, which has kept Gilbert and Hortense apart, and which, now that Hortense's eyes are also open, brings them finally together. Hortense's and Gilbert's humorous exchange displaces the colonial discourse with its wry gaze of otherness and introduces another reality in which the colonised finds a voice and regains a sense of dignity: 'I should have told them their cupboard was a disgrace' ... 'you should tell them that you are used to clean cupboards where you come from' (461). As Bhabha argues, it is a process by which:

the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence. (2005: 127)

Gilbert is determined not to be resigned to the unhappy fate to which he has been consigned since his arrival in England. He knows that he must confront Bernard's racism if he is to shed the mantle of colonialism which has enveloped him for far too long. He understands that resentment and hatred must be set aside, for he would once again find himself trapped in 'slave ethics', locked in his rancour towards his oppressor (Nietzsche, 1956: 170-1). Gilbert is also painfully aware that Bernard's vulnerability mirrors his own, for he recognises in 'the white of the eye, the turn of the mouth, the thrust of the chin', the same bewilderment he feels in himself. 'There was something I recognised on the face of Bernard Bligh... I saw it ...staring back at me from my own face... A bewildered soul.' (445). It is this feeling of kinship which, he feels, binds them together, as well as the desire to put an end to what he believes is the senseless hatred which has so far dominated and defined their relationship, which prompts Gilbert to appeal to a sense of shared humanity in a grandiloquent speech:

You know what your trouble is, man?...Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it gives you the right to lord it over a black

man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man. White. No better, no worse than me – just white... We both just finish fighting a war – a bloody war – for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side – you and me... You and me, fighting for Empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. Am I to be the servant and you are the master all the time? Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end? (Levy, 2004: 526)

Any dreams of a 'convivial' society thus imagined have soon to be abandoned when an unrepentant and obstinate Bernard delivers the final insult with these by now so familiar words: 'I am sorry... but I just can't understand a single word that you're saying' (526). It is then that a distraught Gilbert finally realises that the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries is an enterprise fraught with perils and that the road to mutual understanding and respect between the two sides of the imperial divide will be long and tempestuous. He had been reluctant to acquiesce to Queenie's proposition that he and Hortense should adopt Michael, but those fateful words convince him that he cannot walk away and abandon the poor, helpless child 'alone in this country, full of people like Mr Bligh. Him and all his kind' (527). The future, he knows, will be arduous but it is one he is prepared to face now that Hortense will be by his side, for his 'fine' words have made a great impression on his 'prissy' wife: 'who would not be chastened' she declares 'by those fine words from my smart, handsome and noble husband?' (526).

For Gilbert and Hortense as for many other countless immigrants in the postwar period, leaving 'home' for Britain 'was not simply an issue of departure and travel: it also involved a fraught territorial struggle over local space' (Procter, 2003: 31). It is outside the boundaries of the assumed 'centre', within the Jamaican community in the 'margins', that Gilbert is able to find refuge and solace from the harsh realities of life in Britain. It is a society in which he does not feel marginalised, and in which the members are bound together by a language they all understand: 'So I have to give him the sign. All we Jamaican boys know the sign... All for one and one for all' (25; 440). Levy warns however against such a black essentialist vision of belonging, and the threat of ghettoising that such an affiliation might suggest, by introducing dualism within its discourse in the form of the Jamaican twins, Kenneth and Winston: 'To tell them apart, try to borrow a shilling. Winston will help you out ... Kenneth, on the other hand, will persuade you to give *him* a shilling' (23). It is nevertheless such an affiliation that offered some form of resistance to the

established order and that, with some of the institutions such as the pardner system, enabled migrants such as Gilbert to establish their claim to England as a home by the acquisition of property.²⁵⁷ Indeed, in spite of the rejections he has suffered, in spite of the difficulties which he know lies ahead, it is in England that Gilbert wishes to set up home with Hortense, and begin to contemplate a future in which he might be able to reconstruct some of the fragments of his shattered self. He knows that not very far away ‘panic and emptiness, the failure to connect lurk beneath the surface’ (Boateng, 2004), but by thus inscribing himself within Britain physically and culturally, Gilbert displaces the notion of home and identity as single and homogeneous entities. With his arrival in ‘Mother Country’, England has now become a fluid and plural location in an ongoing process of change and negotiation, in which identities too are plural and in constant state of flux, ‘constantly producing and reproducing themselves through transformation and difference’ (Hall, 1990: 235).

It is these new diasporic identities which threaten Bernard’s restricted vision of Britishness as a continuous, fixed and homogeneous concept. He is enslaved in the colonial assumptions of white superiority and his war experiences, far from expanding his horizons, have only confirmed his prejudices. Gilroy argues that Britain is in the throes of a ‘postimperial melancholia’ which mourns the loss of a ‘fantasy of omnipotence’, of an assumed national identity, of a golden age of Empire and feels the need to ‘get back to the place or moment before the country lost its moral and cultural bearings’ (2004b: 98; 108; 97). It results in a feeling of hostility towards the migrant, the stranger in its midst who, as s/he makes demands for recognition, threatens its supposed homogeneity. From Bernard’s imperial perspective, these ‘blasted coloured colonials’ have ‘invaded by stealth’ the home he fought so hard to protect (Levy, 2004: 469-70) and now threaten the very fabric of the white society with their assumed ‘grubby’ ways and low standards of living. He wants them out of his house so that he may return to living a ‘respectable’ life and is upset and humiliated to find that Queenie refuses to support him in this enterprise (473).

At the same time, he is a very vulnerable and confused individual who has lost his bearings in the world, and most distressingly in his own home from which all

²⁵⁷ As the Jamaicans began to arrive in Britain, they set up their own institutions and organisations since they were excluded from those that existed for the white population. One of these was the pardner system, a cooperative method of saving and sharing money. Participants would contribute to a weekly ‘kitty’ and take turns using the proceeds to buy property.

traces of his presence seem to have been removed, when it was taken over by ‘those brown gadabouts’ who are ‘nothing but trouble’ (469). The trauma of the war has, like his father, reduced him to silence: ‘I was blank as a sheet of white paper. No idea what to feel’ (508). Further humiliation and confusion await him when his wife Queenie gives birth to a child who obviously cannot be his and who is also soon revealed to be black. His unexpected reaction as he croons to the child and soothes him back to sleep highlights once again the ambivalence at the heart of the discourse of racism, and uncovers the cracks within its ideology of difference. There is an instant bond between the two, an instant recognition which is never questioned on either side and the birth of the child is, ironically, a liberating experience for Bernard. He finds himself suddenly released from the prison of silence in which he had been entombed for so long and stirred into feeling again. It is to the child that he tells the story of why he could not ‘come home’, ‘with Queenie listening’, thus bringing the couple to a new level of understanding (510). As he expresses the desire that he and Queenie should themselves look after the child, there is an intimation and a hope that he might at last be able to bestow the same sign of recognition upon the other black protagonists in his household. However, this is a leap he is unable to make because he is trapped inside a ‘perverse logic of race, nation and ethnic absolutism’ which forbids all acknowledgement of the Other for fear he might disturb this fragile construction (Gilroy, 2004b: 110). As Levy herself declares:

I can see somebody who has grown up in a society where they have been told they are the greatest creature on the planet – a white Englishman. They utterly believe this of themselves and everything within this culture feeds into all that. And then to have this war which throws up all these other people, all these other ideas, and to watch the world you thought was set and understandable start to change... I can understand that. It’s not a million miles away; I can really see how that would be incredibly disturbing and how one way of dealing with it is to find the Other and hate them. That’s how racism works. You can’t get rid of something unless you truly look at it in the face and try to understand it. (Levy, 2010: 332)

Hortense’s own road to self-awareness, to looking at colonial subjugation ‘in the face’ is a long and painful one, for her life has been lived in the shadow of Empire and she knows no other reality than the one Britain has painted for her. Unlike Gilbert who harbours warm emotional feelings for his former home, Hortense has dismissed Jamaica as a space which, just like her husband and his coarse friends, lacks the sophistication she, as a true child of Empire, believes she herself embodies.

Like Bernard, she is trapped and locked in the racial and cultural ideology of the empire and exhibits the same intolerance towards those who, she believes, do not come up to the expectations of an all-powerful Mother Country. Unlike Bernard, however, she is black, and it comes as a terrible shock for her to realise that, in the eyes of the host community, she is perceived in no different a light than the ‘coarse’ Jamaicans she scorns. Once in England she finds herself defined through the mirror of race with all the connotations that this entails. In Queenie’s eyes, she is an ignorant young black girl who needs educating into the superior mores of Britain, and to Bernard, she is a ‘dimwitted darkie girl’ (474), with no sense of propriety, ‘completely overdressed – white gloves on a weekday’ (467). Her knowledge of the metropolis has been gained from colonial books and its images of the Empire and she can still be awed by all its artifices of grandeur: ‘Reverent as the devout before an altar, she gasped, astonished at Buckingham Palace’ (462). As, in the same instant, a little boy stares at her and shouts: ‘You’re black’ (463), it becomes a space from which she now feels estranged, a place she sees with new eyes now that the dream has evaporated. In response to an old man’s greeting, ‘Cold day today, Miss’, she can but agree that she has ‘found that this is a very cold country’ indeed (466). With the arrival of Queenie’s baby, the vision of reality upon which her sense of self was constructed suffers an irremediable blow:

I never dreamed England would be like this. Come, in what crazed reverie would a white Englishwoman be kneeling before me yearning for me to take her black child? There was no dream I could conceive so fanciful. (Levy, 2004: 523)

As Queenie beseeches her and Gilbert to look after her new-born child, Hortense becomes aware that the boundaries of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, which had hitherto been clearly defined by the colonial discourse have now become spaces of ambivalence and contestation. Indeed as Brah contends, the ‘margin’ is not marginal ‘but is *a constitutive effect of the representation itself*’ and the ‘centre’ is ‘no more a centre than is the ‘margin’” (1996:226; emphasis in the text).

It is out of these overwhelming experiences that Hortense has at last gained a greater understanding of the role that her education and the rhetoric of Empire have played, in subjugating her to its norms and ideals, in the way she has hitherto defined herself. As she contemplates Queenie’s despair and Michael’s fate who ‘would know his mother not from the smell of boiling milk, a whispered song or bare black feet but from the remembered taste of salt tears’ (Levy, 2004: 528), she is also able to

understand and acknowledge the sinister role that racial ideology, sanctioned by the imperial enterprise, has played in cruelly depriving both her and Michael of the love and care of a mother. As she bends over Michael to kiss him, whispering a gentle 'Me Sprigadee' in his ears, the only memory she has left of her mother, she acknowledges their common Caribbean heritage, which, she knows, must now be recognised as an integral part of who they are. She has learnt to understand that humanity is not to be found in an 'official language smytheryed to sanction ignorance and to preserve privilege' (Morrison, 1993) but resides in this movement towards the other as manifest in her husband's grand gesture. The words that she had once used to describe her father are now employed to praise her husband but they are stripped of any colonial, imperial connotation and come with a newly-acquired understanding of their intrinsic meaning: 'I realised that Gilbert Joseph, my husband, was a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence. Noble in a way that would one day make him a legend' (Levy, 2004: 526). As Fanon states:

There is an absolute reciprocity that must be emphasized. It is the degree to which I go beyond my immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality. If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the other within himself. Ultimately, I deprive him even of his being-for-itself. (1986: 217)

Undeterred by the rejections and humiliations she has suffered at the hands of her unfeeling host, Hortense remains a proud woman, as determined as Gilbert that an ungrateful 'Mother Country' will not break her spirits or undermine her dignity. As she struggles to redefine herself within her new reality, she is more determined than ever to realise her dream of making her home in England, of imprinting herself into the heterogeneous fabric of its society. Indeed, by the end of the novel, home has become not only, as Greer suggests, for Hortense but, I argue, for all the characters, an ambivalent concept, 'the looking back, looking forward, the old country and the new, the new notions of home, of being both the child and the orphan of Empire' (2004). Like all the characters in the novel, Hortense knows that an uncertain future lies ahead but one whose hardships she and Gilbert are ready to brave, for they are survivors, as the last image of the novel so powerfully intimates: 'I pulled my back up and straightened my coat against the cold' (Levy, 2004: 530).

Courtman asserts that Levy 'unites Hortense and Queenie in an act of cross-racial sisterhood' but I would like to argue that it is a union which is steeped in ambivalence (2012: 85). Indeed, the novel ends on a poignant, fleeting threshold

moment when Hortense and Queenie tentatively acknowledge each other's presence but from both sides of a door which, symbolically, is kept reluctantly closed: 'A timorous hand resting unsure on the doorknob. She was there – I knew. 'Goodbye, Queenie', I called, but still she did not come' (530). Further ambiguity also comes to the fore with Hortense's decision to keep secret from Gilbert the money and the photograph of herself Queenie has entrusted to her, commenting somewhat enigmatically that she 'had something else in mind for them' and 'would put them to good use when they were required' (529). Levy offers no sense of closure but deliberately and rightly, to my mind, leaves it instead to the readers to reflect about the country in which they want to live and how they want to live (2005a: 6). Indeed, Hall argues, the 'solace of closure' can no longer be contemplated at a time when events are defined by a 'multiplicity of readings and discourses' which have produced 'new forms of self-consciousness and reflexivity' (1996a: 137). I would like to suggest that the key to the novel may be found in Michael, the son all the characters share, the visible symbol of these 'entangled genealogies', whose future, I contend, depends on the challenge to the 'idea of a continuous, uninterrupted, unchanging, homogeneous and stable British identity', and on the recognition that 'identity is always plural and in process' (Brah, 2006: 195).

In *Small Island*, Levy is shown to deliver a portrait of a social order in a state of flux in which not only do all the characters feel dislocated and forced to re-negotiate their place and their identity within this new reality, but also in which England itself and British identity are being re-imaged. The *Windrush* becomes a liminal space which conjures up contradictory notions of arrival and departure, interwoven with the impossibility of return, and an attendant desire for settlement, for home. Home, within this context, is no longer to be viewed as an essentialist notion, but as a dynamic process which also needs to be rewritten along Hall's lines of similarity and continuity, difference and rupture. Indeed, the concept of diaspora places 'the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *'inscribing a homing desire whilst simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins'* (Brah, 1995: 192-3; emphasis in the text). Finally, diaspora space as understood in this chapter is one where the reader finds her/himself confronted, through the use of heteroglossia and dialogism in the novel, with an interweaving of discourses, to conflicting individual perspectives and histories which 'displace and estrange the

world’ and challenge his/her own understanding of it and place within it.²⁵⁸ Commensurate with this, we also need to consider the role played by the ‘languages of the margin’ in the deconstruction of the hitherto dominant structures, their discourses of power and the reconstruction of new configurations for what is not in doubt, as Hall writes, is that:

‘marginality has become a powerful space ... a space of weak power but it is a space of power, nonetheless... The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities...hitherto excluded from the major forms of cultural representation... have acquired through struggle... the means to speak for themselves for the first time. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been certainly threatened by this de-centered cultural empowerment of the marginal and the local (Hall, 1991a: 34).

Texts are in constant dialogue with their readers, for reading is an ‘act of digging’, of active interpretation and re-interpretation from different subject positions, and is ‘heavily freighted with moral and social significance’ (Lang, 2009:127). ‘The Small Island Read 2007’ provides us with a unique opportunity to analyse the local and global impact of Anglophone Caribbean writing within the context of the interconnectedness of cultures.²⁵⁹ Such an enterprise also grants us, I argue, some valuable insight into the way Caribbean writing is able to reach diverse mass audiences and may, as Fuller and Procter investigate, ‘encourage contemporary readers to share and even resolve, not only their different perspectives on *Small Island* but also their perspectives on cultural difference’ (2007: 26).

Readers were able to engage with the novel at different levels, in different ways and to different ends. Many found the structure of the novel particularly helpful in helping them to view and understand immigration from a Caribbean as well as a British perspective. A lot of them also felt that *Small Island* helped them to gain insight into a part of British history they confessed they knew little about. A great number expressed surprise, bewilderment and at times shame at the way the Empire had deceived the Caribbean characters by ‘selling’ itself as a ‘civilized and educating process’ (Lang, 2009: 131). For some, this meant a destabilising and a questioning of their own perceptions of England and of the concepts of margin and centre.

²⁵⁸ Adorno, cited by Gilroy (1988: 307).

²⁵⁹ The ‘Small Island Read 2007’ was a community-based initiative when fifty thousand copies of *Small Island* were distributed across the cities of Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow and Hull as part of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill. Apart from promoting literacy and stimulating creativity, its aims were to facilitate learning about the past and bringing communities together and developing a sense of shared identity (Fuller and Procter, 2009: 30).

Furthermore, by uncovering the often severe limitations of its characters' understanding of each other, the text seems to have prompted some readers to interrogate their own stereotypes about the immigrants in their midst or about other countries (130).

An important conclusion that is drawn from the analysis of the data is that the transformative power of a text seems to be dependant on its ability to balance the tension between challenging its readers whilst also pleasing them, 'enthraling but at the same time disturbing', something which it is felt, Levy manages particularly successfully (137). Furthermore, there is also on the part of the readers a strong identification with all the characters which, Lang argues, signals a departure from a genre of Caribbean writing which for many metropolitan readers had been an alienating experience:

If critics have struggled with these texts that presented Caribbean alterity, then the very accessibility of Levy's text, seen in its enthusiastic acceptance by a large number of readers in Britain, coupled with its insistent commingling of British and West Indian destinies, make it something more than a middle-brow novel: it is a historical anomaly which harnesses the powerful effects of character identification in order to overcome the difficulties of cultural and linguistic difference for British writers without diminishing that difference or mitigating its material consequences'. (Lang, 2009: 134)

For their part, Fuller and Procter did turn their attention to the potential to establish various types of connection and 'meeting' between the readers of Levy's novel through the common ground of a single book in reading group discussions (Fuller and Procter, 2009: 37). This can be seen as akin to Gilroy's view of 'multiculture' that he sees enacted through routine, everyday cross-cultural interactions (Gilroy, 2004b: 108-9). Indeed, some readers went beyond the confines of the fictional story, and used it as a platform from which to debate current political and social issues such as racism and present-day discrimination towards immigrants and asylum seekers (Fuller and Procter, 2009: 34-5). Others turned to the intersecting discourses of race and class in the novel to reflect on how far their own urban environment was also defined by these two vectors. The researchers reflected on how such commentaries underline the fact 'that most people in the group were already deeply engaged with issues of difference' prior to reading the novel. It also showed, they argued, how much a reading of a text from a particular standpoint can 'produce a 'local' reading of an apparently non-local story' (36). Other readers stressed the

potential of the text to unsettle racist assumptions and also how important it was that black writing should be given such prominence. As an African-Caribbean reader remarked:

I think (*Small Island*) is useful for breaking down barriers. And it's also great that a black author's been recognised at this level. You know, we've got the whole city – well, readers in the city – reading a book, ... So, I'm quite proud of Andrea really, she's done a good job'.²⁶⁰

The *Small Island Read* project, Fuller and Procter conclude, offered the potential for 'meeting places to be imagined and even actualized' but there is also an ephemeral and a provisional aspect to this vision of 'multiculture' which they feel needs to be acknowledged (2009: 38). It is 'refracted in the fleeting and sometimes ambiguous nature of the instances through which readers recognize the textual 'Other'' (id). Indeed, as Long also argues, the power of literature to allow readers to empathise across race and class divides rests on the 'reader's desire and ability to make an intersubjective bridge as she reads' (2003: 186). It will be of particular interest to examine how much their findings concur with those of the 'Devolving Diasporas' study which will also use *Small Island* as one of nine 'diasporic' texts circulated to book groups across seven countries to 'investigate the relationship between reading, location, and migration through observation and recording of a number of book groups around the world' (Benwell, 2009: 300).

Levy's reflections, as fifty writers from of Caribbean, Asian and African descent gather to be photographed to celebrate the significant contribution they have made to contemporary British literature, are perhaps an appropriate if tentative conclusion:

'Britain finally beginning to gather up its more distant voices and listen to the rich stories they have to tell, stories that are as central to the history of Britain and of British literature as anything we are more familiar with?' (2004c)²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ 'Beyond the Book' participant focus group (5), Liverpool, 22nd February 2007.

²⁶¹ Levy (2004 c) reported in the Guardian on this event when she was invited along with those writers to be in the 'Great Day' photograph. The inspiration came from the famous photograph of American jazz musicians taken in New York in 1958 for Esquire magazine. It was the idea of Melanie Abrahams who set up Renaissance One, which promotes diversity in the Arts and wanted 'to create a 'happening' that celebrated and showcased writers who had made an impact'. It was organised by the British Library. This photograph, Levy comments, 'with all its shades of ethnicity, does represent one positive legacy...I believe that it will prove to be a fascinating snapshot of a truly dynamic force in British literature'.

7. EPILOGUE

An African countenance here
A European there
An Amerindian cast of cheek
An Asianic turn of eye
And the tongue's salty accommodation
The tapestry is mine

Grace Nichols, 1989: 57

Caribbean writing is shaped by spatial and temporal voyages, cross-cultural encounters and narrative interweavings across the Atlantic ocean whose violent, turbulent waters occupy a troubled place in the Caribbean imagination. Benitez-Rojo's vision of Caribbean culture as 'aquatic', a 'realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds, of double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity' is a fitting metaphor for the purpose of this study (1996: 11). As it moves to the rhythms of that sea, the Caribbean is an ambivalent space, a 'continual flow of paradoxes' (id), a shifting narrative which speaks of the traumas of enforced migrations but also of the potential for renewal and reconnection. The 'gift of travel', Phillips affirms, is part of the legacy of being a writer of African origin in the West and, he argues, one should not fear 'errancy' but welcome it, take pleasure in it and even desire it (2004: 6). Within this context, writing is, I suggest, a most apt medium as a platform from which to explore the 'high anxiety of belonging' (Phillips, 2002: 303). Indeed, writing is itself a voyage, for 'always speaking of an elsewhere, of an other, and therefore condemned to be dissonant', it opens up a space 'that invites movement, migration, a journey' (Chambers, 1995:10). On the one hand, it tries to establish a path, a

particular way to perceive, a particular knowledge. On the other hand, like ‘the ambiguity of travel’, it moves from the safety of the starting point, the ‘known materials’ to an ‘unforeseen and unknown possibility’, a voyage of discovery into ourselves and the world’.²⁶² It is a means of ‘transporting words into other worlds, of making crossings and forging connections between apparently conflicting worlds’ (Nasta, 2004:6).

This research, too, has been a journey into the significance of that Caribbean writing, in and for today’s world in relation to the negotiating of identity, an identity that lives ‘with and through, not despite difference’ (Hall, 1990: 235). I set off by investigating the power of the book as a tool for the colonising of the mind within the context of the Caribbean and language as an operation of discourse. Benita Parry is very critical of an overemphasis on discourse which she feels ignores the economic and material vicissitudes suffered under colonial rule. I argue, however, that if one is to understand discourse in its Foucauldian sense, as a set of statements enacted, not in isolation, but within a social and historical context, the economic and the discursive cannot be understood as mutually exclusive. I show how the colonial text produces knowledge about the self and the other, in which the two find themselves inextricably bound within a binary system of representation of ‘savage’ and ‘civilised’. While Hulme rejects Gramsci’s and Althusser’s concept of ideology as ‘irrelevant’ in the Caribbean (1986: 7), this research contends that, through the powerful State Apparatus of the school, power is achieved through a combination of coercion and consent. This, in turn, leads to a new paradigm of ‘Benevolent Master’ and ‘Willing Slaves’ upon which the success of the imperial conquest depends. As the Caribbean colonised find themselves reduced to objects of knowledge, deprived of a culture and denied a past, obliged to deal in ‘fragments of epic memory’ (Walcott, 1998: 65) through the medium of a language always shadowed by loss, I show how this leads to a deep crisis of identity.

Far from being an exercise in nostalgia or despair, this vantage point is, I argue, a most valuable tool of resistance, subversion, reconstruction and transformation. It is from the position of exile, from that second encounter with Empire that the Caribbean writer is, I contend, made aware of her/his colonial condition and of ‘the need for the complete calling into question’ of that situation (Fanon, 1967a: 28).²⁶³ This study has shown how this challenge inscribes itself

²⁶² Chambers (1995: 10). See also Michel de Certeau (1988 : 41-42).

²⁶³ See Gikandi (1992: 25-7, 33-42).

within a passionate debate about the power of the text as a tool of resistance and subversion as offered by Spivak and Bhabha. Parry contests such a stress on ‘textual insurrection’ which, by locating resistance within the language of the coloniser itself, ignores, she feels, local realities and obliterates the role of the erstwhile colonised as a producer of another knowledge and traditions (1987: 33). She favours instead a model of political and social resistance in the Fanonian mould. However, I argue, this also runs the risk of homogenising opposition as it too situates itself within the context of the colonial power. I have suggested that the contribution that ‘displaced’ writers such as Lamming, Hodge and Walcott have played in establishing a Caribbean literary tradition of resistance offers us an escape from that double bind as it presents us with a textual model steeped in the local social, political and historical realities and struggles.²⁶⁴ In appropriating the power inherent in language to be dissonant, we have seen how the ‘writing back’ to the texts of the British canon becomes for exiled writers such as Lamming the means by which the hitherto reviled Caliban can be heard and acknowledged. As Lamming proffers another awareness, another ‘way of seeing’, and absent presences are brought to light, I have shown how the master-slave relationship is destabilised and language is exposed as a destructive weapon of subjugation and coercion. With this ‘new sight’ and ‘this new sense of language which bears witness to the miracle of the plough which now talks’ (Lamming, 1984: 121), the authority and the legitimacy of the imperial discourse find themselves challenged and unsettled. I argue that the journey across the Atlantic thus enables a ‘Caribbean architecture of consciousness’ (Harris, 1999:156), and a new order of meaning to come into being in which Caliban now claims his right to Language, which has been re-fashioned to enable metropolitan and Caribbean subjectivities to be re-configured.

Walcott’s play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is seen by Hogan as an exploration of the theme of madness engendered by racism (2000: 45). I dispute such a perspective and contend that, through a fusion of written and oral cultural traditions, dramatic performance is used as a tool of resistance. The use of masks is seen as a powerful stratagem which allows for hitherto suppressed consciousnesses to surface whilst English and Creole intermingle to destabilise a colonial order exercised through the power of language as a singular discourse of authority. Hogan

²⁶⁴ Phillips speaks for all the writers who have followed on when he declares that ‘these writers had a profound effect on my generation, the second generation in this country, who found themselves trying to deal with ambivalence and confusion with regard to their relationship to British society’ (2002: 237).

also rejects the claim of ‘recognition of self and culture’ at the end of the play, performed through the act of naming as the main protagonist breaks free from the shackles of a Western hegemonic discourse, from a nostalgic return to an essentialist African environment or violent revenge (81). I challenge such a claim and argue that the play has shown that the liberation of the Caribbean self will only come about when s/he has been able to divest her/himself of the burden of the paralysing ‘awe of history’ (Walcott, 1998: 37) and to name her/himself and his world anew. From such a perspective, Caribbean writing becomes a performance in which binary constructions such as margin and centre, ‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’ cultures are debated, and questions of authority, identity and belonging are contested and renegotiated, for its power resides in its:²⁶⁵

performative, deformative structure that does not simply revalue the contents of a cultural tradition, or transpose values ‘cross-culturally’. The cultural inheritance of slavery or colonialism is brought *before* modernity *not* to resolve its historic differences into a new totality, not to forego its traditions. It is to introduce another locus of inscription and intervention. (Bhabha, 2004: 241-2; emphasis in the text)

In his introduction to *Crick Crack Monkey*, Narinesingh refutes the view that exile to England should be seen as a ‘morally affirmative position’ from which to attain ‘personal synthesis and coherence’ (1970: xv). My study of the novel contends that it is from this ambiguous, liminal space of exile, and from the adult space of enunciation, through the medium of autobiography, that the main protagonist can best understand how she was constructed and alienated in language. Her young self is shown to be tragically torn between an orality which History has silenced and a written language as a signifier of fracture, of alienating codes and meanings. Yet, I argue, it is this dislocation at the heart of the Caribbean experience which enables Caribbean writers such as Hodge to confront the dilemmas of an overdetermined Caribbean consciousness. She is seen to appropriate “the common inheritance’ which resides in a language riddled with the colonial legacy’ (Harris, 1992: 12-14) to re-inscribe a Caribbean oral culture as a collective performance which restores the black Caribbean to her past, her environment and her community and ultimately to herself. Through the capacity of language to transform ‘inner and outer formal categories of experience’ (Harris, 1967: 32), she stages, I demonstrate, a re-ordering of history and

²⁶⁵ Bakhtin describes the ‘monolithic text’ as ‘a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness’ (Bakhtin, 1981:9).

a reconstruction of the Caribbean self as subject and agent of a new colonial / postcolonial discourse.

Whilst Phillips, Levy and Dabydeen no longer write from the position of exile, I have shown that their concerns inscribe themselves nevertheless within the same framework of a re-negotiating of identity and a re-visioning of colonial history. In this way, they are seen to participate in ‘a Caribbean continuum of a journey in space and consciousness’, which started with the enforced transportation of millions of people from Africa into slavery (Lamming, 1995: 24). In his analysis of *Crossing the River*, Bewes contends that Phillips’s novel needs to be considered from the standpoint of the rhetoric of the shame of the survivor-writer, which is to be defined by the possibility of speaking and the impossibility of it (2011: 79). I challenge such a perspective and suggest that, dictated by Phillips’s deeply felt sense of responsibility to one’s history, his novel is to be viewed instead as an instrument of liberation and transformation. It is seen to open up to possibilities of reconstruction of the self through a repossession of a narrative of slavery which had hitherto been only void and silence. Ledent rejects the idea that re-membering slavery may have anything to do with redemption for, to her mind, this would mean that such a horrific event could then be forgotten (2002: 131). I argue that, as the affirmative act of ‘not forgetting’, such a re-enactment of the past is to be viewed as a redemptive act, not to absolve, but in the sense that it allows hitherto marginal voices to write themselves onto the national stage. Through the power of language to confront, to reclaim, to re-name, this enables other perspectives of understanding, meaning and being to that of the Western discourse to be exposed. I refute Bewes’s notion that Phillips’s cultural identity has but incidental relevance to our apprehension of the text as well as his contention that the plurality of discourses within the novel in which no one has control of the story points to the ‘impossibility of speaking’ (2011: 68). I demonstrate instead how Phillips’s own ‘triple heritage of journeying’ (Phillips, 2004: 5) is central to the novel for it allows for a polyrhythmic performance of voices, narratives and perspectives to penetrate the novel. The criss-cross movement in *Crossing the River* between past and present, across time and space, the interweaving of texts and discourses, entail the subversion of the linearity of the master narrative and introduce us to the fragility of borders, of meaning, and of subjectivity. At the same time, such a polyphonic text can be seen as a liberating, dynamic force from which to explore an alternative narrative of identity which

allows us to move towards an understanding of the complexity and the plurality of our selves away from the notion of a singular vision.

Disappearance has suffered the censure of a number of critics and Mc Watt in particular condemns its apparently ‘self-consciously postcolonial’ stance in the Western tradition (1997: 121-2). My close reading of the text challenges such a perspective and argues that, like *Slave Song*, Dabydeen’s first collection of poems, which I use as an introduction to *Disappearance*, the novel needs to be read instead from the Caribbean perspective of creolisation, perceived not as ‘affliction’, but as ‘creative potential’ and ‘unceasing process of transformation’ (Glissant, 1999: 142). Falk examines the narrator’s story from the perspective of a confession delivered in a ‘ritual sequence of shame’ for which the latter expects forgiveness (2007: 122). I posit instead a Carnival-like reordering of realities and subjectivities hitherto defined along ‘ruler’s edge’ (Dabydeen, 1993: 36). In this context, the search for the ‘real truth about England’ is reconfigured as a journey in imagination into a Guyanan past, which is forced upon the narrator through his relationship with his English landlady. The research shows how, through the power of colonial language as a tool of control and subjugation, order and discipline are brought to bear upon seemingly wild and untamed Caribbean landscape and subjectivities. To this is contrasted a Carnavalesque counterdiscourse which works through the strategy of ‘diversion’ within Glissant’s context of a poetics of Relation (1999: 142; 191). It is seen to be enacted through a pervading intertextuality, through ambivalence and a plurality of interweaving narratives, a web of intersecting cross-cultural horizons. As it explores the multiple and shifting locations of identity, the ‘joyful relativity of all structure and order’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 124), such a perspective offers the possibility of new fields of meaning and being beyond single vision to be imagined.

Whilst in her study of *Small Island*, Lima privileges the encounter with the ‘African Man’ in the prologue, I put forward the view that it is through the lens of the Wembley Exhibition as symbol of imperial ideology that the text unfolds. I show how it exposes the ‘power dynamics which usher racialised social relations and inscribe racialised modes of subjectivity and identity’ (Brah, 1996: 185). From this perspective, the colonial machine is seen as a vast desiring machine, a powerful instrument of subjugation and control which reduces the ‘others’ on display to racial caricatures, to mere objects of knowledge and consumption and ultimately to silence. As the four characters travel in a back and forth movement between present and past,

they are shown to be constructed by and to define themselves through the mirror and the norms of that colonial ordering of the world which entraps them all in its Manichean perception of reality and subjectivity. Whilst Ellis highlights the misunderstandings in the prologue as problematising the discourse of empire (2012: 75), I argue that it is the encounter with the ‘other’ which introduces fracture at the heart of the colonial discourse and disrupts the authority of its articulation. I show how the characters find their hitherto seemingly secure identities and realities challenged and destabilised and how they need to reappraise themselves in the light of that experience. James contends that Hortense, the Jamaican female protagonist, is ‘the window into the text’ and that the other characters only serve to ‘give relief to her experience’ (2007: 7). I challenge such a perspective to argue that it is the criss-crossing, the interweaving, the entanglement of all four narratives along the lines of similarity and difference which are at the heart of the novel. Borders of inclusion and exclusion, of self and other, of centre and margin thus find themselves contested, negotiated and redefined through the use of ambivalence, heteroglossia, dialogism, intertextuality, and carnivalesque images. This leads to a view of Britain after the war as a contested place, to a portrait of a social order in a state of flux and to a view of identity as a shifting concept, a constant repositioning from a particular place and time, from a particular history or culture. The research has also examined how the literary success enjoyed by *Small Island* displaces practices through which ‘certain writings have been and are valorized as literature’ (McDonell, 1986: 80) and helps to redefine the British literary canon.

Throughout the course of this research I have argued that the Caribbean writers, as ‘the spectral hosts of history’, are seen to be unveiling, through an act of imagination, a voyage into a past no longer as a narrative of void, of absence, of silence, of rootlessness, of recrimination or revenge for the ills and sufferings of the past, but as ‘the miracle of roots, the miracle of a dialogue with eclipsed selves’ (Harris, 1981: 65-6). I contend that, through this dialogue with the ‘apparent non-existent ground of being’ (Harris, 1979:19), this re-inscribing of the hitherto silenced as actors onto the ambiguous stage of history, and this ‘re-creation of the self in the world of travel’ (Bhabha, 2004:12), the violations of the Middle Passage whose memory must never be erased, can be re-visualized as the characters are:

capable *now* of discovering themselves and continuing to discover themselves so that in one sense one relives and reverses the ‘given’ conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one’s own

historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future'. (Harris, 1967: 36; emphasis in the text)

This research also shows how, out of the ceaseless movement, the criss-crossing and intermingling of people, cultures and ideas across the Atlantic where concepts of departure and arrival are always blurred, arbitrary and contested, marginality becomes 'an angle of creative and re-creative capacity' (Harris, 1999: 220). Through the use of spatial and temporal journeys, of interweaving narratives, forever 'in motion across the spaces between Britain, America, Africa, and the Caribbean', like Gilroy's chronotope of ships (1993b: 4), Phillips's, Dabydeen's and Levy's novels invite us to travel beyond the boundaries and confines of singular and fixed narratives. We are all, Rushdie reminds us, 'wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions' (Rushdie, 1991: 12). Through their doubleness as insiders/outsideers, the displacement which has been their necessary condition for centuries, through their engagement and dialogue with other realities, the Anglophone Caribbean writer is shown to help us to confront and learn to negotiate and renegotiate the dislocation which is at the heart of the human condition. In this way, I contend, 'the Caribbean ... matters enormously to an understanding of the modern world, the global outcome of the colonial transaction' (Torres-Saillant, 2005: 18).

As the writers present us with the inextricable entanglement and the complex interdependence of cultures with each other, of texts moving in concert with other texts, we enter into a poetics and a politics of relation, of a 'cross-cultural community of families' (Harris, 1999: 164) which, I maintain, shatters the long-held belief in identity as a flawless whole, a unitary essence. As they stress 'the contingency of all definitions of self and other' (Carter, 1992: 7-8), I see them offering us other possibilities of 'home' and of belonging in a world in constant flux. No longer can the intermingling, the cross-fertilisation of cultures, languages and histories be viewed as a 'litany of pollution and impurity' (Gilroy, 1993b: 2), but it must be seen instead as a liberating, dynamic force. Dismissing the pursuit of the erosion of difference in the name of assimilation within a unitary regime of codes, norms and values as the point of arrival, this opens out onto a vision of identity born with and through difference, out of an interweaving of cultures, at the confluence of their often conflicting narratives as a point of departure.

Such a vision seems to me all the more urgent in the context of the major crisis which threatens our present world, poised between a sense of ‘exhaustion and disintegration on the one hand and the resurgence of a narrow fundamentalism on the other’ (Maes-Jelinek, 1991: 47). I argue that it is important however that one should not confuse this appeal to a transcultural perspective with the present globalising trend which focuses on similarities across countries for the economic potential that such commonalities unlock.²⁶⁶ Within such a context, cultural differences are viewed not as creative potential but as obstacles to be overcome and are subsumed into a homogenising ‘sameness’. Inherent in this uniformising, ‘free-for-all’ perspective is the danger that this leads to a demand for ‘particularisms’, to narrow, essentialist definitions of cultural and national identities, to the re-erection of traditional boundaries which bring about ‘hatred, purification actions and wars’ (Welsch, 1999: 210). Throughout this research, I have set out to show that the impact of Anglophone Caribbean writing lies in the way it is able to critically engage with both the global and the local to create a new vision which stresses the need for interconnections, for the interdependence of cultures upon each other in the formation of the subject. What is also not in doubt is that the figure of the Caribbean writer as ‘cultural traveller, moving words/worlds across cultures and transporting the imagination beyond the maps of narrowly defined borders’ (Nasta, 2004: 11) can no longer be dismissed as an aberrance and an irrelevance, but rather as a force for change who will help us to ‘engage with a world which is clumsily transforming itself’ (Phillips, 2011: 17).

I would like to conclude with the quotation which set me off on my journey for this research:

I belong not only to the British tradition, I am also a writer of African origin and, for people of the African diaspora, ‘home’ is a word that is often burdened with a complicated historical and geographical weight. This being the case, travel has been important for it has provided African diasporan people to clarify their position in the world...There was also a third tradition that was pressing on me...that of being a writer of Caribbean origin...A triple heritage of journeying...I did have the option of embracing blackness as a form of essential identity. However, to use one element of oneself as either a weapon or a shield is restrictive...The gift of travel has been enabling for me in the same way that it has been enabling for those writers in the British

²⁶⁶ See ‘Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue’, a Unesco World Report, (2009: 22) at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001847/184755e.pdf>

tradition, those in the African diasporan tradition, and those in the Caribbean tradition, many of whom have found it necessary to move in order that they may reaffirm for themselves the fact that dual and multiple affiliations feed our constantly fluid sense of self. Healthy societies are ones that allow such pluralities to exist and do not feel threatened by these hybrid conjoinings... The most dangerous thing we can do to ourselves is to carelessly accept a label that is offered to us by a not always generous society that seeks to reduce us to little more than one single component of our rich and complex selves'. (Phillips, 2004)

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9. APPENDIX



