

The Novel since 1970

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Since 1970, Caribbean fiction in English has continued to evolve by producing more original talents and imposing itself on the international scene as one of the most innovative and diversified achievements to have emerged from the postcolonial world. Its originality lies partly in its impressively wide range of language forms from classical traditional prose to the highly metaphorical through a remarkable diversity of regional dialects and idiosyncratic blendings of voices and oral rhythms into literary prose. It lies also in the writers' vision of the West Indian experience in the Caribbean itself or in exile which, either in its regional multiracial and multicultural makeup or in a widespread displacement to North America and Britain, is representative of a largely universal condition. It must be noted, however, that whatever society they have chosen to live in, West Indian novelists have generally resisted the temptation of international postmodernism, no doubt stimulated by the need to envision a promising future for their people rather than adhere to the non-referential world view of "First" and "Second" World Western writers. In addition, the social and political unrest of the early seventies in the Caribbean was an incentive to many to investigate the sources of conflict and the possibilities of harmonious living in the islands and in Guyana: while exile remained a pervasive theme, much fiction from the seventies onward deals with the advisability of returning to the Caribbean in order to contribute to the building of a new society. Many contemporary West Indian writers, however, have been preoccupied with the creation, or the expression, of a Caribbean consciousness and of a specifically Caribbean aesthetics, even while they sometimes denied such a possibility, as is the case with the Naipaul brothers and their nephew Neil Bissoondath. Other writers, namely Earl Lovelace and Michael Anthony, have sought the essence of a genuine Caribbean culture in the folk tradition, especially carnival.

Apart from Jean Rhys, all novelists in the first period of Caribbean fiction were male writers, whose female characters were generally of secondary importance, a help or hindrance to the men's self-fulfilment but very seldom the center of consciousness. Exceptions are Wilson Harris's *The Waiting Room*, 1967, and *Tumatumari*, 1968, or, in a more limited way, the earlier *Far Journey of Oudin*, 1961, and *The Whole Armour*, 1962. It was only in the late

1980s and early 1990s that Caryl Phillips began to portray female characters in depth. In the meantime, however, female novelists had appeared on the literary scene who, for the first time, recreated the Caribbean woman's experience from the inside. It even seemed, for a while, that they were altogether taking over from male novelists among whom no new major figure appeared for some time until a much younger generation emerged with Phillips, Fred D'Aguiar, and David Dabydeen, together with the slightly older Bissoondath and Lawrence Scott. As one looks back over the period, then, one discerns three major groups of writers – the older and the younger generations of male writers and the women writers – dispersed over the anglophone Caribbean, Britain, Canada, and the United States, where they have been making a major contribution to the novel in English especially through language and form.

Wilson Harris, the senior writer of the older generation, has also been the most prolific, a novelist of genius in his endlessly renewed exploration of the psychical resources of deprived people(s) in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the postcolonial world and his investigation of a possible conciliation between so-called "primitive" mythical thought and Western rationalism, as well as between art and science. In his efforts to free the contemporary mind from one-track thinking and limited perceptions, he has given his narratives the fluidity of musical movements, revised some of their canvases as a literary "painter" would and brought to light parallels between Amerindian world perceptions and quantum physics. Significantly, Anselm, the protagonist of *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 1990, is a Guyanese "engineer, sculptor, painter, architect, composer" (Harris [1990], x), the representative of a new humanism on the margins of civilization. In addition, although self-reflexiveness was present in various forms in Harris's early fiction, notably in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, 1965, *The Waiting Room*, and *Tumatumari*, he uses it increasingly as a stimulus to imaginative revival in both fiction and life.

Ascent to Omai, 1970, can be considered as the last instalment of Harris's second cycle of novels but is also a landmark in his work-in-progress and announces a new cycle of fictions bringing together in quintessential form aspects of narrative and imaginative concepts which he was to develop subsequently. Victor, the protagonist, explores the heartland (Omai is a chasm and a mountain) in search of his father, Adam, who disappeared after serving a sentence for setting fire to the factory in which he was working, one more example of the lost father in Harris's work and, until recently, in Caribbean society. Superimposed on Victor's ascent to Omai is the reconstruction of his father's trial which also becomes the "trial" and "gestation" of Victor's soul (Harris [1970], 43) and thus adumbrates what the narrator in *Jonestown*, 1996, calls "self-confessional, self-judgmental art" (Harris [1996], 161). The trial

Victor reenacts in his writing (novel and play) is also that of a technological civilization in which, despite "centuries of depression, the decimation of Aboriginal and conquered peoples," he discovers "a significant buried awareness of community" (Harris [1970], 43, 124). One of the narrative's most stunning features is the conciseness with which it, as "novel-history" (52), combines the geological and historical past of the land, still branded with the "stigmata of the void" and the obsessive search for El Dorado, its social history and also the individual experience of Adam and Victor. Through a series of metaphors, at first apparently unconnected, then gradually relating different layers and areas of meaning, Harris shows experience to be rooted in sensations whose retrieval by memory opens the way to an understanding formulated in abstract terms. At the same time, by making Victor a vessel, or "vicar," for the "other *silent* voices" and "*mute* sensations" ignored before, Harris reasserts his faith, already expressed in *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, in language as both "*vision of consciousness*" (78) and an equation of experience, itself later called "text of reality" (Harris [1990-c], 176), thus positing the referentiality of language.

Before his next novel, *Black Marsden*, 1972, Harris published two volumes of stories or novellas, *The Sleepers of Roraima*, 1970, and *The Age of the Rainmakers*, 1971, all reinterpretations of Amerindian myths, vestiges of legend, and historical incidents in postconquest Guyana. They bring to light the distinction Harris makes between historiography as largely descriptive and static and myth as carrier of a seed of renewal or transformation. These stories/novellas are also an essential link between the early and the later fiction as illustrations of Harris's concept of cross-culturalism, rooted in the unconscious depths of the psyche. The best example is to be found in "Yurokon" which fictionalizes the effect on the last surviving Carib child of his ancestors' bone-flute, the instrument they carved from the bones of the Spanish enemies they cannibalized in order to enter their mind and intuit the kind of attack they might be subjected to. The Caribs also saw in the bone-flute the very origin of music. It was, therefore, "the seed of an intimate revelation ... of *mutual* spaces they shared with the enemy," long ignored because of the stigma of cannibalism. The bone-flute metaphor, in which destruction (cannibalism) and creation (music) come together, expresses Harris's conviction that "adversarial contexts," such as the encounter of inimical cultures can generate creativity. This does not mean that Harris envisages an actual rebirth of the Caribs, but, rather, the rebirth of an eclipsed native consciousness, itself part of a collective or universal unconscious.

Though Harris's fiction is always informed by a movement towards otherness, he is also careful to show that the deprived other can become tyrannical in turn. This is a major

theme in *Black Marsden* which takes place largely in Edinburgh but, like all subsequent novels, bridges continents. The bridge metaphor symbolizes the cross-culturalism that informs these novels as the characters travel, actually or imaginatively, from the U.K. to the Americas or India, as in *The Angel at the Gate*, 1982. It is also a gateway to and from the unconscious, as well as to and from the underworld of the dead or of eclipsed people(s). In *Black Marsden*, Clive Goodrich comes upon the "half-frozen spectre" of Doctor Black Marsden in the ruined Dunfermline Abbey and invites him to stay in his house. Marsden, a clown, a conjurer and a hypnotist, yet also a guide, brings along the beautiful Jennifer Gordon and introduces Goodrich to his other "agents" who all exist in their own right as well as being part of Goodrich's personality and the "tabula rasa" theater with himself. From *Black Marsden* onward, Harris called his novels "comedies," either in subtitles or in the narrative: "*tabula rasa* comedy"; "comedy of light"; "comedy of divinity"; or "divine comedy of existence." All differ in character and tone, *Carnival*, 1985, coming closest to Dante's concept of comedy as a journey of initiation while actually revising it, whereas *Black Marsden* features comic elements such as incongruity, metamorphosis, and black humor. It uses the comic as "an instrument of subversion and interrogation" but is also directed "towards the writing itself ... as if Harris [wanted to prevent his style from] becoming an 'inevitable pattern'" (McWatt [1991], 152-54). *Black Marsden* combines elements of (self-)mockery with a serious analysis of the social mechanisms that endanger the very existence of civilization. Harris's writing in this phase offers a superb rendering of the spirit of specific places, whether Edinburgh, Mexico in *Companions of the Day and Night*, 1975, or London in *DaSilva DaSilva's Cultivated Wilderness*, 1977, and *The Tree of the Sun*, 1978. In *Genesis of the Clowns*, published second in one volume with *DaSilva* though written before it, the symbolically named Frank Wellington travels back in memory to Guyana but encompasses the empire as he enters into a dialogue with those he had exploited in the past: "I began to be plagued by an interior sun ... looking back now from the Thames to the Abary I feel myself riveted into a breathless tapestry of revolving continents, landscapes and rivers I once possessed that may have started then.... As though the wheel of empire began to turn anew when for many it had already stopped, began to return to me as a moving threshold of consciousness" (Harris [1977-b], 86). In *DaSilva DaSilva*, the "Commonwealth paintings" of the eponymous protagonist dissolve the uniform of empire, making possible the displacement and mutation of the "fixed boundaries" of a central culture and tradition.

In all these novels, Harris substantialized his concept of "the novel as painting" ([1981], 86). In *Companions*, a sequel to *Black Marsden*, Goodrich edits the diaries, paintings,

and sculptures of Nameless who has "fallen" through many layers of vestiges in Mexico and discovered "unsuspected corridors, underseas, undersides of creation" (Harris [1975], 32) spanning centuries and civilizations. In *DaSilva DaSilva*, the central character, reborn from *Palace of the Peacock*, 1960, and *Heartland*, 1964, prepares his canvases for an exhibition and is spurred on to a profound "revision" of these paintings and the experiences they evoke. The increased sensuousness in these narratives in no way impairs the double vision that Harris's highly poetic prose creates, the real world *through* which hidden depths are perceived, "transparent densities of blues and greens, white fire, edges of orchestrated delicacy touched by unfathomable peace ... as if to alert him to the reality of the radiant city within every city, the reality of the genie's gift, the genie's potential reconstruction" (Harris [1977], 63). In *The Tree of the Sun*, the DaSilvas come across an unfinished book and letters, which the former tenants of their flat secretly wrote to each other but never sent. DaSilva's editing of this material is the subject both of the novel and of his paintings. Not only does he bring the dead to life; *they* bring *him* to life in the new dialogue he initiates between them. In this dialogue through art across time and space, between the living and the dead, lies the way to "the resurrection of the self," a theme further developed in the following novels. In *The Angel at the Gate*, art also "create[s] a subtle, therapeutic no-man's land or accent upon cross-cultural humanspace" (Harris [1982], 23). One must note, however, that the role of art is never romanticized as it first confronts the protagonists with the "furies" that keep ravaging the world.

Harris's Carnival Trilogy, *Carnival*, 1985, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, 1987, and *The Four Banks of the River of Space*, 1990, foregrounds the dialogue between author/"editor" and creative protagonist initiated in the previous novels. *Carnival* is Harris's "rewriting" of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, his exploration through the I-narrator, Jonathan Weyl, of the "Inferno and Purgatory of the twentieth-century world" (Harris [1985], 15). Weyl's Virgil is Everyman Masters who has developed from Marsden, the spiritual but sometimes demonic guide in the earlier cycle of novels. Masters's name encompasses both the average man and the ruler and suggests that each contains the other potentially. A plantation overseer in his first life in New Forest (probably Guyana), Masters becomes an exploited everyman in what may be called his second life, working with other West Indians in a London factory. "Carnival," another Harrisian protean metaphor, involves a penetration of masks towards a deeper reality, *not* Truth but many partial truths. It is also a dynamic, multivalent concept evoking the "carnival of history" and a metaphysical "divine comedy of existence," which shows the absolute categories of Dante's time – Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso – to have become inadequate

and transformed into fluid, overlapping states. The Carnival Trilogy also revises the traditional forms of allegory, comedy, tragedy, and epic as each novel revises a masterpiece of Western literature, freeing it from the historical/social/psychological frame and ideology of a given period. That ideals of greatness and an incorrigible desire for the infinite led to the conquest of the world and its division into higher and lower cultures is further shown in *The Infinite Rehearsal* (a phrase that epitomizes Harris's writing process and view of existence), "a spiritual biography" that sifts "unreliable fact from true play" as the narrator, Robin Redbreast Glass, "rewrites" Goethe's *Faust*, now associated with the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl, the fabled plumed serpent, and conceives a creative process that enables Glass to envisage the liberation of the world from its tyrannies. In *The Four Banks of the River of Space* and his next two novels, Harris's attempt to reconcile art and science takes the form of a symbiosis between quantum physics (which supposes a multiple, relational conception of reality) and a pre-Columbian perception of the universe, particularly the Mayan conception of time with its blending of past, present, and future. *Four Banks* "rewrites" *The Odyssey* with English and Guyanese characters. It disrupts and reverses the finality of Ulysses's deeds, especially his implacable vengefulness which, when imitated in modern technological societies, is a threat to the very existence of humanity. In the protagonist Anselm's "book of dreams," his personality is fragmented into a number of actors who share the burden of his strong personality and become partial selves subject to conversion.

Resurrection at Sorrow Hill, 1993, is also an all-embracing epic in Harris's sense of the word. Most characters are inmates in the Sorrow Hill "Asylum for the Greats"; in their schizophrenic dividedness, they claim to be famous historical figures, such as Montezuma, Leonardo, and Socrates. Their psychological and spiritual breakdown reflects major contemporary crises, while historical disasters reverberate in the present-day conflicts fired by intense individual emotions and are therefore major sources of violence. Shifts between past and present show the need to face the legacies of the past that still weigh on the characters' psyche but also point to their capacity to transfigure their experience into the creative potential inherent in the disruptive wounds of history. The variations on metaphors of breaking and reconstituting – the very process of life – are so many manifestations of the resurrection as transformation from one mode of sensibility to another.

Harris's faith in the power of the imagination to bring about a renaissance of meaning and value is again actualized in his latest novel, *Jonestown*, 1996, which evokes an actual tragedy in the Guyanese interior where the Reverend Jim Jones, the American leader of the People's Temple sect, forced hundreds of his followers, including 276 children, either to drink

cyanide soup or be shot on the spot. This massacre is presented as part of a large-scale historical and moral context, a manifestation of an irrational will to destroy, epitomizing other twentieth-century ideological holocausts and genocides, all of them effects of moral disease, whether unbridled ambition, the false spirituality of charismatic leaders, or the perversion of originally idealistic ends. The destruction of the settlement also suscitates questions about the enigmatic disappearance of cities, settlements, and peoples in Central and South America before and after the conquest. The focus on the Maya, their culture, knowledge of mathematics and astronomy as well as their myths, evokes a powerful elusive presence reminiscent of the folk in *Palace of the Peacock*, while the imagery partly inspired by Mayan art sustains the narrative movement towards a synthesis between mythic and discursive thought. In Harris's ever deeper exploration of the unconscious, archetypal characters, the deepest embodiment of an ontology he has developed since *Palace of the Peacock*, illustrate the contradictory forces that humanity should face and learn to balance. Harris also denounces the devastatingly repetitive motivations by which societies keep operating. But only the individual consciousness of the protagonist, here Francisco Bone, an imagined former acolyte of Jones's, can contemplate repentance, a healing compassion and love. In Harris's latest fiction philosophical and self-reflexive dialogues on the relation between morality and creativity are woven into the fabric of "convertible imageries" and rich intertextuality through which he presents a vision inspired by the colonial and postcolonial experience but nevertheless stubbornly hopeful.

In contradistinction to Harris, V.S. Naipaul, the other major figure in West Indian fiction, has repeatedly expressed his skepticism about the form of the novel even while continuing to write fiction after 1970. In an early essay on "Conrad's Darkness," Naipaul stated that "the novel as a form no longer carries conviction ... there is a great confusion in the minds of readers and writers about the purpose of the novel" ([1980], 217-18), while twenty years and four novels later he wrote that "the novel has done its work" ([1994-b], 3). A 1985 remark, "I ... began to feel that those of us who had come after [the great nineteenth century work] were simply borrowing the form and pouring our own experiences into it" (Naipaul [1985], 5), seems curiously similar, at first, to Wilson Harris's objection to the Caribbean writers' use of the nineteenth-century model of the novel (see Harris [1967]). But whereas Harris, from his first published work of fiction on, discards the realistic mode of the English tradition, Naipaul's narratives have, if anything, become more realistic. He avowedly presents actual events or facts which he then analyzes, an analysis that turns into a meditation on life and the human condition in his last two novels.

Naipaul's own comments evince an obsession with "delivering the truth" ([1994-b], 3). This phrase recurs insistently in all his interviews, he means by it both factual accuracy and the more imaginative truth that facts reveal. Significantly, both *Guerillas*, 1975, and *A Bend in the River*, 1979, were preceded by essays on the same subject, respectively by "Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad" and by "A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa" (both reprinted in *The Return of Eva Peron*, 1980). Unlike the narratives in his two later novels, *The Enigma of Arrival*, 1987, and *A Way in the World*, 1994, historical events in both Trinidad and Zaïre are woven into an imaginary plot in *Guerillas* and *A Bend in the River*. *Guerillas* describes the involvement of two white liberals, a man called Roche and his mistress Jane, with Jimmie Ahmed, a character based on the real Michael de Freitas, alias Abdul Malik or Michael X, a Black Power militant who had founded an agricultural commune upon returning to Trinidad from England, took part in the 1970 uprising on the island, and was later hanged for murder. All the characters in *Guerillas* turn out to be powerless shams, the Third World idealists just as much as the self-deceived white liberals; real power lies in the hands of American Bauxite companies and other financial powers rooted in the slave past. Naipaul commented that, in this period of writing, he was no longer content to represent the world but had begun to analyze it (see Naipaul [1971], 62). What his critical analysis brings to light is the utter futility of enterprise in what he sees as second-rate societies. One character seems to sum up Naipaul's view when he states that "*The setting may change, but no one will make a fresh start or do anything new*" ([1980], 149). In this, as in most of Naipaul's fiction, one sees "a community without rules" and gets a "feeling of a dissolving world" (Naipaul [1975], 103, 74). An incapacity to think or act rationally, to establish some kind of order, and the underlying fear of inevitable failure that feeds a sense of frustration and resentment against the very white liberals who have sympathized without understanding the real situation, all combine to provoke incredible violence. Jane is sodomized by Jimmie, hacked to pieces by one of his acolytes and buried in a pit; all evidence of her presence in Trinidad is erased by a cowardly Roche who destroys her papers and runs away, his last words to Jimmie being "We are leaving you alone" (253).

Apart from its symbolic political meaning, the fate meted out to Jane reveals a disturbing recurring feature in Naipaul's treatment of women, white women in particular, as when Salim, the protagonist of *A Bend in the River*, breaks with his mistress, another white liberal; he beats her black and blue, then spits between her legs. Such a scene arouses the reader's revulsion both from the scene and from the protagonist; it is not a mere side issue, for the characters involved are all equally contemptible and show in personal relationships the

same self-interest and disregard for the other human person as they do in their public roles. Admittedly, Salim, who has traveled from East Africa and settled in Zaïre as a shopkeeper, is more observer than participant, in spite of some painful experiences. He finally escapes to London, among the last to leave just before a civil war and the accumulated rage of the Africans further devastate a country already ravaged by anarchy since the end of the colonial rule, bled by the dictator and the foreign powers that keep him in place. Naipaul's clear-sighted and unfortunately prophetic critique of Mobutu's Zaire may well make this his best novel. But as Salman Rushdie was to point out in a review of *The Enigma of Arrival*, 1987, Naipaul describes "life without love" ([1987], 13), a striking feature in Naipaul's fiction of the last twenty-five years apart from the affection for his family indirectly expressed in the last part of *Enigma*.

It may well be that the representation of an utterly inefficient, disorderly, and violent Third World in the aftermath of colonization is inspired by compassion (see Thorpe [1976], 39), though some readers and critics have appreciated this differently. The values that clearly underlie Naipaul's satire of those incapable of putting them into practice are order and the form of the civilization and culture of a European tradition sustained by the self-assured authority of its antiquity. Naipaul's attachment to these values is illustrated in his intertextual use in his fiction of the "great tradition" of the English novel (see Thieme [1987]). He was clearly hoping to enjoy the way of life that he thought coterminous with this European culture when he sought refuge in a Wiltshire cottage where "he was given a second chance, a new life, richer and fuller" (Naipaul [1987], 96). *The Enigma of Arrival* recreates the ten years he spent in this originally idyllic setting. It is indeed hard not to identify Naipaul with the unnamed narrator, a writer from Trinidad with exactly his experience of displacement and quest for a center, now seeking appeasement and solitude and given to self-analysis both as a writer and a man indelibly marked by his origins in a chaotic and "historyless" society. Although Naipaul still writes a classic prose with the same descriptive precision, this plotless novel shows a significant change in both subject and method. Apart from his retrospective meditation on his purpose and achievement as a writer, he concentrates on the lives of a few select individuals whom he first sees as deeply and securely rooted in a traditional way of life in the symbolical vicinity of Stonehenge, but then he comes to the conclusion that even there all is change, flux, and decay. The center itself has become void, while the writer performs what he now considers as the novelist's major task, that is, to meditate on facts observed and faithfully recorded. The ultimate development is that of a fiction largely inspired by non-fictional events, rather than predominantly imagined or "invented." For the role of the

imagination in *Enigma* lies in its fusion of a metaphysical reflection on death (see Crivelli [1993]) with self-reflexive comments on the purpose of writing. It has been suggested that the text's function is to unmask "the literary and cultural authority represented by England to the end of reconciliation of the self" (Tiffin [1989], 38).

Naipaul's latest novel, *A Way in the World*, 1994, is another autobiographical book mixing personal and collective history with meditation. He goes over his beginnings as a writer both in Trinidad and in London, introducing characters he later meets in different parts of the world and partly fictionalizes people who, whatever their temporary rise to importance, are failures at the core. He also returns to the material of *The Loss of El Dorado*, 1969, by presenting differently, but with equal stress on defeat, deception, and self-deception, the "unwritten stories" of Raleigh and General Miranda who, in the early nineteenth century, tried to free Venezuela from Spanish rule. Again, there is emphasis on the absence of order and values, on irresponsibility and on "memories of a cruelty present in all aspects of life" in the Trinidad of his youth (Naipaul [1987], 29, 79). Yet there is also nostalgia for the colonial landscape, now transformed, as he knew it in his childhood. The narrative comes full circle with the assassination in Africa of Blair, a clerk and temporary colleague in Naipaul's Trinidad youth, who became a United Nations counselor and was sent on a mission to Uganda. The wholly unheroic return of Blair's body to Trinidad appears to be symbolic of the lasting futility of the postcolonial endeavor to change the world for the better.

Like V.S. Naipaul, his younger brother, Shiva, won a scholarship to Oxford and after graduation began a literary career in the same realistic tradition of fiction and travel writing. If anything, Shiva Naipaul is even more pessimistic and scathingly critical of the Third World than is his brother. In "The Writer without a Society," the former repeats several times that Trinidad, "dull, empty and devoid of inspiration," could in no way feed the imagination and that even the attempt to forge a culture could not escape absurdity (S. Naipaul [1970-b], 116). Nevertheless, however critical he is of the society he came from, including his own East Indian community, his first two novels, *Fireflies*, 1971, and the *Chip-Chip Gatherers*, 1973, are set in Trinidad. In *Fireflies*, the rich Khojas and the Luchtmans (who replicate the family hierarchy of the Tulsis and the Biswases in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*) evince the cultural confusion resulting from their efforts to maintain Hindu customs while, at the same time, being unable to resist the appeal of Christian beliefs. After her husband's death, Mrs. Luchtman, the obstinate and resilient heroine of the novel, struggles to bring up her children, hoping that education will be their passport to a fuller life. But her sons fail and are ironically closer to the fireflies caught in a jam bottle by a boy so he can study by their light (his parents

are too poor to afford an oil-lamp) than they are to the boy himself, who ends up as a successful doctor. *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* is also a story of failure in a community dominated by cruelty and greed, except for the selfless dedication of women, while *A Hot Country*, 1983, later published as *Love and Death in a Hot Country*, is set in imaginary Cuyuma and blends the author's perceptions of Africa and Guyana. Shiva Naipaul's fiction is informed by his conviction that the society he wrote about was "fragmented and incoherent" ([1970-b], 122). He did not break away from the literary models – Jane Austen and Dickens – who, in his youth, conveyed to him what a novel ought to be. Rather, he implicitly suggested that the West Indian writer could not evoke, nor could a West Indian audience respond to, the sense of order underlying the English tradition. His career was cut short by his untimely death at the age of forty. Although one cannot say how he might have developed, his last books of essays point to an increasing interest in journalistic writing similar to his brother's work.

Death also interrupted the career of three writers of the older generation: John Hearne, Andrew Salkey, and Sam Selvon. John Hearne left an unfinished novel after he published *The Sure Salvation*, 1981, after twenty years of silence. This late novel differs markedly from his early fiction and no longer concentrates on the middle class in contemporary West Indian society. It takes place entirely on the slave ship *Sure Salvation* which illegally perpetuates the international slave trade into the 1860s. It has rightly been pointed out that the novel is polyphonic (see King [1982], 657), its narrative progressing through dialogue and a sweeping movement which throws light, by turns, on the inner self of the characters involved: the captain and his crew, but also the captive slaves. The novel's beginning evokes both "The Ancient Mariner" and Melville's *Benito Cereno*, but, except for the slaves' liberation at the end of the middle passage, those ultimately responsible for the horrors that have taken place remain imprisoned either in their own dreams of power or in their prejudices. Formally more ambitious and of a richer narrative texture than Hearne's early work, this novel also conveys a more pessimistic view of humanity.

Andrew Salkey, the author of more than thirty books, including poetry, essays and children's stories, published only one other novel after *The Adventures of Catallus Kelly*, 1969. *Come Home, Malcolm Heartland*, 1976, combines several themes explored by writers of the first generation: exile, a longing for home – at once a physical place, a familiar social context, and a psychological answer to alienation – and an idealistic (genuine or counterfeit) involvement in Third-World politics. Salkey's radical intellectual protagonist, who sincerely wants to help the oppressed of his country, becomes involved with black revolutionaries who are secretly working for racist governments, whether in prerevolution Portugal, White

Rhodesia, or South Africa. He sees them as imprisoned in a "spurious, melodramatic self-dramatizing fantasy" (Salkey [1976], 145). Yet, though aware of their play-acting, Malcolm Heartland does not realize how dangerous they are and disregards their attempts to prevent him from going home to Jamaica. On the day he is due to leave, they have him killed by one of the "oppressed" for whose sake he was going back. This victorious nihilism is another pessimistic comment on the failure of the Black Power movement to contribute to genuine revolutionary change.

In retrospect, it is possible to see Sam Selvon's whole fictional opus as an attempt to put on the literary map the experience of Caribbean people as they struggled to fit into the economic, social, and cultural scene of the modern world and, in the process, to present in his own original language an inside view of the Caribbean common man in all his complexity, resilience, and sustaining humor. Selvon's fiction in the second half of his career still concentrates either on Trinidad or on London, and on the difficulty, for most of his characters, to feel completely at home in one or the other. The implicit ideal informing his novels, though never fully actualized by his characters is, as he himself said in several interviews, the creation of a "third" race and an identity free of the divisive racial and regional/national allegiances within the Caribbean. This "third" race would also match Selvon's conception of universal man. "I am a citizen of the world," he declared, and of Moses Aloetta, the protagonist of his London trilogy, "I think of Moses as a Caribbean composite of every man" (Selvon [1996], 97, 111). At the same time, he considered himself to the end as deeply Trinidadian, hoping to create a Caribbean consciousness and "mind" (see Selvon [1995], 123, 125) in his inimitable "modified" English which, as Wilson Harris said, was "part of the consciousness of the narrator" in his novels (quoted in Selvon [1995], 116), and he pioneered the "meeting of orality and literacy" (Ramchand [1988], 108) later so well rendered by Earl Lovelace. However different in their writing Selvon and Harris may be, they both believe in a specific Caribbean sensibility and share the conviction that a composite Caribbean identity can represent universal humanity. But if Selvon himself proved that "he could easily fit into any culture" (Selvon [1996], 97) by moving happily to Canada after nearly thirty years of residence in Britain, Moses, perhaps because he is an ordinary man incapable of clearly conceiving and formulating his own potentialities, remains an exile in both London and Trinidad.

Most of Selvon's protagonists are working-class men, urban or agricultural in the Caribbean, immigrant workers in London. Selvon himself often returned to Trinidad and continued to represent the various conflicting constraints that his aspiring heroes attempt to

overcome. *The Plains of Caroni*, 1970, the fruit of a period of research on sugar production sponsored by Tate and Lyle, focuses on the effect of these pressures on the lives of East Indian workers. The intense love of Balgobin and Seeta is thwarted by her prearranged marriage to his brother. While the latter rises to the position of overseer and makes good financially, the disillusioned Balgobin concentrates all his energies on traditional cane-cutting. Toward the end of his life he desperately resists mechanization, armed with his cutlass, in a memorable battle against the mechanical harvester introduced by the company. As Balgobin is dying, he is saved from arrest by the revelation to Romesh, his university-educated nephew and plantation manager, that he is Balgobin's son. Pursued by the resentment of the East Indian workers, Romesh escapes to London with his white girl-friend, while Balgobin, the one who overcame the "metal Trojan Horse" (Selvon [1970], 68), is venerated like an epic hero. His heroism, both in his daily existence and for the preservation of an outdated way of life, recalls Poseidon in Wilson Harris's *The Secret Ladder*, 1963, and can be compared to both Harris's and Walcott's mythologizing of the experience of ordinary peasants and fishermen.

In *Those Who Eat the Cascadura*, 1972, Selvon recreates life on a cocoa estate owned by an Englishman before independence, illustrating in individual lives and in the relations between the white man's "great house" and the estate village "Sans Souci"(!), the colonial system and its attendant hierarchies never questioned by the totally dependent villagers. The love affair between Sarojini, the estate owner's unacknowledged daughter who is promised to the overseer Prekash, and a visiting Englishman interested in folk traditions and obeah is given a metaphorical dimension and enables Selvon to explore, and implicitly comment on, the social and political aspects of the colonial situation (Dance [1986], 444). Selvon's last two novels, *Moses Ascending*, 1975, and *Moses Migrating*, 1983, are sequels to *The Lonely Londoners* though not originally intended as parts of a trilogy. Twenty years after their early difficult years in London, the group of "boys" is dislocated, none of them having succeeded in making a satisfactory living, except comparatively, for Moses who has bought a dilapidated house in Shepherd's Bush. He is now a "landlord" in his "castle," refusing to let rooms to black men and former friends and resisting involvement either with the Black Power movement or the new wave of Pakistani migrants (many illegal) in London's migrant areas, though he gets mixed up with both against his will. He has chosen to live in the attic to view the world from above, employs an illiterate white Man Friday, Bob, to whom he teaches reading, and he has decided to become a writer and "compose" his memoirs. But he fails in all his efforts to achieve even his misguided notion of true Englishness; at the end of *Moses*

Ascending, Moses finds himself again in the basement, symbolically punished by his former "slave," Bob, for his sexual relations with the white Jeannie, while Bob keeps harassing the black Brenda without the slightest compunction.

Since Moses is the first-person narrator in both the second and third novels of the trilogy, he condemns himself in his own words through Selvon's masterly use of a dramatic irony which blends humor, wit, and a merciless satire to expose his protagonist's self-deceptive adherence to misunderstood English values, ridiculing both white prejudices and Moses's inability to break free from the colonial relationship and the colonialist stereotypes in which he is proudly indoctrinated. The subversion of these stereotypes is further carried out in *Moses Migrating*, 1983, where Moses decides to return home to Trinidad at the time of Carnival. He is accompanied by Bob and Jeannie and, like them, stays at the Hilton, ignoring his "Tanty Flora," who brought him up, until he comes upon her by chance. In the carnival procession, he impersonates Britannia as she is represented on preindependence coins, with Jeannie as his hand-maiden and Bob as his slave. While he is convinced that their group represents England's greatness as an imperial power and serves its cause, the onlookers and the jury interpret it as a satirical subversion of colonialism, and Moses wins the competition. As has been suggested (see Fabre [1995], 161), Moses does not see that his impersonation of Britannia is only an empty mask, and he misses the opportunity to graft himself back on his cultural roots, which he briefly rediscovered during the carnival celebrations. He leaves Trinidad feeling a traitor to his country, to Tanty Flora and to Doris who he had fallen in love with and intended to marry. At the end of *Moses Ascending*, Moses, confined to his basement room, had wondered "if [he] should start from scratch all over again" (Selvon [1975], 13). At the end of *Moses Migrating*, this seems exactly what he must do as he stands in the immigration line at Heathrow Airport. The officer makes him wait while Moses clutches his carnival silver cup like the Holy Grail, the ironical reward of his failed quest to come to terms with his authentic self. Selvon, who acknowledged in interviews that parts of himself went into the making of Moses, certainly succeeded in creating a distinct Caribbean consciousness expressed in his unique blend of Creole and standard English and, as Fabre comments, in molding "the folk-tradition of the Caribbean into a recognized literary form" (Fabre [1995], 162).

The disorientation and persistent destructive effects of the colonial experience on individuals and communities who have neither fully understood its real nature nor "digested" it remains an all-pervasive theme in the writing of the older generation and is shown to thwart

the potential creativity inherent in a truly liberated postcolonial consciousness. As opposed to Selvon's trilogy, George Lamming's last two novels, *Water with Berries*, 1971, and *Natives of My Person*, 1972, explore this theme in a tragic, allegorical mode through the experience of white colonizers in the seventeenth-century (*Natives of My Person*) and contemporary West Indians in London (*Water With Berries*), thus linking the two periods and the devastating effects of imperialism on both conquerors and their victims. Significantly, the major characters in *Water with Berries* are three expatriate artists going through a period of creative sterility largely due to their failure in personal relationships and their incapacity to come to terms with their historical past and connection with England. Teeton, a painter, escapes San Cristobal (Lamming's symbolic West Indian Island throughout his fiction, like Hearne's Cayuna and Naipaul's Isabella) thanks to his wife's relation with the American ambassador. But he cannot forgive her infidelity, and she commits suicide. So does Nicole, the American wife of Roger, a musician of East Indian descent, who repudiates her because she is pregnant and he cannot face their child's racial impurity. Derek, the actor, successfully plays Othello for one season, then is imprisoned in the role of a corpse until he "resurrects" himself from it and rapes his white co-actress onstage, thus enacting the Caliban stereotype assigned to the black man in the colonizer's imagination.

Water with Berries borrows its title from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which Lamming had closely scrutinized as an allegory of colonialism in *The Pleasures of Exile* and used as a referential frame in earlier novels. The major roles – Prospero, Caliban, and Miranda – are all shared here by at least two, sometimes three characters as a way of showing in each relationship the destructive influence of colonialism on colonizers and colonized alike. The most significant indissoluble bond is the one between Teeton and his landlady, Mrs. Gore-Brittain, or "The Old Dowager," for whom he feels deep affection until he realizes the extent of her power over him and the subconscious hatred unacknowledged by either. He kills her and burns her body, "burn[s] the Old Dowager out of his future" (Lamming [1971], 247). At the end of the novel, the three artists are awaiting trial for rape, arson, and murder, though there is a clear suggestion that the spiraling violence in which they have been involved is the unavoidable backfire of the violence suffered by the colonized and the only conceivable means of freeing themselves from their ambiguous relation with Britain. Lamming himself and some of his critics (see Tiffin [1979], 92, and [1986], 268) explain Teeton's murder of the Old Dowager as a necessary therapeutic step "to kill that whole area within himself that has been her creation" and "the drama of cleansing for a commitment towards the future" (Lamming [1988], 22, and [1973], 7). But apart from running counter to Lamming's assertions

that the West Indian artist cannot help being a descendant of both Prospero and Caliban and that reconciliation is possible through a redeeming collective "ceremony of souls" or dialogue between the living and the dead, the three artists' radical "purgation" places them on a par with the destructive imperialists in *Natives of My Person*, who are pursued by their past and cannot envisage a better future. In spite of a similar interest in history and an insistence on the need for a new Caribbean consciousness and vision, Lamming's position is here poles apart from the satirical Sam Selvon and the metaphysical Wilson Harris. Nevertheless, *Natives of My Person* does evoke *Palace of the Peacock* in its recreation of the colonizers' journey and the treatment meted out to women who are considered, like slaves, either "senseless creature[s]" or "cargo" (Lamming [1972], 16).

If Lamming, like Harris, insists on the necessity to face the legacy of the past, however painful, as a prerequisite to a modified consciousness, he is much more pessimistic about the possibility of such a change in the individual psyche and even more so about the effect of history on the community. *Natives of My Person*, his most complex and many-leveled allegorical novel, recreates the unauthorized voyage undertaken in the seventeenth century (and carefully documented by historical voyages) on the *Reconnaissance* by white colonizers with the purpose of founding a Utopian settlement on the Caribbean island of San Cristobal. While the commandant's motives seem at first laudable in his bid for freedom and his escape from the absolutism of his country's leadership with its all-powerful House of Trade and Justice (two obviously linked, if incompatible functions), it soon becomes clear that neither officers nor crew are prepared to revise the motives (greed and lust for power), prejudices, and unscrupulousness which lie at the root of both Caribbean and European history, Lime Stone, the metropolis, representing all imperial powers. One exception is the commandant who, on rereading (and, in a sense, revising) his diaries, realizes that if the territories where he intends to settle are virgin, it is because he is morally responsible for the extermination of the native tribes (see McDonald [1987], 81). Another exception is Priest who confesses in his journal his responsibility for the collapse of order within the officer's "orbit of power" which he chose rather than perform what he knew, half-deceptively, to be his duty "within the orbit of [the Lord's] mercy" (329). Together with his and the officers' ambiguous reluctance to be reunited with their wives, who have traveled separately on the *Penalty* and are waiting for them on San Cristobal, the commandant's awareness that his destructive past is before and not behind him makes him decide not to continue the voyage. This leads to the crew's mutiny; the commandant is murdered by Surgeon and Stewart, who are ignorant of his decision and are, in turn, shot by the commandant's cabin boy. The novel is nevertheless

open-ended in the ordinary crew's escape from the power conflicts and the officers' unredeemable mad impulses, as well as in the Lady of the House's assertion to the waiting women that they "are a future [men] must learn" (Lamming [1972-a], 351), although they, too, have encouraged the men in their barbarous ways by their submission. *Natives of My Person* remains Lamming's most impressive achievement, a polyphonic, self-reflexive narrative blending various modes of writing and bringing to light the many blind spots in the characters' consciousnesses, which prevent them from perceiving that freedom is not escape but requires a responsible moral choice. It also shows that, ultimately, such shortcomings partake of human nature and shape with equal forcefulness personal relations and public/collective/political behavior, the postcolonial present as much as colonial history, and that the only way towards a better society lies indeed in self-knowledge and in a morally creative vision.

In their different ways, Naipaul (in *Guerillas*), Salkey (in *Come Home, Malcolm Heartland*), Lamming (in *Water with Berries*), and even Selvon, humorously (in *Moses Ascending*) all explored the impact of the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in both London and the West Indies, whether on the individual (both the intellectual and the ordinary man) or on society. Most Caribbean artists were sensitive to the crisis in which the future of West Indians seemed to be at stake and felt compelled to examine the potentialities and the pitfalls of a commitment to race and revolutionary politics in order to achieve a genuine Caribbean consciousness. Michael Anthony's largely autobiographical early novels had given voice to the awakening sensibility of young West Indians of peasant, mostly illiterate background, an emerging awareness representative of their communities, showing from the inside and with a natural simplicity the ordinary person's consciousness of self and environment, a process other novelists postulated in more intellectual or abstract terms. Anthony again used a first-person narrator in a "mystery novel" (Carter [1987], 42), *All That Glitters*, 1981, in which twelve-year-old Horace Lumpres learns to discriminate between truth and falsity, "all that glitters." In *Bright Road to El Dorado*, 1982, Anthony offered a revised version of Trinidadian history through the eyes of a young Arawak, who succeeds in sending Antonio de Berrio and Walter Raleigh on a wild goose chase after gold. But in the late 1960s, after fourteen years in Britain, Anthony felt that he had lost touch with a changing Trinidad and he was trying to resist pressures on him to write novels of protest. He decided that his only option, if he were to go on writing, was to leave England and accepted a teaching position in Brazil where he stayed for two years before returning to Trinidad in 1970 (see Walmsley [1992], 104).

Streets of Conflict, 1976, inspired by Anthony's Brazilian experience, tends to confirm his conviction that he could not write about racial tensions and ideological causes without betraying his conception of fiction and his vision of reality. His attempt, in this novel, to integrate a rather complicated love story with the social upheaval and violence of the 1968 students riots in Rio de Janeiro is unconvincing, to say the least; it is an example of his confessed inability to deal with social and political issues as opposed to "the realities and nuances of West Indian social relationships" (Baugh [1995], 64) perceived through his portrayal of aspiring individuals. In *King of the Masquerade*, 1976, a children's novel, Anthony, like other West Indian novelists, particularly Earl Lovelace, presents the Trinidadian carnival as a metaphor for West Indian creativity and a potential instrument of social harmony. Unknown to his middle-class parents, who despise the folk culture of Trinidad as violent and vulgar, Alan Broomley, longing for self-fulfilment and recognition in the community, dons the mask of the Fool in *Twelfth Night* in the carnival parade and wins the first prize in the competition. As Fool turned calypsonian, he not only succeeds in harmonizing two cultural traditions but acknowledges his own roots in contradistinction to his father who is guilty of the very violence he denounces when he knocks down his disguised son as the latter is trying to embrace his mother. Through Alan's experience, however, Anthony reaffirms the strength of the folk tradition and imagination as the true expression of Trinidadian culture.

From a completely different perspective and in a much more ambitious form Michael Thelwell's *The Harder They Come*, 1980, deals, like Anthony's earlier fiction, with the experience of a poor country boy brought up by his grandmother, who leaves the magic world of his youth and emigrates to "Babylon," Jamaica's Kingston with its contrasting social spheres and surroundings: the exclusive areas where the wealthy hide protected by guard dogs and the squalid slums where deprivation and suffering inevitably lead to violence and crime. The novel turned into fiction a Jamaican film by the same title, inspired by the life of a reggae songwriter. Ivan Rhygin becomes a famous musician but is repeatedly frustrated by injustice and corruption, whether in church, business, or civil service. Losing faith in the values his grandmother instilled in him, he becomes a rebel who drifts into the ganja trade and a life of crime. He is killed in a confrontation with the police but immortalized as a hero by the young who carry on as rebels against an iniquitous system. *The Harder They Come* is a long, substantial novel that offers a composite picture of all aspects of Jamaican life, its landscapes and culture, in contrasting language registers, juxtaposing the third-person narrator's standard English with dialogues in Rastafarian language described as a "brilliant reproduction of the

folk speech" in Jamaica (Dance [1986], 459). Thelwell's novel is a significant example of the social realism he advocates as a critic, arguing that modernism "has had a corrupting influence on ... Caribbean fiction" and has been an excuse for avoiding "engagement with social and moral questions" (quoted in Gikandi [1992], 3). It fits in with a body of fiction shaped by the conviction that literary realism is the most suitable form to render the Caribbean people's culture, identity, and sociopolitical aspirations.

A similar search for authenticity runs through Earl Lovelace's writing, whose far more considerable achievement stands in this respect between Thelwell's novel and the fiction of Michael Anthony with whom he has often been coupled (see Barratt [1986] and Harney [1991]), though his recent novels show that he has moved with great assurance toward a more complex vision and rendering of Trinidadian society. But the emphasis in Lovelace's, as in Anthony's, fiction is on what has been called "selfhood," "personhood," and "peoplehood." Except for limited periods of teaching in America, Lovelace never emigrated and is said to live in a remote village in Trinidad. This may explain his attachment to Trinidad's landscapes as well as its strong peasant tradition and sensibility which, in Lovelace's fiction, are eroded by a colonial education or by neocolonial American capitalism. *The Wine of Astonishment*, 1982, published after *The Dragon Can't Dance*, 1979, was written first. It takes place in the village of Bonasse where a community of spiritual Baptists see their traditions disrupted when their religious practices are forbidden by law. They are also betrayed by the village schoolteacher, formerly of their group, who tells them "We can't be white, but we can act white" (Lovelace [1982], 13). Bolo, the village stickfighter (a "warrior" figure in Lovelace's fiction) resists the authorities and is killed by the police when he refuses to free the two girls he has taken as hostages. When the congregation (who had not supported Bolo) is allowed to resume its practices, they realize that they have lost touch with the "Spirit." On their way home, however, the religious leader and his wife Eva come upon a steelband and discover the same "Spirit" in the boys' music, a spirit not imposed from the outside but born of the people itself. The novel is told by a female narrator, Eva, whose vernacular is another expression of the "Spirit" and of literary authenticity. It has been suggested that, as a speaker, she sustains a patriarchal "authoritative masculinity" (the "drums and songs and warriors" emblemized by Bolo) represented before by white colonial power (Shetty [1994], 76). There are admittedly strong mothers but few women who share the burden of the quest for selfhood in West Indian fiction by male writers.

The Dragon Can't Dance brings together on Calvary Hill, a slum area in Port-of-Spain, characters who have mostly left a more secure and solidary, if poor rural community.

Many are jobless in keeping with a tradition of "Idleness, Laziness and Waste" (Lovelace [1979], 11), their only means of resisting colonial exploitation in the post-emancipation era. This is Aldrick Prospect's "philosophy" of life; year after year, he awakens from his lethargy to make the dragon costume into which he weaves his own and his people's history and sufferings, celebrating the people's culture and resistance to oppression through costume and dance in carnival. Fisheye, the "warrior," similarly asserts himself in the Hill's steelband, but Philo, the calypsonian, eventually escapes to a wealthy suburb when he becomes King. When carnival is taken over and regulated by rich sponsors, Fisheye, Aldrick and a few others rebel and capture a police jeep, proclaiming themselves the "People's Liberation Army" without any preconceived plan or ideology. While arousing sympathy for the rebels, uprooted workers who are victims of the economic situation, Lovelace nevertheless draws attention to the pitfalls both of a directionless rebellion and of a cultural event recuperated by those in power who encourage the poor to concentrate their expectations and energies on a brief manifestation rather than on steady, self-fulfilling endeavor. Already in the meaningless rounds in the police jeep, Aldrick "had a feeling of being imprisoned in a dragon costume on Carnival Tuesday" (77). In the years spent in prison, he understands the nihilism and omnipotence of his former passivity and avoidance of responsibility. It makes him take his life in his own hands in a spirit of hope (see 205) as he had once encouraged Sylvia, the girl he loves, to do. They eventually come together when she renounces marriage with wealthy Mr. Guy, the rent collector and city councillor. Though Lovelace clearly upholds the indigenous popular tradition and gives substantial form to its impact on the people's everyday life, he does not romanticize the subversiveness of its major expressions (carnival, steelband, calypso) but is careful to show that its potential dynamism (the dance of the title) depends on the individual's awareness of who he is and what the tradition really means to him. What Aldrick tells Sylvia applies to himself first: "You want to be a self that is free ... to grow ... to be yourself" (202).

To find one's own way and arrive "at a self" (Lovelace [1996], 254) is also central to *Salt*, 1996, which received the tenth overall Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1997. In a remarkably smooth but vivid and witty narrative, it blends together the tragic and the comic, all aspects of Trinidadian society in village and city, represents all classes and races (and their history) now inextricably mixed, and shifts unobtrusively between standpoints, including that of the white plantocracy. The repository of myth and history is Uncle Bango, a laborer on a creole estate who, in order to build the New World originally misnamed by the conquerors, has made it his life's mission to free his fellow villagers from the mental imprisonment, born

of historical servitude, that continues to plague the island's inhabitants indiscriminately. The other man with a mission is Alford George, an enthusiastic, obstinate teacher turned politician, who comes to understand first that he must educate the young to live *in* the island rather than prepare a few for higher education abroad, then that he must serve his village community rather than support demagogic, profit-making post-independence politicians. At the end of the novel, the young narrator of the beginning meditates that "the tragedy of our time is to have lost the ability to feel loss, the inability of power to rise to its responsibility for human decency." But he has learned "not to despair because of our errors or to be afraid to try again" (259). There is also in this novel a new recognition of the contribution of women to men's achievement. Another striking feature is the de-dramatization of tragic historical events, especially as told by Bango with a kind or innocent irony, not to minimize his people's sufferings but to stress their resilience and make them share his stubborn faith in their future. One of his best stories (which gives the novel its title) is of a slave ancestor, Guinea John, wanted for rebellion, who was wise and light enough to fly back to Africa to his pre-middle-passage family but could not be followed by the other slaves because they had eaten too much salt and were too heavy to fly. A widespread legend among slaves had it that Africans could fly before they started eating salt to compensate for their dehydration in the canefields (see also Cliff [1984], 63-64). Since slaves were also, like salt, currency and precious cargo, the novel's title may suggest that as long as Trinidadians do not liberate themselves from the psychological burden of this past, they will not be able to take imaginative flight toward a new life.

Similarly concerned with his countrymen's need for psychical liberation, Roy A.K. Heath belongs in age with the older generation of Caribbean writers. But his first novel was only published in 1974, and he therefore appears as a continuator, rather than a pioneer, of Caribbean fiction. Though he has worked in Britain as a teacher, and temporarily as a lawyer, for more than forty years, all his novels take place in his native Guyana where he returns regularly not to lose touch with his roots. Like Wilson Harris in *The Whole Armour*, he is sensitive to the topography of the country's settled areas, a narrow strip of land between the sea and the vast South American forests, the physical counterpart of the people's spiritual imprisonment. His fiction blends Amerindian myths, obeah, Hinduism, and Islamic beliefs (more than half of the Guyanese population is of East Indian origin) with the Protestant and Catholic legacies of the colonizers. But the cultural fusion that Guyanese society is in the process of achieving (see Heath [1992], 125) emerges in his last two novels only. Heath's treatment of the supernatural and some extravagant features in his narratives have elicited

comparison with Mittelholzer (see Munro [1984], 383), while Heath himself acknowledges influences as diverse as Amerindian storytelling and the nineteenth-century Russian novel. However, his fiction is extremely realistic, verging on naturalism even in the bleakness and determinism of the characters' daily life. This is particularly obvious in *The Murderer*, 1978, in which Galton Flood is so confined within a life of cruel repression, fear, and emotional sterility by his domineering and destructive mother that his relationship with his wife is doomed; he kills her when he hears that she has been unfaithful and ends up as a harmless lunatic walking the streets and repeatedly shouting "Don't cork the bottle."

Confinement to an inescapable glass sphere is also the condition of the Armstrongs, a middle-class family whose decline over two generations Heath follows in his Georgetown Trilogy, *From the Heat of the Day*, 1979, *One Generation*, 1981, and *Genetha*, 1981, named after the Armstrong daughter who is driven to prostitution in the brothel of the family's former servant. Heath's fiction centers on family life and relationships and seems to ignore the broader issues of race, politics, class, and gender that other Caribbean writers consciously explored. But these are part of the unconscious legacy of the Guyanese psyche, whose "hinterland" (Heath [1981-b], 58) or "unexplored countries of the heart" (Heath [1993], 168) Heath scrutinizes as his characters struggle, mostly in vain, to break through their "state of unfreedom" (Harris [1978], 656). While his novels express little concern for history, Heath still describes them as "historical" and considers that he shares a "social, cultural consciousness" with Wilson Harris (Heath [1992], 121, 136). This can be seen in *The Shadow Bride*, 1996, which returns to the theme of a difficult relation between a tyrannical mother and her son, a doctor aware of his East Indian inheritance but also conscious of the need to serve and mingle with the other races. Heath's 1996 novel, *The Ministry of Hope* (a title that echoes Orwell's sinister ministries in *1984*) is a sequel to *Kwaku, or the Man Who Could Not Keep His Mouth Shut*, 1982, named for its trickster protagonist. This is a more ambitious novel with new political overtones and a salutary meeting with Amerindians in the hinterland, a theme already tackled in *Orealla*, 1984. Unlike most characters in Heath's earlier fiction but like Dr. Singh in *The Shadow Bride*, Kwaku reaches self-knowledge and is spiritually redeemed, giving the novel's title an ambivalent meaning.

Since all West Indians descend from forced or voluntary migrations, throughout their history, first to the Caribbean and, after World War II, to Britain and North America, in some cases completing a triangular journey back to the Caribbean, the theme of exile remains central to Caribbean fiction wherever it is written. West Indian writers in Canada, though less numerous than permanent or temporary expatriates in Britain, form a growing and significant

body on the country's multicultural scene. Canada must be one of the very few countries in the world, if not the only one, whose multicultural policy was inscribed in the law by the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. Nevertheless, while recognizing the opportunities afforded by official policy, some West Indian writers denounce in essays or fictionalize what they see as insidious manifestations of racism or discrimination and also criticize their countrymen's attempts to fit into the prosperous, respectable white community at the cost of their cultural roots.

It has recently been demonstrated not only that African slaves were imported and held in bondage in Canada but that from the eighteenth century onward, there were writings by black Loyalists, slave narratives by African-American fugitives and the occasional writings on black religious communities. At the present time, African-Caribbean writers in Canada are sometimes considered as part of a larger group who emigrated from various African countries, though some descended from families long settled in Canada. George Elliott Clarke, for instance, is a seventh-generation Canadian, whereas Austin Clarke is a first-generation immigrant from Barbados. Austin Clarke's *Toronto Trilogy* is still thought to have first validated the African-Canadian experience in fiction. He has continued to explore the dilemma of the black West Indian who tries to fit into and to contribute to the Canadian cultural mosaic while retaining his racial integrity. His characters, however, are still affected by that now universal plight, alienation. It can take the form of deadness as in *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*, 1971, an ironical description of the protagonist who cuts himself off from the West Indian community for the sake of an illusory assimilation into white society. Alienation is also the condition of John Moore in *The Prime Minister*, 1977, who returns to Barbados to take up a high government position only to realize that he is a stranger in his birthplace, which is now overrun with tourists and plagued with prostitution and corruption. Clarke attributes the source of Caribbean alienation to a colonial education analyzed with comic but sharp insight in the autobiographical *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: A Memoir*, 1980. His next novel, *Proud Empires*, 1986, partly covers the same ground, dealing with education and the corruption of island politics in Barbados during an election, though it ends on a more optimistic note than *The Prime Minister*. After a long period of silence, Clarke published a new novel, *The Origin of Waves*, 1997, which centers on two boyhood friends from the Caribbean who meet in Toronto after half a century and catch up with their respective life story, gradually revealing truths hidden from each other and from themselves. Clarke's realistic narratives are sometimes uneven but are interspersed with highly comic scenes and lively dialogues, especially when they are set in the Caribbean. His 1996 novel has been hailed as the expression of a "vibrant literary renaissance" (Nurse [1997],

C1).

Understandably enough, since they are most familiar with their own background and experience, anglophone Caribbean writers have tended to write about their own race groups. There are notable exceptions such as Sam Selvon, whose fiction indirectly advocates racial integration, Wilson Harris with his characters of mixed ancestry, and Earl Lovelace who, in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, describes the repeated unsuccessful attempts of an East Indian character, Pariag, to become part of the Afro-Caribbean community on Calvary Hill. Writers of East Indian descent have drawn attention to the difficult choice their people faced between the preservation of a major old culture, static and sometimes empty of meaning because it has been cut off from its roots, and the possibility of an uneasy sociocultural integration. Moreover, just as Afro-Caribbean novelists have felt the need to come to terms with the legacy of slavery, so East Indians have analyzed the wounds and psychological traces of indentureship. A case in point is Harold Sonny Ladoo, a Trinidadian East Indian who had settled in Canada. *No Pain Like This Body*, 1972, is set in a rural backward East Indian community in Trinidad at the beginning of the century. It is a compassionate recreation of the trials of one family that barely subsists on a small allotment, poverty, uncontrolled passion, and bereavement driving them to degradation and even madness. Ladoo's posthumously published and unrevised second novel, *Yesterdays*, 1974, is far less successful in its somewhat farcical and repetitive account of a boy caught between the equally violent impositions of Canadian Christian educators and his Hindu father. He becomes so unsettled that he wants to travel to Canada with a "Hindu Bible" and start a mission school equipped with whips and torture chambers. One critic praised the novel as a "bittersweet comedy" (see Salick [1991]), attributing its ribaldry and scatology to the specific Indo-Caribbean peasant background in which, he argues, the book originated. Again, the intention behind the plot seems to be to portray the deprived condition of an acculturated community seeking self-expression in revenge and violence.

Also of East Indian origin but of a younger generation and of middle-class background, Neil Bissoondath, V.S. Naipaul's nephew, was acclaimed as a significant writer from the publication of his first book of short stories, *Digging Up the Mountains*, 1985, and, like his uncle, has since been a controversial figure among West Indian writers and critics both in the Caribbean and in Canada. His first novel, *A Casual Brutality*, 1988, was criticized for its negative picture of "Casaquemada" ("house burnt" in Spanish), a fictionalized Trinidad, and accused of playing up to white prejudice by accepting uncritically both colonial values and neocolonial power relations. The novel opens at the island's airport where Dr. Raj

Ramsingh is on the point of embarking alone for Canada, significantly without luggage. The novel's end picks up this scene as Raj flies back to Canada where he had taken his medical degree. Framed by these two scenes, the narrative alternates between his reconstruction of his first journey and his life in Canada as a medical student, then a doctor, and the evocation of his youth and recent stay on his native island with his wife and son after his return at the time of a short-lived oil boom. The ensuing slump and political unrest give rise to a spell of terrible violence during which his wife and son are murdered.

While Bissoondath's technical achievement and precise realism are generally admired, his portrayal of Trinidad is said to ignore and even negate the historical diversity, the pluralism and the creative culture of the Caribbean, presenting only a racially divided and class-ridden society. Ramsingh (and clearly Bissoondath himself) sees his native island as a place "of limited scope, of brutal past, hesitant present and uncertain future," where the individual faces "the impossibility of possibility" (Bissoondath [1988], 142, 268). Ramsingh is an unattached individual who confesses to never getting to know the grandparents who brought him up; he is not interested in their past (see 127), and his total lack of imaginative sympathy for, or even interest in, his own cultural roots undermines what he presents as the objectivity of his perception. Similarly, he has little interest in his wife to whom he has spoken only once with intimacy (see 295). At the end, however, Ramsingh achieves some self-knowledge, recognizes that he returned to Casaquemada out of self-interest at the time of the boom but asserts, in contradiction to his first statement about his leaving, that he now emigrates not to escape but to expiate, to turn "nothing into something, far from the casual brutality of collapse, far from the ruins of failure" (15, 378). Nevertheless, his return to Canada -- which he had made sure that he could go back to by taking Canadian citizenship just before leaving -- does look like an escape. The reader is left to wonder whether Bissoondath condones his narrator's vision and sees him as the inevitable product of his colonial and postcolonial condition whose complexities are not sufficiently substantiated in the narrative to elicit a clear answer. It also seems that no doubt is cast on the narrator's conclusion about the island's future: "So it has been. So it is. So it will remain" (378).

However, as Ramsingh's earlier experience in Canada shows, the challenge of meeting his future there is not unproblematic either. He shrinks from association with fellow expatriates (Bissoondath [1988], 162) and, like the author, in *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, 1994, clearly objects to Canada's policy of multiculturalism and ethnicity. Bissoondath's objection is that to perpetuate ethnic customs and a sense of belonging to one's country of origin can only make for division and prevent integration. He

himself simply wants to be a Canadian, not an Indo-Trinidadian Canadian, just as he wants his novels to be "universal" and present universal situations and emotions. The trouble is that, however defensible such a position may be, literary universality even as a specifically Western conception is seldom the fruit of a deliberate intention or ambition. In spite of cultural globalization, few writers are genuinely "international," and universal masterpieces are usually rooted in particularized cultures explored with understanding and compassion, qualities that can hardly be compensated for by what one critic called Bissoondath's "bleak honesty" (Thorpe [1991], 9). His second novel, *The Innocence of Age*, 1992, concentrates on a white Canadian protagonist and his estranged son, whose wanderings through Toronto make them aware that the city is rapidly and constantly changing, the ups and downs of some areas suggesting similar movements in the life of individuals and social groups. The novelist's intention seems to be to universalize the migrant's plight – one can be a migrant in one's own country – seen as an aspect of the mutability of existence and, as has been pointed out, to "deconstruct" such categories as "ethnic fiction" or "migrant writing" (Van Toorn [1994], 89).

Of the same generation as Bissoondath and, like him, at first a short story writer, Lawrence Scott is a European Creole from Trinidad who now lives in Britain; he has published a highly original novel, *Witchbroom*, 1992. The author's acknowledgments of his indebtedness to older West Indian artists and his recreation of Caribbean history and myth clearly place him in a specifically Caribbean tradition. But in spirit, this novel of epic dimension belongs with the work of a new generation who, while aware that the terrible legacies of the past still influence the social and political complexities of the present, envisages a Caribbean future in terms of reconciliation and possibility. The narrative consists of an overture – music and later painting alternately animate the novel's texture – and of two groups of "Carnival Tales" recreating the pre- and post-independence eras, separated by the first narrator's self-analytical diary. As he is on the point of closing down the old family house, he evokes fairly similar events as the tales, though in a more matter-of-fact way and "in a plainer style" (Scott [1992], 95). The "Carnival Tales" recreate the history of a Spanish family since the conquest of the New World, the Monagas de los Macajuelos, and are told by Lavren, their last descendant and the first narrator's "alter ego" (2). The tales are inspired both by Marie Elena, his mother and muse, and by the stories his second mother and Black Nanny, Josephine, used to tell him. Lavren is something of a mythical character, "archetypal" in Wilson Harris's sense of the word, a hermaphrodite who "levitated between worlds. S/he hung between genders. S/he trembled between loves and desires. S/he was pigmented between races. S/he stretched her young body between continents and hung about her neck this

archipelago of islands" (12). As a kind of vessel voicing the dreams, ambitions, and sufferings of all strata, genders and races of West Indian society while overlooking the Gulf of Sadness and occasionally swimming in its undercurrents, Lavren seems to have emerged from the depths of Caribbean experience, conscious that the one task he must never relinquish is "remembering." His brothers and his sister have dispersed, "fleeing and fragmenting the family in their fear and guilt, their obsession with pigmentation" (224), and he alone remains to remember the guilt and pain of the past, as well as love and dedication. If the story of the white plantocracy largely dominates the narrative, it is by way of a confession, while Josephine's role in the lives of her masters shows how inextricably interdependent blacks and whites are: on the day of her mistress's delivery, Josephine gives birth to a son also conceived by Lavren's father when he seduced her on his own marital bed. The novel ends on J'ouvert morning (from "jour ouvert"), suggesting the openness and the promise of the future, when the first narrator realizes that he has been Lavren all along, the composite consciousness and conscience of the Caribbean. At the novel's very end, "the memory of treachery and cruelty" endures, and the vestiges of a long history of exploitation and torment are still seen. Finally, the old plantation house, derelict and eaten up by a parasite worse than the witchbroom that entailed the family's ruin (slavery and indentureship), disappears, and there remains only an absence full of "remembered selves" (272). This beautifully written novel blends the tragic with the comic, eccentric behavior with silent suffering, and sacrifice with love, while the fluidity and empathy of the exploring, sensitive consciousness points to a new course in the Caribbean imagination.

Scott's second novel *Aelred's Sin*, 1998, further develops a theme adumbrated in *Witchbroom*, the overwhelming ambivalent influence of the Creole Catholicism on Jean Marc de la Borde (the Aelred of the title), also a white planter's son. He joins an English monastery (formerly an estate built on the proceeds of the slave trade) at the age of nineteen after the tragic death of Ted, his mixed-race youthful love who was challenged by hostile schoolboys to jack-knife from a high rock. In the monastery Aelred falls in love with an older monk, his mentor, then with a young novice, and strives to sublimate his sexual passion into spiritual love and conciliate it with the monastic discipline and vow of chastity. Gradually his idealization of both homoeroticism and love of God combine with his apprehension of the cruelties of racism. Cleaning the painting of the eighteenth-century owner of the estate – which represents an African boy kneeling by his master – he recalls his black nanny's story of Mungo, a young slave hanged for trying to escape. Aelred calls the boy in the painting Jordan and fictionalizes his life from his capture in Africa, his enslavement in Antigua, and his death.

Hunted by his master's hounds, Jordan plunges into a river and, like Ted, dies when his head strikes a rock. Aelred's own thwarted emotions and suffering enhance his compassion for the torments imposed on Ted, Mungo, and Jordan by a similar inhuman intolerance. When he dies, presumably of AIDS, some years after leaving the monastery, his younger brother Robert, who runs the family plantation, comes to England. As both third-person and I-narrator, he reconstructs Aelred's life from his journals and letters while on a moral journey of his own. For Aelred, and years later Robert, the experience of Ted, Mungo, and Jordan urges them to come to terms with the racism and guilt in their own, and the West Indian, past. Writing about it is also an initiation into art and, as in other recent West Indian novels (see Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*), it brings out the close links between Caribbean and English social history.

Also of Trinidadian origin, but based in the United States and Spain, Robert Antoni has much in common with Lawrence Scott, not least a faith in a remembering of formerly antagonized racial groups. Antoni's impressive first novel, *Divina Trace*, 1991, deals, like *Witchbroom*, but on a more playful and daring mode, with the complex genealogy and history of the Caribbean and celebrates its multiculturalism, an aspect of West Indian identity hardly ever pictured by white creole writers, not even by Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. Seven voices, speaking from different social, racial, and sexual perspectives, help the ninety-year-old central narrator, John Domingo Jr, to chart the mysterious story of Magdalena, a nun *cum* whore who has been canonized by the folk. These voices also trace the short life of her frog-like son, perceived as both a fantastic being (a "diab-crapochild" [Antoni (1991), 69] in the words of Evelina, the obeah woman) and a congenital monster suffering from anencephaly, a tension between "superstition and science" (Rollins [1993], 72) typical of the novel's hybrid spirit. What follows is a visionary journey into a violent past, made up of rapes and incest, yet ending in forgiveness, through which the narrator discovers his "other I. Not the imagined I but the I of my imagination: the imagining I" (Antoni [1991], 170) and explores the collective memory of Corpus Christi, the fictional island reminiscent of Trinidad where the novel is set. The text's stylistic and formal exuberance, inviting comparisons with novels by James Joyce and Gabriel García Márquez, gives *Divina Trace* a surreal touch. Yet some critics believe that Antoni's overblown prose is more likely to alienate readers, as in the abstruse central section, narrated by Hanuman, the monkey god, and appropriately written in a simian gibberish full of well-hidden ironic allusions. One might argue, however, as the narrator does in relation to the testimony of Mother Superior Maurina (a Molly-like monologue without punctuation, mixing Latin, Spanish and onomatopoeia) that, "through [its] sensory overload," this incantatory

novel can manage "to tap some source deeper than [one's] conscious mind, deeper than reasoning and touching and actually tasting" (157). While addressing by now common postmodern issues such as the meaning of language and the relativity of historical truth, *Divina Trace's* originality lies mainly in its vivid representation of a cross-cultural Caribbean as "one big callaloo with all of we boiling up swimming together inside, and nobody could know any longer who was who and what was what, much less care to make a difference" (365). One finds a similar interest in syncretism in Antoni's more recently published novel *Blessed is the Fruit*, 1997. Its lush and lyrical narrative centers on two thirty-three-year-old women living on the island of Corpus Christi in the late 1950s: white Lilla, an impoverished estate owner, and black Vel, Lilla's servant, at once her "opposite" and her "own twin sister" (31). As Vel is recovering from a failed abortion in her mistress's bed, the two women evoke their often difficult past and try to make sense of their "collective Caribbean fate" (51) beyond the constraints of race and class. This deep-running complicity, testifying to a conciliatory mood that also characterizes the writing of younger Caribbean writers in Britain, is embodied by Bolom, Vel's yet unborn child, to whom the two women tell their complex life stories.

If the arrival in Britain of writers such as Wilson Harris, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, and Sam Selvon led to a new West Indian consciousness and an unprecedented creative boom, it also paved the way for a new generation of writers of Caribbean origin who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s. Either born or brought up in England, these younger artists are still caught between a Caribbean ancestry to which they remain attached and the British culture in which they grew up. In a sense, then, their attempts to build bridges between these two poles resemble the reaction of their predecessors to the cultural "schizophrenia" inherited from colonialism, although what was for them a source of conflict, albeit creative, has now become the carrier of a richer, pluricultural consciousness. For the two groups of writers, fiction is part of a process of self-discovery manifest, for example, in their common predilection for the Bildungsroman. Yet, the endeavors of the younger writers to find a genuine identity seem to rest on a more confident sense of belonging to British culture, however tempered this feeling may be by the racism they still face and the supranational ethos to which many of them tend to subscribe as citizens of a global world. Their border writing can thus be said to contribute to the definition of a displaced and increasingly universal Caribbean identity, while simultaneously taking part in the construction of a new, heterogeneous Britishness.

In spite of the discrimination rampant in the Thatcherite Britain of the 1980s, the fiction by the descendants of Caribbean immigrants has rarely been one of social protest,

unlike much of the poetry written during the same period. Only a handful of minor novels, mostly written by novelists of Jamaican descent, have taken as their direct subject the anger and frustration of the new generation who, in the wake of the 1981 Brixton riots, came to the realization that their parents had been lured to Britain by false promises. Two examples of this trend are Norman Smith's *Bad Friday*, 1982, and David Simon's *Railton Blues*, 1983, written in adapted forms of Jamaican English. Whereas their protagonists see exile in Britain very much as a new form of slavery, they never express nostalgia for the Caribbean. In the same vein, Amon Saba Saakana's *Blues Dance*, 1985, draws upon dub and reggae to depict a violent and racist London.

That social realism is a marginal genre in recent Caribbean fiction in Britain should not be taken to mean that this body of novels is impervious to its social and political surroundings. On the contrary, in spite of their frequent temporal and spatial distantiation from contemporary Britain, these narratives can be read as allegories of life in a modern, multicultural society. By and large, the major novelists of the post-*Empire Windrush* generation write in a revised realistic vein, integrating deliberate intertextuality, polyphony, structural disruption or even, as in Fred D'Aguiar's *Dear Future*, 1996, tinges of magical realism. As Mario Relich put it in relation to David Dabydeen's prose, "beneath the limpid surface lurk endlessly explosive undercurrents of literary, cultural and historical debate" (Relich [1993], 56). While such subversions of the traditional realistic narrative might be ascribed to the familiarity of writers, who are also academics, with current literary theories and postmodernist techniques, they are more likely to emanate from a double authorial intention: the wish to decolonize their writing by questioning the epistemological and ontological premises of Western thought, while also expressing a desire to continue, and simultaneously depart from, the Caribbean literary tradition represented by the former generation and thereby to give voice to a new displaced, yet idiosyncratic Caribbean sensibility. Perhaps another explanation for this departure from conventional realism also is that, unlike their predecessors, the second generation of writers are no longer affected by a "burden of revelation" (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe [1987], 83), that is, they do not have to explain themselves to an audience but can rely on the readership created by their precursors (D'Aguiar [1993], 141).

Caryl Phillips, who was born in St Kitts and arrived in England when still a baby, stands out as the most original and versatile among the new Caribbean voices. He is also a prolific playwright, television and radio scriptwriter, essayist and editor, which is not without relevance to his fiction. His collection of essays *The European Tribe*, 1987, is a case in point

for its indictment of European racism gives a more political edge to his often restrained narratives. Moreover, as it probes the identity quandaries of a Caribbean migrant living in the West though not fully of it, this volume sheds light on the predicament of a whole generation of writers, very much as George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* had done for the novelists of the 1960s. Although there are major differences between Phillips's early and later novels testifying to an impressive capacity to develop, his fiction could well be read as a single book starting from the concrete Caribbean exilic condition and developing into a complex diasporic vision or, in the novelist's own words, "a sort of late twentieth-century aesthetic which reaches out beyond the Caribbean" (Phillips [1991-c], 605). In addition to a pervasive concern with displacement, which he has explored from many angles, Phillips is also obsessed with the misrepresentations of history which he feels his moral responsibility as a writer to address. Therefore his novels often focus on marginalized individuals silenced by hegemonic systems, whether colonialism, patriarchy, or Christianity. His sympathetic recreation of female voices bespeaks an exceptional capacity to render a character's inner thoughts as well as a great sensitivity to sexual oppression.

Phillips's first two novels deal with the tense relation between the Caribbean and Britain that has crucially shaped his art. *The Final Passage*, 1985, tells the story of Leila, a young West Indian woman who journeys, in the 1950s, from her prison-like Caribbean island to an unwelcoming London. The novel's open ending does not completely alleviate the despair of Leila who is shattered by England's coldness and by her husband's selfishness. In keeping with Phillips's double allegiance, *The Final Passage* is as much about British as about Caribbean history, for if it explores the reasons that drove Caribbean people to undertake the quasi-mythical journey to the colonial Motherland, it equally chronicles the changing face of Britain in the postwar years. Though a modest novel written in a deceptively plain, yet lyrical prose, it nonetheless prefigures features of Phillips's more mature writing: a tendency toward ambivalence as well as a preference for form over plot. One can also see in Leila, who bears a striking resemblance to Jean Rhys's victimized heroines, a prototype of the alienated and enigmatic Phillips character who finds it difficult to communicate with others but whose often vain efforts to survive finally command respect.

In spite of a predictable narrative, *A State of Independence*, 1986, offers a critique of neocolonialism in St Kitts, the more perceptive for being the fruit of the author's "stereoscopic vision" as both insider and outsider of the society he depicts. Its main protagonist, Bertram Francis, decides to go back to his native Caribbean after two decades in Britain. Confronted with the corruption of local politicians and his own incapacity to act, he intuits that nothing

can ever be achieved if the past is ignored. His return, fraught with cultural and emotional difficulties easy to imagine, conveys the tragic fate of the immigrant who can "never go back home and be happy" (Phillips [1982], 47), an understandably favorite theme with exiled writers of the first but also the second generation as is obvious in Joan Riley's *A Kindness to the Children*, 1992, and Vernella Fuller's *Going Back Home*, 1992.

With *Higher Ground*, 1989, Phillips's fiction takes a departure toward greater formal sophistication, though some reviewers interpreted this as artistic failure. Its vaster historical and topological scope encompasses Africa, the Americas, and Europe, the three key components of cosmopolitan Caribbeanness. *Higher Ground* consists of three apparently unrelated stories, each giving voice to a suffering and isolated individual "trying to survive a journey" (Phillips [1989], 218) whose plight can be read as an allegory of the alienated and exiled West Indian moving from enslavement and bondage to life in a Western metropolis. A nameless African working as an agent for white slave-traders on the West African coast is the narrator of "Heartland," the first section set in the eighteenth century. "The Cargo Rap" is made up of the letters sent by Rudi, a black American prisoner in the 1960s. The focus of "Higher Ground," the third part, is Irina, a Polish Jew exiled in post-war Britain. By bringing these three stories together, Phillips invites his reader to see them, from a kind of moral higher ground, as the complementary facets of a human condition he views in terms of captivity and oppression, made perhaps more bearable for being shared and resisted by men and women from different continents and times. *Cambridge*, 1991, mostly takes place on a nineteenth-century Caribbean plantation. Written in a pastiche of confessional literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely travel writing and slave narratives (see O'Callaghan [1993-b]), it centers on two characters: Emily, a thirty-year-old Englishwoman who has just arrived to survey her absentee father's sugar estate, and Cambridge, a slave born in Africa whose education and conversion to Christianity marks him as a threat to white plantocracy. Although both are finally crushed by slavery and the violence of the colonial society, Emily's vision eventually begins "to pulsate with a new and magical life" (Phillips [1991-a], 182), which indicates, as Wilson Harris's fiction has repeatedly shown, that human imagination can survive and even benefit from the worst adversity. The masterly mixture of good faith and self-deception inscribed in the discourses of the two protagonists provides a powerful anatomy of the paradoxes and psychological processes underlying Caribbean history. *Cambridge* is often regarded as Phillips's masterpiece because of its subtle yet powerful irony which constantly questions the notion of truth and, according to Paul Sharrad, "works to turn monologue into dialogue" (Sharrad [1994], 213).

Like *Higher Ground* and *Cambridge, Crossing the River*, 1993, rests on a recreation, without sentimentality or moralism, of unheard voices from the past, a strategy that conveys Phillips's belief in the novel as "an incredibly democratic medium" (Phillips [1991-b], 98) but also as a revisionary tool. This fragmented novel spans two hundred and fifty years of black Atlantic history and opens with a guilty African father who sold his children to an English slave-trader in the eighteenth century. The body of the book is made up of the "many-tongued chorus" (Phillips [1993], 1) of his children dispersed in time and space: Nash, a nineteenth-century liberated slave sent as a missionary to Liberia; Martha, a pioneer in the American Wild West; and Travis, a black GI posted in Europe during WWII but also Joyce, the working-class Englishwoman who becomes Travis's wife. While the jubilant epilogue brings the voices of the African Diaspora together and points to the possibility of cross-culturality, of crossing the river of man-made prejudices, the rest of the novel suggests that this remains a complex and never-completed process, constantly threatened as it is by tribalism and obsession with racial difference. This is even more fully demonstrated in *The Nature of Blood*, 1997, which is mostly set in a Europe hostile to what it regards as the outsiders in its midst. The novel combines, in another puzzle-like narrative, a haunting evocation of the Holocaust as seen through the eyes of Eva Stern, one of its victims, with the Israelis' discrimination against Ethiopian Jews, a connection that Phillips uses to show that "man learns little from history" (Phillips [1998], 7). The novel also interweaves a lyrical reworking of *Othello* (with the African general as central consciousness) into dry and biased accounts of Jewish persecution in fifteenth-century Venice. Here again, as in *Higher Ground*, Phillips approaches the Jewish experience with sympathy and obliquely suggests a parallel with the black history of homelessness and exclusion, a traditional comparison in Caribbean thought that informs Rastafarian ideology but is also tackled in novels such as Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, 1969, and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*, 1984. Nevertheless, despite Eva's suicide and Othello's bitter thoughts, the vision of the world offered in *The Nature of Blood* is not wholly negative for it points again and again to man's universal need for love and irrepressible capacity to maintain hope in the face of adversity.

The need, and the difficulty, to unearth the repressed traumas of history, which runs as a leitmotiv in Phillips's later fiction and may be part of a quest for a postmigratory self-definition, is also central to *The Longest Memory*, 1994, the first novel by Guyanese-born Fred D'Aguiar, also an acclaimed poet and playwright. Set on a Virginian plantation at the turn of the nineteenth century, *The Longest Memory* is built around the figure of Whitechapel, an old, obedient slave (the "master of his own slavery" [D'Aguiar [1994], 27]), who reports

the escape of his rebellious son to the plantation owner and thereby causes him to be whipped to death, an act of betrayal illustrating the issues of responsibility and loyalty conflicts in an oppressive system. In spare, though vibrant prose, the novel then branches out from this central event into the testimonies of its many protagonists: the master, his daughter, the overseer, the runaway son and his mother, whose intertwined voices evoke the "prodigious carpet" (33) that the complex history of the Americas has helped to weave. Like Phillips, D'Aguiar chooses to dwell on the unchronicled aspects of slavery, viewing it from a human rather than an institutional perspective, thus examining the many ambiguities hidden behind its monolithic facade. Although he refutes any autobiographical dimension at the beginning of *Dear Future*, 1996, D'Aguiar may have drawn upon his own Guyanese childhood to create in this novel the village of Ariel and its colorful inhabitants, among them Red Head, a nine-year-old boy who longs to be reunited with his mother, an immigrant in England. After receiving a head injury, he alternates between reality and a dream-like dimension, a limbo from which he writes letters to "Dear Future," his only hope of change. The episodic narrative, full of macabre humor, addresses the corrupting effects of power, the destruction of nature and traditional culture by progress symbolized here by a black tarmac road "running through the heart of the land" (D'Aguiar [1996], 25), and the disruption of family life caused by migration, all problems that affect present-day Caribbean societies and ironically threaten the "Dear Future" the boy puts so much faith in. But the immense creative resources of ordinary people, their genuine racial pluralism in a racially polarized country as well as the warmth of their extended families are presented as possible if endangered alternatives to the scourges of modernity. In his next novel, *Feeding the Ghosts*, 1997, D'Aguiar reverts to the slave experience and recreates from the victim's point of view the conditions of the Middle Passage and the poorly documented practice whereby ships' captains would throw presumably sick slaves overboard, then claim compensation from insurance companies, rather than risk financial loss if their "stock" did not fetch a good price at market. D'Aguiar's narrative is based on an actual event, the jettisoning of 132 live slaves by the captain of the *Zong* (also mentioned in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*), who later faces the insurers at a trial presided by Lord Mansfield, himself a slave owner. The prologue, a prose poem evoking human bodies gradually melting into the rolling waves (see also David Dabydeen's poem *Turner*), their voice speaking through the wind, transmutes and amplifies Derek Walcott's "the sea is history" into "the sea is slavery." The principal narrative strand contrasts the captain's treatment of the slaves as cargo with their suffering and terror as perceived through the consciousness of Mintah, a mission-educated young woman, who was also thrown overboard

but managed to climb back on board. From her hiding place she writes a journal that is produced at the trial by the sailor who helped her. The judge quite predictably ignores the journal as ghost-written; but for Mintah writing her slave narrative is a duty and a tribute to the dead that keeps their memory alive. The powerful reconstruction of the Middle Passage is interwoven with a striking sea, wind, and, above all, wood imagery. Mintah, who has learned carving from her father, later carves 131 statues of the nameless ghosts buried in the oceanic vault as another act of memory: "The ghosts feed on the story of themselves. The past is laid to rest when it is told" (D'Aguiar [1997], 230).

Like Fred D'Aguiar, David Dabydeen is a prize-winning poet of Guyanese origin. However, he diverges from his fellow-countryman in that his fiction is written from a recognizably Indo-Caribbean perspective, which is not to suggest that it is narrowly ethnocentric. On the contrary, its many allusions to the racial tensions in his native country show that Dabydeen, like Grace Nichols or Janice Shinebourne, other Guyanese novelists of his generation, is aware of the destructiveness of racial essentialism. His novels are therefore imbued with a sense of the cultural plurality of West Indian identity, encapsulated in the parting words "you is we" (Dabydeen [1991], 40) uttered by an African character to the nameless narrator of *The Intended*, 1991, as he leaves his Berbice village for England. This commonality is also illustrated in his third novel, *The Counting House*, 1996, where the exploitation of the African slave Miriam by the white plantation owner foreshadows the lot of the freshly arrived indentured East Indians.

As is often the case with first novels, *The Intended* is largely autobiographical. The London experience of its teenage narrator is interspersed with long flashbacks evoking his childhood in a violent, yet warm Guyana, which reveals Dabydeen's talent for bringing minor characters to life, in a way reminiscent of V.S. Naipaul's early fiction. The novel captures the narrator's inner division between his ambition to belong to the center symbolized by the University of Oxford which he finally reaches, and his attachment to his "dark self" (Dabydeen [1991], 196) embodied by his Rastafarian friend Joseph Countryman. Joseph's intuitive imagination works as a foil to the apparent calm and order of Western academia and, in a subtle twist of irony, informs the whole novel, not only its broken structure and imaginative prose but also its use of Creole in which the absence of grammatical distinction between past, present, and future is, for Dabydeen, evocative of the migrant experience (Dabydeen [1990], 179). While *The Intended* has been read as a metaphor for the dilemma of the exiled post colonial intellectual caught between "resistance and complicity" (see Fee [1993]), it can also be interpreted as a subversion of the traditional apprenticeship novel (see Relich [1993]) or as

an example of literary decolonization through its "creation of a new literary aesthetic independent from the cultural hegemony" (McIntyre [1996]) which transpires, for example, in its complex reworking of *Heart of Darkness*, evoked by the title.

In *Disappearance*, 1993, the central character is an Afro-Guyanese engineer who has been sent to Dunsmere, a village near Hastings, to help consolidate its crumbling foundations, an obvious reference to a decaying empire. In spite of its obtrusive symbolism and self-conscious writing that refer back to Wilson Harris's *The Secret Ladder* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, the novel is a sensitive rendering of a colonial journey from illusion to disillusion. While the narrator used to view Englishness as essentially rational and restrained, he is initiated into its darker sides by two fellow outsiders in the village, the eccentric Mrs. Rutherford and the Irishman Christie, an experience that leads him to greater awareness through a reappraisal of the "sorrow of ancestral memory" (Dabydeen [1993], 17). Dabydeen himself achieves a similar repossession of the past in his third novel, *The Counting House*, 1996. If Phillips and D'Aguiar retrieve the slave past in their fiction, Dabydeen returns to indentureship, a subject rarely tackled by West Indian novelists of the previous generation. *The Counting House* focuses on Rohini and Vidia, two poor Indian peasants who migrate to British Guiana in the nineteenth century at the time of the Indian Mutiny, lured by promises of wealth and romance. But, as Rohini's childlessness conveys, the new land proves a mirage. The couple gradually drifts apart, their relation strained by their differently channeled ambitions which are symbolized by the title's counting house. Thanks to a kaleidoscopic perspective including the points of view of parents and friends of the young couple, Dabydeen portrays Indian and Guianese societies without idealizing them: while his India is plagued by endemic starvation and a rigid caste system, the Guiana he describes is riddled with destructive greed and violence. Hardly disguised authorial explanations about Indian customs occasionally mar the novel, yet it provides a cogent if bleak account of "coolie" experience as well as an enlightening analysis of the tense relationships between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese that still affect contemporary Guyana.

In *Hogarth's Blacks*, 1985, a book on eighteenth-century English art, Dabydeen presented an exhaustive analysis of Hogarth's serial paintings entitled *A Harlot's Progress*. His eponymous novel, 1999, is, in his own words, a "reconfiguration" of the paintings (Wasafiri [1999], 29). Indeed, the central character and narrator is a black slave who usually figures on the margins or in the background of Hogarth's paintings. As he lies on his deathbed, Mungo (an imposed name later changed to Noah, then Perseus) is pestered by a Mr. Pringle, an abolitionist in whose eyes he is only a "ruined archive" (Dabydeen [1999], 3, 36).

Pringle himself wants to write an "epic" of the slave's adventures to promote his cause. Pringle's insistence kindles Mungo's consciousness but he gives Pringle scant or false information ("I can change memory," 2). Mungo refuses to have his story and the suffering of his people appropriated and turned into a sensationalized account. He creates instead a narrative of his own including alternative versions of experiences ranging from his early childhood in Africa to his capture, sodomization, and conversion to Christianity by Captain Thistlewood, his sale to Lord Montague, then to the Jew Gideon who appoints him servant to the prostitute Moll Hackabout. The novel's message is clearly that in the corrupt, mercantile society of the time, when human beings were commodities, everyone was enslaved by other humans, by cupidity or ideology, or by all three. The novel's most remarkable feature is the complete symbiosis between form and content. The multiplicity of viewpoints adopted by Mungo is matched by an equal multiplicity of language registers, pidgin alternating with highly sophisticated English, poetic evocations with violence. Violence is expressed in deed and expression both in Africa and London and in Mungo's inner dialogues with the dead. Mungo is out to show that he has mastered all the forms and subtleties of the language as well as much of the knowledge available at the time. His true personality, however, remains a mystery to Mr. Pringle and, to some extent, to the reader. Since the fluctuations in language and narrative perspective make it impossible to pin Mungo down, Dabydeen's style suggests perhaps that the dehumanizing effect of slavery destroys any possibility of a stable self. Only in the last chapter, when Moll finally appears in the narrative, does Mungo sound authentic in his expression of tenderness for the harlot who has only "progressed" to her death. Yet, surprisingly, and in contradiction to Dabydeen's analysis of the paintings in *Hogarth's Blacks*, Mungo asserts that the artist, too, misrepresented them both. The final irony is that he turned them into a commodity for thousands when the paintings were popularized and repeatedly reproduced.

If the emergence of a new generation of novelists may be viewed as one of the main developments of Caribbean literature since the seventies, the long-awaited recognition of writing by women was an even more striking phenomenon. Their fiction had, till then, not so much been absent as marginalized by publishers and critics alike. Significantly, one of the first publications of the 1970s is *Crick Crack, Monkey*, 1970, by the Trinidadian Merle Hodge. Remarkable for its vigor and humor, it has become a symbol for a rising tradition of women's writing. Not only is it the first major novel published by a black Caribbean woman (with the exception of Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 1959), but it also encapsulates the preoccupations that were to figure prominently, though with a great diversity

of approach and tone, in female fiction: the place of family relationships in the coming to maturity of a child protagonist, often metaphorical of the wider political scene; the incongruities and destructive effects of colonial education; and the complex intersections of race, class, and gender in cultural identification. The male novelists of the 1950s and 1960s had already explored these themes; but it is important to underline that women writers were often more introspective and formally more innovative than their male predecessors.

What further seems to distinguish female writers, apart from their focus on heroines rather than heroes and their greater sensitivity to their "double colonization" first as colonials then as women (see Petersen and Rutherford [1986]), is an interest in retrieving voices and knowledge from the past, a movement also involving male authors like Caryl Phillips. In other words, women writers are intent on challenging their age-long, actual and literary, voicelessness, or, rather, unheardness (Davies and Fido [1990], 3), which no doubt explains why so many of their works are autobiographies, either real or fictive. This new "woman consciousness," involving "righting history and redefining identities" (25), is often combined with a "reliance on oraliture," which, for Rhonda Cobham, provides women writers with powerful metaphors as well as with "organizing principles within their narratives" (Cobham [1993], 47). Hence the insertion of songs, nursery rhymes, or storytelling and the crucial role ascribed to grandmother figures as repositories of ancestral wisdom, lore, and indigenous practices such as obeah. These two aspects significantly coalesce in the title of Hodge's seminal novel, an echo of the ritual "Crick crack?" with which the heroine's grandmother Ma used to conclude her Anancy-stories and to which the children would chorus back: "*Monkey break 'e back / On a rotten pommerac!*" (Hodge [1970], 25), but also a reminder of the "hiatus between fantasy and reality" (Cobham [1993], 47) that brands the life of many protagonists in Caribbean female fiction.

Crick Crack, Monkey is narrated through the eyes of Cynthia Davis, also known as Tee, a young girl whose mother has died and whose father has emigrated to England. First brought up by the boisterous and generous Tantie in a caring, multicultural rural community, she then goes to live in a gentrifying neighborhood of Port-of-Spain with her self-righteous Aunt Beatrice whose firm intention is to "haul" her niece out of "ordinaryness" or "niggeryness" (Hodge [1970], 137). The heroine's dual allegiances to and growing ambivalence toward indigenous values and those imported from the metropolis are reflected in shifts from broad dialect to standard English but also in changing rhythms of narration. If Tee can thus be seen as torn between clashing cultural systems, some critics have insisted on a more complex reading, one also including the world of Ma and that of the colonial school

which generates Helen, Tee's imaginary "Proper Me" (90; see Gikandi [1992] and O'Callaghan [1993-a], 70). *Crick Crack, Monkey* closes with the heroine looking forward to her imminent departure for England, to her "'Land of Hope and Glory'" (Hodge [1970], 46), ironically unaware that more alienation awaits her there and that it will be difficult for her to ever find her "true-true name" (32), painfully caught as she is between Tee and Cynthia, between her peasant past and her middle-class aspirations.

Although Merle Hodge views creative writing as "a guerilla activity" that can empower peoples and help them fight attempts to negate the reality of their world (Cudjoe [1990], 206), she paradoxically stopped writing fiction after her promising first novel, apparently taken up by political activism. Recently, however, she published *For the Life of Laetitia*, 1995, this time aimed at a younger Caribbean readership who, she believes, should also be exposed to children's fiction from their area. It is about twelve-year-old Lacey who has to leave her small village to get an education in town.

In *Beka Lamb*, 1982, Zee Edgell from Belize portrays another case of divided consciousness as her eponymous protagonist is, like Tee, forced to choose between her black creole community (embodied in her militant Granny Ivy) and the colonial values which entail that "almost everything locally reared or made is suspect" (Edgell [1982], 88). This impossible choice encapsulates the difficulties of the quest for postcolonial individuality while also illustrating the pitfalls facing the construction of a national identity in a society struggling for decolonization (see Gikandi [1992]). But *Beka Lamb* emphasizes more strongly than Hodge's novel the role of religion, represented here by a moralistic and hypocritical Catholic Church, in the cultural dilemma of the colonial subject. In addition, it directly addresses the issue of female sexuality through Beka's close friend Toycie who cannot bear the stigma of an illegitimate pregnancy and eventually dies mad. Much of the novel consists in a long flashback meant as a wake for Toycie, "a remembrance in the privacy of Beka's own heart" (Edgell [1982], 5), ending with her reaching a mental "clearing" that imbues her story with a sense of beginning.

Taking place in a Belize on the verge of independence, Edgell's second novel, *In Times Like These*, 1991, brings again the private and the public together. It focuses on Pavana Leslie, a young woman back in her homeland with her twin children after years working in Somalia for a development agency. However, this new novel does not match the originality of *Beka Lamb* which, though not experimental, had a vividness sustained by a pervasive vegetation imagery. Edgell's second work of fiction, described as a "romance" by at least two reviewers, fails mostly at the level of characterization, with a heroine almost too respectable

to be true. It has also been labeled a "middle-class novel," not that this is a flaw in itself, but the book does not really call into question the values of that social group, such as careerism, though these obviously clash with the preoccupations of the nation at large (see Savory [1993], 87).

Jamaican Erna Brodber, like Hodge and Edgell, belongs to a small group of women writers who, though widely traveled, have opted for residence in the Caribbean, possibly a way of asserting their commitment to their society and the place of women in it. If, as one critic put it, "Caribbean women writers are more amenable to formal experimentation than their male counterparts" (Gikandi [1992], 32), Erna Brodber certainly exemplifies this statement in a style that in Wilson Harris's words, "penetrates surfaces" to convert boundaries (Harris [1990-b], 92, 89). Like Harris's own fiction, her narratives attempt to retrieve a "community of being" from the unconscious and to reintegrate in oneself and one's social environment all the disparate elements, above all mixed ancestry, previously ignored. Brodber's is one of the most original talents among Caribbean women writers, whose work blends in totally new language and forms the expression of womanhood (so long confined to stereotypes in both life and fiction) and of a specifically feminine sensibility, history (particularly oral history transmitted by ordinary people in Jamaica), social analysis, myth-making, and the folk tradition. Like Harris, who makes little distinction between fiction and essay, Brodber, an historian and sociologist, remarks that "her sociology and her fiction are inextricably linked," and, like Harris again, she believes that individual and community must confront their past "no matter how distressing" (O'Callaghan [1986], 73, 75) before any harmonious development can take place at either level. This is the experience of Nellie, the I-narrator of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, 1980, a title borrowed from a Caribbean song game (see Humphrey [1989], 30). Nellie suffers from a breakdown and can only begin to heal when she accepts her sexuality and understands the conditioning process to which she has been subjected by her aunt Becca, herself sterile and obsessed with respectability. The circular narrative takes Nellie from past to present, then back to the past until she can say goodbye to her mixed ancestry and declare "we are getting ready," obviously planning the future: "No paths lay before us. We would have to make them" (Brodber [1980], 147, 146). The reader must piece together her broken recollections of her protected and idealized childhood, her fearful and guilty discovery of sexuality, her first frustrating sexual experience, her recognition of her identity as black and Jamaican in the United States, her disappointing commitment to political activism and her growing awareness of her true cultural roots. The central ambivalent symbol of the novel is Anancy's "kumbla," a Jamaican word for calabash,

at once a protective envelope and a source of light which either blind and paralyze or "show you the way" (77). For, as Nellie realizes, "the trouble with the kumbla is the getting out of the kumbla" (130), an expression which has come to express the liberation of the female voice in Caribbean literature (see Davies and Fido [1990]).

Myal, 1988, also presents the psychological breakdown of the central character, Ella O'Grady, a young mulatto girl adopted by a near white Methodist parson and his English wife who give her a schoolish education that gradually cuts her off from her peasant background. She accompanies a rich American woman to Baltimore and there marries a white American who appropriates both her body and her past which he uses to produce a profitable entertainment, "the biggest coon show ever," called *Caribbean Nights and Days* (Brodber [1988], 79-80). But he would not give her the child she longs for, and when she becomes psychologically ill, developing an imaginary pregnancy, she is brought home and cured by Mass Cyrus, a religious folk leader who practices Myalism, a kind of healing by which the slaves attempted to counter evil forces – and the sometimes negative effects of obeah. Similarly, young Anita threatened by Mass Levi who uses obeah to "zombify" her and restore his declining sexual powers, is exorcized by Miss Gatha, of the Kumina Church, whose liberating influence as she marches like "a coconut tree in a private hurricane ... Birnamwood come to Dunsiname" (70) is rooted in her African cultural past.

One senses through the narrative the strength of the oral tradition in the many voices and rhythmical cadences through which the life of the Grove Town community can literally be heard and sensed. The conversion of boundaries Harris alludes to relates to the self-awareness the two girls, and the community with them, achieve as they are freed from the "spirit thieves" who victimized them, Ella's husband who drains her dry, spirit thieves at Whitehall but also Jamaican sexual plunderers (Brodber [1988], 108, 82, 109). The conversion also applies to the fractured realities – religious mosaic, historical and cultural legacies – in the community, eventually moving toward an accepted syncretism. As has been pointed out, there is "an analogy between the role of the healer who diagnoses the heroine's illness and that of the artist who examines the sources of cultural malaise" (Walker-Johnson [1992], 49). The end of the novel wittily implies that the remedy must come from within, an expulsion of the hidden text, "The half that has never been told" (Brodber [1988], 34).

Like her first two novels, Brodber's *Louisiana*, 1994, rests on a retrieval of voices from the past to set in motion a process of collective and individual healing. In the 1930s, Ella Townsend, a young African-American of Caribbean origin, is sent to Louisiana by the University of Columbia to piece together local black history with the help of a prototypical

tape recorder. Her major informant is Mrs. Sue Ann Grant-King, at once storyteller, matriarch, and, as Ella later learns, a Marcus Garvey supporter and a psychic. Although she dies well before Ella's mission is over, the old lady, also known as Anna and Mammy, keeps sending messages first through the recording device then through Ella's own mouth, a "thought transplant" that at first makes Ella question her sanity but which later comes to accept as a "journey into knowing" (Brodber [1994], 31, 38) Through Ella's academic project, Brodber points to the sterility of a science wary of psychic forces and therefore ignorant of the "affective interaction between the researcher and the researched" (Cudjoe [1990], 165) while also touching upon the appropriative impulses that can underlie an investigation into the past. What might have turned into "spirit thievery" then results in Ella's rediscovery of her roots, a rebirth and ongoing metamorphosis. For Ella's husband too, a colored Jew from the Congo brought up by a white priest in Belgium, Louisiana means becoming a new man (Brodber [1994], 53) and, although his relationship to his wife is at first not devoid of self-interest on both sides, he supports and shares her involvement with the supernatural. But Ella's experience is above all a "community tale" (161) that explores the deep and complex links between the Afro-Caribbean and African-American histories, a theme already touched upon in *Myal* but also running through Phillips's *Crossing the River*. According to Brodber, attempts to build connections between the New World blacks have so far come mostly from the grass roots, and it is high time that intellectuals tackled these connections, "thus making dialogue easier and more fruitful and black solidarity and therefore black action more possible" (Cudjoe [1990], 168). As *Louisiana* unfolds, the voice of American Anna is joined by that of Louise, alias Lowly, her close friend from Jamaica; both become spiritual mothers to Ella who celebrates their sisterly "oneness" (Brodber [1994], 62) by calling herself Louisiana (Louise plus Anna), a spiritual version of female bonding. This very rich novel is again reminiscent of Harris's fiction, not simply because of its metaphorical style or its interest in non-rational approaches but also for its accretive form. Opening with an epilogue in which the editor of a small black woman's press explains how Ella's manuscript reached them, the novel then goes on with a rough transcript of Anna's first recording whose sibylline words, but also silences, are then echoed, expanded, and entered into to confirm that indeed "language is the key" (117) to human becoming.

Most of Erna Brodber's contemporaries are writing from an expanding diasporic web spanning Western Europe, mostly Britain, but also Canada and the United States. Both a lived experience and a source of inspiration for creative writing, migration can therefore be regarded as a catalyst in the development of a Caribbean female literary consciousness, very

much as it contributed to the literary explosion in male writing in the 1950s. Yet, in the 1990s, the most original female talents among exiled writers are not to be found in Britain, as was the case with the first generation of male writers, and still is to a certain extent with Phillips and D'Aguiar, but in North America where, as Jamaica Kincaid pointed out, she could find her own voice more easily because there she "could rebel against ... the patriarchal nineteenth-century English view." In England, by contrast, she felt she would have been unable to "express anger at [her] historical situation" (Kincaid [1996], 142, 139). This may be one of the reasons why writing by Anglo-Caribbean women has been said to be fueled by a so-called "creative rather than 'high academic'" passion (Davies [1994], 33), their craft being basically meant to "write about life as [they] live it" (Ngcobo [1988], 1), to assert a selfhood that is threatened in the here and now, an immediacy perhaps more germane to poetry than fiction. While to some such an engagement with realism is a strength (Davies [1994], 33), it may also explain why fiction by Caribbean women in Britain tends to be published by smaller publishing houses and therefore have a poor international circulation.

With six novels to her name, Beryl Gilroy is the most prolific among the Caribbean woman novelists writing in Britain. She is also their senior, although her fiction has only been released in the last decade, which may be indicative of changing policies in the world of publishing. With the exception of two romantic narratives retelling legendary love stories of the New World, *Stedman and Joanna*, 1991, and *Inkle and Yarico*, 1996, her novels are informed by her encounter with racism and prejudice as a Guyanese immigrant in the 1950s, an experience even more directly recorded in her autobiography *Black Teacher*, 1976. On her own admission, Gilroy writes "fact-fiction" (Cudjoe [1990], 200), deriving her inspiration from the reality met in her work as headmistress and psychologist. Moreover, she is something of an exception in Caribbean writing by women for while the vast majority of first novels deal with childhood, hers, *Frangipani House*, 1985, focuses on old age, also the subject of *Snowflakes in the Sun*, 1995, the second novel of Grenadian Jean Buffong. "Frangipani House" is the Guyanese rest home where sixty-nine-year-old Mama King has been sent by her two daughters based in New York. The book opens with Mama King's feelings of uselessness and her rebellion at her "incarceration" and her having to "see the world through window" (Gilroy [1985], 1, 5) but it closes on a positive note, for after an ordeal including depression, madness, and a stint on the streets with a group of Indo-Caribbean beggars, Mama King eventually goes to stay with her granddaughter Cindy, a decision that Gilroy seems to consider more in keeping with the caring traditions of the African family even when dispersed by exile. Intergenerational relationships also inform *Boy-*

Sandwich, 1989, the story of Tyrone, a young Jamaican living in Britain, whose grandparents have, like Mama King, just made "the journey to the limbo of a sheltered home" (Gilroy [1989], 1). This shakes the fragile sense of identity of the boy who used to feel "sandwiched-in and safe" (36) between his parents and grandparents. It is only after a journey back to what he believes is his Jamaican home that he can come to terms with Britishness. Gilroy's next two novels, published simultaneously, are simple stories focusing on Caribbean women in Britain. Marvella, the heroine of *Gather the Faces*, 1996, falls in love with her Guyanese pen-friend and returns to her native land to get married, while Melda in *In Praise of Love and Children*, 1996, finds solace in fostering children of immigrant families. As has been pointed out, it is important to understand Gilroy's work and career to "put into some historical context the creative achievements of younger writers" (Davies [1994], 100), in particular that of Joan Riley who came from Jamaica in her late teens and writes, like her elder, about the black British experience, although in a much darker mood.

Riley's first novel, *The Unbelonging*, 1985, is a pioneering work: the first novel published by a Caribbean novelist in Britain since Jean Rhys in the 1930s, it is one of the few, along with Phillips's *The Final Passage*, to offer a woman's perspective on Caribbean migration to the U.K. As its title indicates, it dramatizes the dilemma of a generation who feels at home neither in England nor in the Caribbean. Hyacinth, its teen-age heroine, arrives in England in the 1970s. Faced with an abusive father and hostile schoolmates, she retreats into her dreams of an idealized Jamaica that turns into a nightmare when, after taking a degree, she journeys back to the Caribbean. There, she is brutally confronted with her ultimate homelessness when the "Go back whe yu come fram" of destitute Jamaicans echoes the "Go back where you belong" of racist Britons (Riley [1985], 142). Although *The Unbelonging* does not innovate formally nor stylistically, it contains an interesting reworking of the traditional accounts of childhood found in so many novels by women, which seems to point to an aggravated sense of dispossession of the postmigratory generation. In Riley's novel the new environment is no longer seen in terms of bewilderment but of aggression. Besides, the child is not looked after by a surrogate parent but ends up in a children's home, which symbolizes the fundamental inhospitality of England, as in David Dabydeen's *The Intended*.

Because of a hard-line realism that the author justifies as a token of loyalty towards "the community of women who give unstintingly of their lives to flesh out my creative world" (Riley [1992-b], 217), Riley's next two novels fail to energize their thematic potential. In *Waiting in the Twilight*, 1987, Adella, a Jamaican crippled by a stroke (a clear metaphor for the paralyzing effect of British society on the alien) takes an embittered look back at a life

made of hardship. Riley's presentation of man/woman conflicts is particularly dark and entrenched, rather than challenges, sexual prejudices, insofar as her male characters remain one-dimensional figures chronically negative and unaccountable, although immigration makes them victims as much as it does the women. If Riley's stark realism tends to transform context into text (Suarez [1991], 291), it is also intended as an absolute rejection of the romantic fiction in which her heroines find an escape from the harsh realities of immigrant life. This is the case in *Romance*, 1988, an altogether less depressing novel which traces the lives of two dissatisfied Guyanese sisters, Verona and Desiree, and concludes with their decision to change after the stimulating visit of two aged grandparents from Jamaica, the symbolic bearers of their lost roots. These limitations notwithstanding, there is one aspect in which these two novels are unreservedly successful: in retrieving Caribbean women from decades of absence in fiction and presenting them with a faithful mirror of their own suffering. In that sense, Riley's writing can indeed be seen as "an effort to heal through representation" (291).

Riley's fourth novel, *A Kindness to the Children*, 1992, is her best work to date. It presents three women who can be viewed as "metaphors for national states and attitudes" in the Caribbean (Riley [1993], 18). The first two, Sylvia and her sister-in-law Jean, have just arrived in Jamaica from England. Undertaking the journey to come to terms with her husband's recent death, Sylvia is faced with the "destruction of her Utopian vision of Jamaica," thereby getting rid of her "righteous indignation" (Riley [1992-a], 278, 260) and the sense of superiority attached to her English ways. For Jean, return to her native land means remembering her unhappy childhood and the sexual abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of a pastor. But the confrontation with her secret past arouses feelings of persecution mixed with guilt and transforms her long-lasting depression into religious fervor then madness. Sylvia and Jean's arrival also triggers the coming to consciousness of their relative, Pearl; she realizes how trapped her daily life has been (218) and decides to take advantage of her newly-found freedom. The novel stands out for its vivid evocation of today's rural Jamaica and its presentation of the clash of mentalities between the locals and those "from foreign" (209), often educated people. More importantly, it also marks a change from Riley's rather rigid third-person narratives to a more varied text including some stream-of-consciousness passages that give access to Jean's deranged mind, to "the whole army of people inside her head" (27). The madwoman is a recurring image in texts by Caribbean female novelists, often conveying an incapacity to cope with the stereotypes imposed from the outside. But while in many of them fragmentation of the self marks the beginning of a new wholeness as in Brodber's *Jane and Louisa*, for example (O'Callaghan [1993-a], 38), in *A Kindness to the*

Children, it only leads to self-destruction as Jean eventually dies after a drunken escapade during which she is raped again. For Riley, she represents the "schizophrenic nature of Caribbean society" (Riley [1993], 18) and her bleak end may therefore symbolize the impossibility of getting over the rifts caused by colonialism and patriarchy if these cannot be voiced by the victim (see O'Callaghan in Davies and Fido [1990]).

Next to Gilroy's and Riley's naturalistic narratives of Anglo-Caribbeanness, one finds a group of novels again emphasizing the personal and the domestic but more directly geared at the West Indian experience. Written by three novelists who spent their formative years in the Caribbean but later settled in Britain, they all depict societies in transition, with the passing of an old order suggesting the emergence of a new awareness. If these novels do not, like Riley's, focus on the "'realities' of black women in Britain" it may be, in the words of Grace Nichols, a poet from Guyana, because their authors cannot "subscribe to the 'victim mentality,'" which would imply yielding to the stereotype of the "'long-suffering black women'" (Cudjoe [1990], 284). Nichols's *Whole of a Morning Sky*, 1986, takes place in Guyana in the early 1960s and gives yet another version of the novel of childhood, one whose form is particularly innovative since the straightforward third-person narration is coupled with poetic and sensuous impressions written in the second person. Young Gem Walcott and her family have just arrived in Georgetown from their rural village, and the child's emotional disquiet at moving is paralleled by the explosion of violence attendant on the country's imminent independence. Evelyn O'Callaghan has commented upon the transformative qualities of this apparently simple book: not only does its irony subvert the nationalist feelings present in its epigraph (an extract from a Martin Carter poem) by demonstrating the ultimate inanity of political upheaval, but its gently comic vision also dismantles the paternalistic order by exposing the human frailty of men who nonetheless occupy the leading positions in society (see O'Callaghan [1993-a]). In this first novel Nichols captures the cultural plurality of Guyana, with its unique "*mélange* of people of different races and different shades and mixtures of races," even as she emphasizes the racial divisions that tear apart a country where "everything is race" (Nichols [1986], 52, 80).

A similar paradox informs *Timepiece*, 1986, the first novel by Janice Shinebourne, who left Guyana in the 1970s. It opens as Sandra Yansen, its heroine, returns to Pheasant, her native Berbice village now deserted and dead except for the "unperturbed presence" (Shinebourne [1986], 10) of the slave past. The narrative looks back on her childhood there in a predominantly matriarchal world where solidarity prevailed over racial divisions and her career as a journalist in a male-centered urban society is threatened by personal ambition and

the political unrest of the mid-1960s. *Timepiece* is written out of a need "to come to grips with Guyana's political culture" (Cudjoe [1990], 143), but it does so by celebrating those who, like Sandra's father, "lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (epigraph from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). The strength of Shinebourne's second novel, *The Last English Plantation*, 1988, lies again in a vivid depiction of the social and historical circumstances of individual characters. Set in the mid-1950s, at a time of political crisis, it is told from the point of view of June, a passionate young girl of Indo-Chinese descent who experiences alienation when she wins a scholarship to attend high school. As the Martin Carter epigraph makes clear, this is a novel about the difficulties of becoming and finding one's self for both a young girl and the disintegrating plantation society in which she was born.

Angel, 1987, by Grenadian Merle Collins, deals, like Nichols's and Shinebourne's novels, with a period of turbulent change in the history of her native country. Starting in the 1950s with the burning of white landowners' houses up to the 1983 American invasion of Grenada, it focuses on three generations of women, the youngest represented by Angel McAllister, whose strength, sense of solidarity, and emotional intelligence bode well for the future of the island. A highly diversified form (including traditional realistic narrative, letters and pieces of folk wisdom), linguistic variety ranging from standard English to broad Creole (for which a short glossary is provided), and polyphonic qualities, all contribute to an open-minded and wide-ranging rendering of a complex history. As Renu Juneja points out, *Angel* epitomizes the major features of Caribbean women's fiction: it is a story of childhood with communal dimensions, but its humor and radical political message (a literary "call to arms," according to Lima [1993], 52) give it a flavor of its own (Juneja [1995], 95). Collins's second novel, *The Colour of Forgetting*, 1995, is set again in the Caribbean but this time on fictional islands called Paz and Eden. It presents Carib, a woman whose voice is a "monument to [the] bravery" (Collins [1995], 4) of her forgotten Carib ancestors. Regarded as mad by the islanders, she stimulates the remembering of their intricate history thereby helping their understanding of the spirits living inside them.

Pauline Melville, the author of a widely acclaimed collection of short-stories entitled *Shape-shifter*, 1990, published in 1997 a first novel that seems to initiate a more original trend in Anglo-Caribbean female writing. Distrustful of the label "magic realism," Melville prefers to describe her writing as a rendering of "the marvels of reality" (Clee [1997], 38). *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, 1997, is a complex book full of inventiveness whose title suggests, like *Shape-shifter*, the idea of otherness and role-swapping. It is framed by a prologue and an epilogue told in a conversational tone by a trickster figure, the ventriloquist of the title, who

can be identified as Macunaima, the mythical Amerindian folk hero. Inside this frame are two stories which might be those of Pauline Melville's Guyanese ancestors: the incestuous relationship between Danny and Beatrice in the 1920s, which is thwarted by Father Napier, a homosexual Jesuit; and the present-day affair between Chofy, a relative of the incestuous couple, and an Englishwoman researching Evelyn Waugh's links with Guyana as expressed in *A Handful of Dust*. In a sense, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* can be read as writing back to Waugh's scorn of "natives." But in addition to its revisionary intent, it also registers, often humorously, the many clashes between European and Amerindian world views without, however, deciding in favor of either.

In 1994, Merle Collins left Britain for the United States, a move that is perhaps indicative of the migratory lives of many Caribbean writers but is also symbolical of the displacement of the publishing opportunities for Caribbean women writers towards North America. Canada, for example, has only recently been experiencing a flourishing of female talents. Tobagonian Marlene Nourbese Philip, better known as a poet and political activist, long remained the only West Indian woman novelist in Canada with *Harriet's Daughter*, 1988, a book that gives but a slight indication of the radical engagement with hybrid female identities expressed in her collection of poems, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, 1989, and her more recent prose poem, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, 1991. *Harriet's Daughter* is a young adult novel about the emotional maturation of Margaret, a teenage West Indian living in Toronto, who, on her way to adulthood, identifies with two women named Harriet: on the one hand, Harriet Tubman, who facilitated the passage of hundreds of slaves to the free North; on the other, Harriet Blewchamp, the Jewish employer of Margaret's mother who bequeaths the young girl not only money but also "a shared sense of persecution of blacks and Jews" (Ramraj [1995], 109).

In the mid-1990s, two remarkable novelists emerged. Trinidadian Dionne Brand published *In Another Place, Not Here*, 1996, a lyrical novel set both in Trinidad and Toronto and written in a language that reminds us that poetry is Brand's first vocation. It is the story of two women: Elizete, prisoner of an abusive relationship, and Verlia, a political activist who becomes Elizete's lover. The subject may be reminiscent of Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, although the temporal and spatial contexts of Brand's novel are completely different. After a well-received collection of stories, *Out on Main Street*, 1993, Shani Mootoo, of Indo-Trinidadian descent, wrote *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 1997. At the center of this powerful first novel is Mala, an old reclusive eccentric on a fictional island, whose eventful life story is told with humor and suspense by her sexually ambiguous nurse, Tyler.

With the exception of Brodber, the most original fiction by Caribbean women in the last decade has been produced in the United States. While the vitality of Caribbean-American writing by women can be ascribed to their intellectual independence from the former colonizing power, which does not prevent an anti-hegemonic engagement with the United States (see Davies in Davies and Fido [1990], 60), one should not forget the role played by the well-established African-American literary tradition in facilitating the Caribbean writers' integration into the multicultural American canvas; hence their confident treatment of plural identities. This was surely the case for some writers of the former generation, such as Rosa Guy and Paule Marshall, who have kept writing after 1970 but are more often listed as African-American than as Caribbean writers. If the difficulty of placing them significantly questions the relevance of national and geographical criteria in drawing up a Caribbean literary tradition, it concretely problematizes the articulation of complex identities which has become "central to our understandings of the ways in which these writers express notions of home in their works" (Davies [1994], 116).

Rosa Guy tackles specifically African-American issues, as in *A Measure of Time*, 1983, which explores the history of the Harlem Renaissance. But Paule Marshall, born in New York of Barbadian parents, can be helpfully considered here as a foremother to the new generation of Caribbean writers, both female and male. Not only did she pioneer black women writing, but she also initiated what Edward Brathwaite has called a "literature of reconnection" (Davies [1994], 119; see Keulen [1996], 85), that is, one bringing together the different cultural strands of the African Diaspora, a theme also dear to Erna Brodber and Caryl Phillips. Marshall does not see her own double cultural allegiance in terms of division or duality but as a unique experience enabling her to "act as a kind of bridge" (Marshall [1988], 15). Such is the thrust behind *Praisesong for the Widow*, 1983, Marshall's first novel in fourteen years, which renders the moulding of an identity through a confrontation with the past. While cruising the Caribbean, Avey Johnson, a widow in her sixties, recovers the African roots with which she had lost touch during her married life in New York and at the same time reconnects with her female self. As in Marshall's first two novels journeys and dance rituals provide metaphors for the heroine's psychological transformation. But while the protagonists of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* were left on the brink of new discoveries, the more mature Avey performs her own metamorphosis, eventually able to feel "part of what seemed a far-reaching, wide-ranging confraternity," her individual wholeness indissociable from the "collective heart" (Marshall [1983], 249, 245). A similar interest in the linkages between Afro-Caribbean and African-American cultures

informs Marshall's latest novel, *Daughters*, 1991, which features Primus Mackenzie, a politician from the fictional Caribbean island of Triunion, Estelle, his black American wife, and Ursa, their daughter born in the Caribbean but living in the States. As usual with Marshall's fiction, the cultural is coupled with a focus on gender issues. Even if the multi-voiced narrative (in which the female perspective prevails) highlights the selfishness of men, the younger generation of women, the daughters of the title, are shown to achieve emancipation thanks to their sense of self and their cultural heritage. Though praised as a dense and complex novel, *Daughters* may not be Marshall's best work for it occasionally lapses into melodrama.

Jamaica Kincaid, born Elaine Potter Richardson in Antigua, is one of the most inventive Caribbean novelists of the last decades, which might account for her tremendous critical success though this is more likely due to her articulation of issues in vogue among feminist critics, such as mother-daughter bonding, female sexuality, and the recovery of the female body (see Cudjoe [1990], 221). However, Kincaid's foremost originality does not lie in her choice of subject-matters. The topic of her first novel, *Annie John*, 1985, is familiar enough to readers of Caribbean literature: it is the growing-up story of Annie, a school girl who eventually leaves her native Antigua to study in England. Organized in eight chapters first published as separate stories in *The New Yorker*, it is a subtle exploration of the child's upsetting confrontation with death and sexuality, both classic focuses of tales of initiation everywhere, and of her coming to terms with history and migration, more specific features of stories of colonial childhood in the West Indies. What distinguishes Kincaid's novel is a rather deceptively simple, at times even childish, prose style that is actually replete with Biblical echoes and sensuous overtones. The very language Kincaid uses in fact exemplifies one of her major messages, that the world is not what it seems and that beyond surface reality lies "another reality over which we, in our modernity, have no control – and certainly of which we know very little because we're too scientific" (229). It is no wonder, therefore, if *Annie John* is woven with dream sequences and Annie's deranged thoughts during a physical and mental collapse that symbolizes the break between childhood and womanhood and from which she is significantly cured by Ma-Chess, her obeah-wielding grandmother. Yet the novel remains largely realistic and can be read as a concrete translation of Kincaid's earlier book, *At the Bottom of the River*, 1984, a collection of bafflingly impressionistic stories whose central consciousness, like Annie "no longer a child but ... not yet a woman," has visions of an essentially ambivalent world "in which the sun and the moon shone at the same time" (Kincaid [1984], 56, 77).

In spite of Kincaid's claim to the contrary (Kincaid [1991], 22), her second novel, *Lucy*, 1990, might well be read as a continuation of *Annie John* since it opens with a nineteen-year-old Caribbean heroine arriving in the United States as an au-pair to a well-off white family with four daughters. Leaving behind a mother she used to love intensely but now hates in her wish to become independent, Lucy uncharts her new cultural and affective environment with a blend of lucidity and naivety and eventually achieves a complex identity, "inventing" (Kincaid [1990], 134) herself away from the ethnocentric feminist and psychoanalytical discourses that her employers would willingly impose upon her (see Donnell [1992]). Apart from the continuity in the plot, *Lucy* also pursues similar motifs, chief among them the theme of the fall and the challenging of binary thought. But whereas *Annie John* chronicles the girl's passage from the "paradise" (Kincaid [1985], 25) of the mother-child symbiosis to the hellish separation from the parent (significantly also called Annie John), the later work is clearly grounded in a post-lapsarian phase in which Lucy, named after Lucifer, is "doomed to build wrong upon wrong" (Kincaid [1990], 139) as a rebellion against family and conventions. Also, if *Annie John* questions traditional categories, as in the much quoted episode in which Annie meditates upon a picture of Christopher Columbus "fettered in chains attached to the bottom of a ship" (Kincaid [1985], 77) like a slave, Kincaid operates a similar blurring of roles in her depiction of Lucy who is at once agent and subject of discovery in her dealings with her lovers and her middle-class employer, Mariah. But as Giovanna Covi rightly insists, there is no simple reversal of the master-slave dichotomy (Covi [1994], 82). Like other novelists of her generation, Kincaid indeed upturns and decenters power, rather than directly opposes it, in a refusal to adopt the dualistic rhetoric of empire, and aware, like Lucy, that it impinges on your freedom because it makes you see "hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face" (Kincaid [1990], 31).

Both *Annie John* and *Lucy* are semi-autobiographical first-person narratives exploring a female subjectivity underpinned by a love/hate relationship with the mother metonymic of the bond between the colonized and the colonial mother country, of the relationship between the powerless and the powerful (see Kincaid [1991], 12; Kincaid [1992], 23). In a sense, Kincaid offers a fresh version of the coming-of-age story for if the use of autobiography and other confessional writing has been isolated as a favorite mode for expressing an individual female consciousness in the making (see O'Callaghan [1993-a], 7), her almost obsessive focus on biological mothering, for all its ambivalence, sets her apart from her fellow writers whose mother figures are often relegated to surrogate parents, such as aunts, grandmothers, or nannies (see Cobham [1993], 56).

As its title suggests, Kincaid's *The Autobiography of my Mother*, 1996, does not dramatically differ from her first two novels, an apparent lack of originality partaking of her aesthetic of repetition whereby events only gain significance if they are told again and again. Yet, as ever with Kincaid, similarity also hides difference. While this third novel takes up once more the autobiographical mode, its concern with motherhood is not what it seems. Its narrator, Xuela Claudette Richardson does not tell the story of her Carib mother, who died when giving birth to her, but paradoxically retraces her own bleak life in Dominica: her early years as a foster child in a world where "brutality is the only real inheritance and cruelty is sometimes the only thing freely given" (Kincaid [1996], 5); her childhood with an uncaring and calculating father who is half African half Scottish; her departure for Roseau at fifteen and her first unwanted pregnancy; her love affair with Roland and, eventually, her loveless marriage to Philip, an English doctor. As the novel unfolds, however, one realizes that Xuela's account is as much her mother's as it is her own, for "In me is the voice I never heard, the face I never saw, the being I came from" (227), a strange mixture of absence and presence which raises the question of the nature of reality in a world where the coexistence of opposites such as life and death is unproblematical. But however much Xuela's narrative allows her to know herself better, it nonetheless points to the limits of self-knowledge, for "who you are is a mystery no one can answer, not even you" (202), and as the now seventy-year-old narrator dismally concludes, "Death is the only reality, for it is the only certainty, inevitable to all things" (228). Kincaid has always depicted headstrong female characters, but Xuela surpasses them all in self-reliance and willpower, possibly her way of keeping at bay the defeat and despair that brand her colonial society. Lonely and narcissistic, Xuela rejects all forms of attachment and refuses to bear children, even practising her own abortions. Her self-centeredness is unequivocal: "I allowed nothing to replace my own being in my mind" (100), but this outspoken self-love is perhaps her only means to relate to the mother she never knew and to compensate for her sad loss. The novel contains hardly any dialogue, yet its short, rhythmic sentences and iterative vocabulary endow it with an unmistakable oral sonority that account for its compelling stylistic beauty.

The temptation is strong to interpret Kincaid's fiction independently of its unobtrusive social and cultural context, although one gets a clearer idea of her political commitment if one reads her fiction in the light of *A Small Place*, 1988, an angry essay in which she forcefully denounces the colonial past and neo colonial present of her native Antigua. But by concentrating on what some critics believe to be the universal dimension of her fiction, that is, the strictly domestic mother-daughter relationship, psychoanalytical readings often overlook

its wider implications (see Donnell [1993]). For example, Xuela's story has an unquestionable collective meaning, and her motherlessness is also the historical exile of enslaved Africans taken from their motherland. In contrast to Kincaid's spare fiction, the novels of Michelle Cliff, a Jamaican also based in the United States, rely on a rich historical and cultural context that confers a unique multi-layeredness on her narratives but also makes them more overtly political. Another difference between the two novelists is that while Kincaid deals with the peasant or working-class experience, "Cliff's world is that of the bourgeois vacillating between the metaphoric yard and the big house" (Davies and Fido [1990], 60).

Cliff's first novel *Abeng*, 1984, focuses on Clare Savage, a twelve-year-old Jamaican girl, a "crossroads character" whose name bespeaks her plural heritage: "Clare" refers to her light skin and the privilege and gentility it entails while Savage evokes the "wildness that has been bleached from her skin" (Cudjoe [1990], 265). Like many other characters in Caribbean literature, Clare is thus a divided figure: divided between her father, the impoverished descendant of a family of planters, and her mother, a colored woman from the country, divided between their conflicting visions of the world which she is not able to understand, let alone analyze. But if the novel describes the girl's fragmentation and thereby provides a reexamination of the "tragic mulatto" stereotype, it also chronicles "her movement toward ... wholeness" (265), which culminates in Cliff's second novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, 1987, when Clare is killed while taking part in a guerilla attack. Her tragic death may sound like defeat, but, for Cliff, this ending "completes the circle, or rather triangle, of the character's life. In her death Clare has complete identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestors' bones" (Cudjoe [1990], 265).

One of the clues to understanding *Abeng* is its title, an African word for conch shell, an object both used to call slaves to the canefields and employed by the maroons to communicate among themselves. With this double reference to bondage and resistance, the text undertakes to reconstruct the intricate Jamaican past of which the island is tragically ignorant. While history looms in the background of Kincaid's novels, influencing her characters' subconscious, it is foregrounded in Cliff's writing in such a deliberate way that it might be taken for didacticism, were it not so effectively woven into the narrative. Etymological information, the evocation of little-known but meaningful events of Jamaican history, and a wide-ranging intertextuality all mix in *Abeng* to "[expand] the Caribbean social and semantic space" (Gikandi [1992], 239). But *Abeng* does not only retrieve lost meanings, it also seeks the "imaginary collapse of the given" (246) by, for example, refiguring the island's

phallogocentric genealogy through a focus on Nanny, the female Maroon leader.

Unsurprisingly, the gaps in the collective memory also affect Clare's family whose "carefully contrived mythology" (Cliff [1984], 29) the novel dismantles by revealing some of its secrets, such as Clare's ancestor's native mistress, his burning of his slaves on the eve of Emancipation, and the homosexuality of one of her uncles. Ironically, Clare remains unaware of all this, and the novel closes with her inability to understand a dream in which she stones her black friend Zoe (a clear reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea*). "She had no ideas," the narrator adds, "that everyone we dream about we are" (166).

No Telephone to Heaven presents an older Clare Savage, still trying to come to terms with her split self. After a motherless adolescence in a racist New York, studies in London and wanderings on mainland Europe with a black Vietnam veteran, thirty-six-year-old Clare returns for good to her native Jamaica, now under Michael Manley's rule, determined to follow her mother's advice to help her people, which she does by joining a group of revolutionaries and giving them the farm she has inherited from her grandmother. But "there is no telephone to heaven," as the title indicates, that is "no way of reaching out or up" (Cliff [1987], 16), no magical solution to endemic poverty and violence; the only way out for Jamaicans is to rely on themselves, as Christopher, a boy from the Dungle, tragically does by becoming a murderer.

Nonetheless, Clare's return journey is one of remembrance of woman-centered myths (like that of Nanny, the Maroon leader, or Pocahontas), of reunion with the spirit of her female ancestors who are identified with the motherland – "here is her" – and of efforts toward "restoration," a personal quest mirrored in her best friend, Harry/Harriet, a transsexual who is like Clare "neither one thing nor the other" (174, 87, 131).

Abeng and *No Telephone to Heaven* follow roughly the contours of Cliff's own fragmented self which is also the subject of two collections of remarkable prose poems, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*, 1980, and *The Land of Look Behind*, 1985. *Free Enterprise*, 1993, her third novel, testifies to an extended agenda going well beyond the identity dilemmas of colonial Clare Savage to cover a wider diasporic domain, an evolution also perceptible in the later fiction of Brodber and Phillips. Its multivoiced narrative deals with resistance to slavery and centers on two women activists, Annie Christmas and Mary Ellen Pleasant. The first is a light-skinned Jamaican who joins American abolitionists in the 1850s and ends up, some sixty years later, leading a "secluded" life in Louisiana (Cliff [1993-a], 4). The second is a successful black entrepreneur, very much "her own woman" (96), who owns high-class hotels staffed by runaway slaves she has helped to escape. By recovering the

two women's participation in an aborted slave insurrection funded by Mary Ellen herself but recorded in history as "John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry," the novel enacts the revision of this "official version" (16), while simultaneously emphasizing the unavoidable subjectivity and fantasy of memory, thus of historical records as well, since "we carry more within us than we can ever imagine" (202). Such is at least the message conveyed in the stories told, "like a poor man's Decameron" (58), by Annie's neighbours, the members of a leper colony whose leprosy is in fact metaphorical and who have been incarcerated for their political activism (see Cliff [1993-b], 598). Among them is Rachel DeSouza, a Jew from Suriname, who recalls the Inquisition and the persecution of her people in fifteenth-century Europe. As was the case with *Abeng*, the complexity of *Free Enterprise* is reflected in its richly allusive text but also in its polysemous title. The name of a restaurant run by a Negro fisherman where Annie and Mary Ellen have meals together, "Free Enterprise" echoes at once the capitalism that gave rise to the Institution, the entrepreneurship blacks have to engage in if they want access to power, but also, more positively, the enterprises undertaken to liberate slaves.

There are many points of convergence between the novels by women writers such as Brodber, Kincaid, and Cliff and the fiction of Lawrence Scott and Caryl Phillips, namely their overlapping interests in otherness (whether Jewishness or sexual ambiguity), their conflation of sexual and colonial victimization, and their crossing of the borders of race, class, gender, or nation, both in theme and form. While this commonality challenges once more the validity of the controversial concept of a specifically feminine writing, it clearly indicates the emergence of a new creolized sensibility, one rejecting oppositional stances and one whose fluid boundaries have rendered obsolete issues of purity and legitimacy. To the editors of an anthology of Caribbean women's writing who speak of Michelle Cliff's "compromised authenticity" (Mordecai and Wilson [1989], xvii), young Caribbean writers themselves, whether male or female, seem to suggest the following answer: that, even without a "true-true name," "We are New World People, and we built this blasted country from the ground up. We are part of its future, its fortunes" (Cliff [1993-a], 151).

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