

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL PLURALISM:

EAST INDIANS IN THE CARIBBEAN.

VOLUME TWO.

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Chapter Eleven.From the Sugar Estate to the Suburbs: Varieties of Indian Residential Experience.

The image of the Indian in the Caribbean as a rural person, wedded by choice to the land, has been one of the most persistent stereotypes of both non-Indian social comment and fiction. By contrast, much Indo-Caribbean fiction, whilst quantitatively reflecting the fact that the majority of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana do live in rural areas and are employed in agriculture, very strongly challenges the conception of the Indian as a country-dweller by choice. Indeed, the overwhelmingly negative treatment of rural life by Indo-Caribbean writers indicates strongly that we are often simply being presented with an alternative stereotype. Many of the writers discussed in this chapter came either from urban backgrounds or made their 'escape' from the country-side. It is frequently evident that, as yet, we have only received a partial view of this area of Indo-Caribbean experience.

The chapter focuses on residential location, rather than social class as the most significant aspect of the internal diversity of the Indian population, though the one is often the indicator of the other. The diversity, the relationship between estate, rural village, urban centre and wealthy suburb, is both synchronous and sequential. The journey of Mr. Biswas from the mud and grass hut of the village of his birth to the jerry-built but still solid house in Sikkim Street represents a passage made by a significant minority of Indians.

As Chapter Seven outlined, at the beginning of the journey, for virtually all the Indians who came to the Caribbean, was a period of residence on a sugar estate. For some it was no more than a temporary phase; for others, particularly in Guyana, the estates remained as distinctive communities until the early 1950s. The egalitarian social climate, industrial militancy and the non-Brahminical religious practices of the estate marked it off quite distinctively from the

villages where the pattern of North Indian village life, including an attenuated caste system, was reconstituted. In its difference, the image of estate life has varied very sharply depending on the observer's point of view. In Guyana, for instance, Indians in the rice-growing areas of the Essquibo, where an orthodox Brahminical culture survives, have tended to look down on estate dwellers as 'low nation' people who drank, were violent and had disorganised family lives.²

Such a view is very much present in the Green Vale chapter of V.S. Naipaul's A House For Mr. Biswas (1961), the work, of course, of an urbanised Brahmin. The estate is a place where blighted nature symbolizes the blighted lives. Naipaul uses the image of the trees whose leaves are half-dead, with death 'spreading at the same pace from the roots' and leaves which 'only grew longer before they too died'³ to suggest the decaying stasis which afflicts the labourers' lives. They still live in the barracks of the indenture period, they wait for their pay in 'slow submissive queues' and are apparently content to put up with the 'mud, animal droppings and the quick slime on the stale puddles'^(p 132) of the barrack yard. Theirs is a life of crude pleasures: Christmas is a day of 'abandoned eating and drinking and ...the beating of wives'.^(p 137) Relationships are determined by power. When the labourers detect Biswas's weakness they are quick to mock him and, when Seth, whom they fear, takes estate land away from them, they begin a campaign of sly terror against Biswas. They kill his dog and, after his departure from the estate, burn his house down. Biswas's own feelings are corrupted by living near to them:

He began to speak of the brutishness of the labourers; and instead of wondering, as he had done at the beginning, how they lived on three dollars a week, he wondered why they got so much. (p 181)

Yet in this episode, there is also a scene of peculiar tenderness when, after Biswas collapses and Anand is heard screaming, one of the labourers braves his way through the storm. As he approaches Anand he cries,^(p 254) 'Oh my poor little calf! Oh my poor little calf!' It is a humanity

which Biswas has been unable to see and which Naipaul only belatedly suggests.

Sheik Sadeek's novel, The Song of the Sugarcanes (1975), is the work of one who escaped. In the foreward he writes: 'In-as-much as I hate to look back at my slavish days on the plantation...' and the novel, which portrays every aspect of estate life as contemptible, consistently expresses this perspective.⁴ It is presented as a saga of Indian achievement, 'from rags and total illiteracy; from the...slush and mud of a remote sugarcane plantation, to learning and luxury',⁵ but is in fact the story of an escape from Indianness into European mimicry. The estate dwellers aim always to reduce life to a mean lowness. When they learn that the heroine, Lillawattie, is destined to marry the Indian foster-son of a wealthy white doctor, they jealously try to assassinate her character and drag her down to their own level. The estate women, 'cane-field women' who sleep with the overseers for favours, affect a hypocritical moral indignation when Lillawattie is discovered alone with a boy. The men are portrayed as craven cowards. When things start to go wrong during an attempted strike they mill around 'uneasily, like a tired hungry pack...squabbling and whimpering'. When Lillawattie looks at them she thinks: 'What a rice-bellied lot! What guts they have...Pity rolled within her'.⁶ It is the pity of contempt. Their culture is presented as only an assertion of lowness. Lillawattie's sharp-tongued mother spends much time trying to teach her daughter a proper passivity: 'Me tell you to keep you blasted mout' padlock, an' not to watch people in them face!'⁷

By contrast, Peter Kempadoo and in particular Rooplall Monar, both of Madrassi estate backgrounds, have written of its life rather differently. In part, Peter Kempadoo's Guiana Boy (1960), also the story of one who escaped, reiterates the negative picture V.S. Naipaul and Sadeek give. However, Guiana Boy has the virtue of going beyond the stereotypes and bringing the people of the estate into a closer focus. It shows, for instance, that even within the ranks of the workers there

social gradations, so that people like Lilboy's parents look up to the white manager and are highly gratified by his occasional show of patronage, and despise the common labourers who live in the nigger-yard. And though to some extent Guiana Boy presents a uniform picture of the labourers as a coarse, pork-eating, heavy-drinking and sexually ribald group, it also contains characters such as Lilboy's feckless but likeably rascallish Uncle Tobie who successfully evades the regimentation of estate life.

In many respects Kempadoo's Old Thom's Harvest (1965), also based on his growing up on the Cane Grove estate on the Mahaica river, is an even less satisfactory work of fiction since it exposes Kempadoo's inability to develop character and impose a vision on what he records. However, as a portrayal of a group of people who have been abandoned by employers and Government when sugar production is halted on the estate (as happened in Cane Grove in 1948) the novel does begin to suggest some of the strengths of the estate community which were lost in its break-up. Nevertheless, Kempadoo's portrayal remains ambivalent. For instance, the apathy of the remaining people is seen as endemic to the culture of the estate. As Charlie Thom, a former estate driver complains, estate coolies had allowed 'shit to float all around the place and into their kitchens every time the rain spit...' The men are seen as having been emasculated by the power of the overseers to take their wives and they remain trapped by the illusion that the white management class cares for them. Charlie Thom tells 'Mas' Ken', the son of the former manager, 'we miss your Pa from this estate one helluva lot', and they mistakenly believe that Mas' Ken will take up their cause. Yet Kempadoo also shows the estate people in a different light. The meeting they hold with a Government representative reveals them as having a shrewd political awareness. They have no illusions about what the middle class politicians were doing. They send a representative of a company union packing for doing 'boss-man stinking work and lick their behind for a few copper cents'. Again, Charlie Thom's wife suggests

something of the former social solidarity of the estate in the past when 'people was one' and 'People woulda share what they got'. She recalls how life was hard:

But for all that, when people go to work early in the mornning they whistle and sing and laugh and when they come back from work at six o'clock in the afternoon they whistle and sing and laugh. And after dinner the East Indians boiled their channa and the black people their black-eye peas and rast corn and they all sit down near their hand-lamps and their mosquito smoke-pots and looked out into the black night and and tell their children stories that make your skin grow.::'

It is a memory of the estate shared by many former estate dwellers, but not one which Kempadoo was able to integrate effectively into the texture of either of his novels.

The most outstanding attempt to do justice to the evident heterogeneity of estate experience is Rooplall Monar's collection of short stories, Backdam People (1985).^(C) Monar was born in a mud-floor logie on Lusignan estate, the son of cane-workers (his mother still works as a weeder). He lived on Lusignan until he was about ten, before moving to Annandale village where he has lived ever since. Monar has developed a mature, clear-sighted perspective on estate life, portraying both its positive and negative features with equal conviction. Socially he has never separated himself from those whose lives have been shaped by working in the canefields, and though his stories are sometimes angry, they never express contempt. Monar's social commitment to recording the lives of the backdam people is reflected in his consistent and inventive use of creolese throughout the stories. By a process of deep reflection on his childhood memories and hours of talking with older men and women, he has developed an intimate and inward view of estate culture.

He recognises very clearly that though there were certain underlying consistencies in the social structure of the estate, in the twenty year period his stories span, it was never a static system. Above all he shows that though the estate dwellers lived their lives within the same circumscribed conditions, they maintained an intense individuality. Indeed, several of the stories focus on how, within the external

uniformity, the construction of an idiosyncratic personality absorbs much of the creative energies of the characters. In addition, though Monar never decorates his stories with cultural detail merely for the sake of it, he shows that the estates were not just places of labour, but communities where people made music, danced, told stories and worshipped.

Within the stories there are alternative views of the estate. There are those like Sumintra and Big-Boy Mumma in 'Jan-Jhat' who regret that the old days have gone and that the younger generation have changed: 'Eh-eh, dem young gal, proper shameless nowadays', they complain. There is also the view of the estate headmaster in 'Dhookie' who, meeting the school's biggest dunce a few years after he has left, and hearing him proudly announce that he 'wukking in the mule gang', sadly reflects that 'Dull or brilliant, they all end in the sugar cane field.' None of the stories ignores the hierarchical structure of the estate and the manager's power; they show that though that power breaks some, degrades some, corrupts some and forces some into absurd compromises, there are others who rebel or, by cunning and ingenuity, subvert the estate order to their advantage. Monar's estate dwellers are never mindless automatons; if they appear to be acting passively it is because they have weighed the consequences and have decided to bide their time.

Monar portrays the power relationship between manager and workers with a mixture of acerbity and humour. In 'Cent and Jill', for instance, the school children are marched at Christmas to the manager's house where Missie throws down coins and sweets to them from the balcony and they will scramble :

jus like when dog does fight among they self fo food throw-
ing to them from verandah-top while the Missie giggling.

The narrator recalls his youthful awareness of how teachers Urmilla and Johnson signal their feelings when the Headmaster makes them sing 'Rule Brittania' by 'fanning themselves with exercise book as though they feel hot', but notes that as soon as they reach the estate house yard they start 'moving like athlete when they know them Missie watching

them'.

The stories are acute on how the power of the manager is often disguised by the intermediary role of traditional authority figures from the Indian community. 'Hakim Driver' shows how such figures, whether sacred or profane, are often corrupted by their role. Hakim-bap, the Muslim majee on the estate, uses his spiritual authority to gain a privileged place as a barrier between the manager and the workers' complaints. 'Slow-slow Hakim-baap and them bakra man come thick-thick like konky', so that when people come to him he consults his Koran and tells them 'This is not right time to discuss with big manja. Wait after the moon full'. Freed from estate work to pursue his ministry, the majee 'always dred in he mind that if he come too disgusting, big manager might want to send he back to the backdam'. Similarly, his son, Hakim Driver, uses his position to take advantage of other men's wives. Monar deals ironically with the connection between the two kinds of authority when an irate husband chops Hakim and 'he private come too weak'; he abandons his secular power and takes over from his late father as majee and becomes 'one very good man'.

The absurd compromises forced on those sympathetic to the workers but beholden to the manager is the theme of 'Lakhan Chase Dispenser'. The estate hospital dispenser is Mathews, a creole from Georgetown who makes a point of 'always bowing and saying : 'How do you do?' to anybody, even if you cleaning mule-stable self like Black-an-Shine and Rat'. Mathews feels genuine sympathy for the workers, particularly when they start to bring him gifts, and freely gives out sick-notes. However, he is then instructed by the manager to stamp out malingering. He solves his dilemma by giving out doses of Epsom salts to those whom he suspects might be faking, in order that they can show genuine symptoms of illness. The scheme backfires when Lakhan's dose of salts proves so explosive (described with graphic gusto) that it prevents him from going to the funeral he had needed the sick-note for. He suspects the dispenser has poisoned him and is only just stopped from

using his cutlass on the dispenser. Nevertheless, he readily believes Mathews's lie that the manager had ordered him to give out the salts. He even feels sorry for Mathews and says, 'You know, me pappa say never trust one backra'. The story ironically accepts Mathews's lie as a kind of truth.

Monar always remembers though, that there are those who are broken by the estate. In 'Hakim Driver', Khan is one of the cuckolded husbands, but he is forced to be compliant because estate work has broken his health and made him impotent, and he needs Hakim's favour to obtain lighter work. And yet, and the stories are full of such ironic perceptions, coexisting with Hakim's exploitation of Khan's weakness is a human relationship: Khan and his wife 'come more thick as man and wife and Hakim like the big brother'.

But if the hierarchical order of the estate is the major fact in the workers' lives, their response is by no means always passive. In 'Cent and Jill', when the boy who witnesses the undignified scrambling of the children suddenly recognises the meaning of the event, he stands aside and on the way back to his house has to plunge into the canal 'for cool-off me passion'. There are characters like Bahadur who in the story of that name 'can't stem the blasted advantage them driver and overseer does take of them thick and good-looking coolie and black-women', who has such a strong regard for his dignity that 'you couldn't dare eye-pass he...or else was real trouble. And he don't stand fo nonsense from them driver and overseer and backra man, never mind them control the estate at that time'. He is one of a group of characters who ingeniously succeeds in getting a position for himself which protects his independence. 'Massala Maraj' shows the comic lengths to which the cunning would go to exploit the management to their own advantage. This story both celebrates Maraj's cunning and satirises his brahminical pretensions: 'E always t'inkin' dat he is brahmin an backdam wuk noh so prappa for 'e caste'. Massala Maraj inveigles his way out

of field labour by making the manager and his wife addicted to his 'massala fowl curry'. He becomes the estate carpenter and, according to the saying, 'neva trus' a Brahmin too much, E mek yuh run, Papa', Maraj is soon using his position to cheat the manager. However, despite his wife's warning ('Yuh mean yuh na got lil shame pon' yuh. Nah mek yuh eye big. Tief, but nah tief nuff for get ketch...') Massala is too greedy and is inevitably caught by the manager as he is dragging a log underwater along the canal. He has to pretend that he is 'shyin' for patwa, the small fish which live in the canal mud. It is a scene which brings out all Monar's gifts for visual and aural comedy. Yet, if Maraj is a winner, it is clear that he succeeds only because he has fitted himself into the power structure of the estate.

The pervasiveness of that structure is shown by the way that those who attempt to create an alternative system of esteem, mimic the estate structure by basing their reputation not on moral consensus but on compliance exacted through force. For instance, Ramban, another 'dam independent' man, in the story, 'Bully Boy', tries to establish a position for himself which is outside the estate hierarchy; but it mimics that hierarchy by being based purely on fear and the threat of physical brutality. Ramban uses his power merely to exact a constant supply of drinks from his weaker workmates. However, based as it is on physical force, Ramban's power is vulnerable. His reign of terror ends when 'one big strong man chop-up Bully-Boy ...and cool Bully-Boy for good'. Thereafter he is a pathetic broken figure. Yet, as other stories show, the estate was not merely a society of the weak and the strong, but a community with its own moral norms and tolerances. Thus the rise of the estate badman, such as Bully-Boy, is seen very much as a phenomenon of the early 1950s as the old estate communities were breaking up and political changes were giving the workers a different idea of themselves

Those changes can be seen most clearly in a story such as 'Jhan-Jat' where Data, by carefully biding her time, successfully rebels against her husband and his domineering mother, so that she can live

'me life according to me own likeness'. That urge, suppressed, diverted into devious and anti-social forms as it sometimes is, is seen by Monar to underlie the behaviour of nearly all his estate-dwelling characters.

The heart of the sugar estate experience is, of course, physical labour, the tasks of trenching, weeding, planting and cutting, which until the slow spread of mechanisation, have changed scarcely¹¹ at all since the days of slavery. Surprisingly, there are remarkably few fictional portrayals of the act of labour, with the exception of significant episodes in three of Samuel Selvon's works. His treatment is ambivalent. In 'Cane Is Bitter', it is the life of field labour which Romesh has to escape from, but his only moment of pleasure during his visit to his family is when he joins his brother Hari cane-cutting and restores a contact which education has broken.¹² Similarly, in Turn Again Tiger (1958) cane-labour symbolises for Tiger everything which is servile in the Indian experience in the Caribbean, but it is part of his progress to maturity that he must test himself in the cane-fields:

'I have a feeling to work, to cut cane until I sweat, and all my muscles tired, and still go on cutting...' ¹³

In The Plains of Caroni (1970), Selvon seems almost to create a mystique of the figure of the cane-cutter in the portrayal of Balgobin's quixotic battle against the new harvesting machine. Balgobin is proud of his skill in wielding 'poya', his cutlass and the harvester threatens his skill. Yet though Selvon romanticises Balgobin's revolt, he also shows that in the act of cane-cutting Balgobin makes himself akin to the machine he despises:

Every move he had had purpose and effect, and after a minute or so he became engrossed with the rhythm of the work... He was like a machine himself, performing automatically without pause. ¹⁴

If novelists have written little about work, the figure of the sugar worker has proved irresistible to Indo-Caribbean poets. There are at least fourteen versions,¹⁵ most of which express a sentimental but genuine protest against the harshness of the sugar worker's life, which, as the sugar economy has grown less important, has become increasingly

depressed. Monar, one of the few writers actually to have worked on an estate, catches the monotonous, depersonalising rhythms of labour in his poem, 'Creole Gang':

Baling and throwing
among green canes from rusty punts...
between cane roots and black streams,
sunburnt trenches and parched earth,
wearied days and restless reality.
Their hands and limbs are but fragments
That walk and bathe...¹⁷

By contrast, rice cultivation, seen as a symbol of peasant independence, is portrayed as requiring labour which, though hard, is dignified and productive. Jagdip Maraj's 'Reaping Rice' in The Flaming Circle (1966) pictures a peasant woman whose look towards her toiling husband,

...is neither servile, fearful nor proud
But is rich with tender love and pity...
she returns to the lagoon and plants
her strong legs into the earth...¹⁸

The sugar estate communities existed in pure form in Guyana up to the 1950s, though even then many estates had a high proportion of inhabitants who were not employees. In the Caroni and Oropouche areas of Trinidad, on the Essequibo coast and in the rice-growing areas of the Corentyne in Guyana, the majority of Indians lived in independent villages and settlements. Some of these remained dependent on estate work, but in others a more self-sufficient life developed on the basis of rice cultivation, cane-farming and provisions growing. As was outlined in Chapter Seven, in many of these villages there was a partial restoration of the kind of cultural patterns to be found in the villages of Uttar Pradesh. Yet even in the nineteenth century there were those who left the countryside, and, particularly after the economic boom stimulated by the American presence (especially in Trinidad) in the post-second-world-war period, the urban centres increasingly attracted younger Indians away from the country areas. This process has intensified as communications media (and improved transportation) have brought images of urban plenty into the homes of country-dwellers, their impact increased by the actual Governmental neglect the rural areas have suffer

ed. Nevertheless, many Indians remain attached to rural life and the culture it supports.

In such a context, it is scarcely strange that literary images of Indian village life have tended to polarise around its actual positive and negative features. Much is the work of writers whose experience has been urban or whose education and employment have taken them away from the country. There are exceptions, writers such as Vishnu Gosine and Harricharan Narine who have remained in touch with village life and whose literary treatment of it is notably more sympathetic than that of urban writers such as V.S. and Shiva Naipaul or refugees from Trinidadian Indian village life such as Harld Sonny Ladoo.

Images of village life have changed in ways that reflect both actual changes and changes in the way rural life has been seen. One striking feature of the short stories of Seepersad Naipaul is that in most of them the village locale is assumed and rarely described visually. It is simply Indian life. However, in one or two of the later stories defining elements increase. For instance, in the second part of 'The Adventures of Gurudeva' ^(c. 1948-1950) we are told at one point:

But Cacande was not like St. James or Arima or San Fernando. Cacande was not polyglot. Cacande was a little India, almost wholly Hindu-populated...¹⁹

Something has happened. Seepersad Naipaul no longer feels able to take the village for granted. This becomes even clearer in the short piece, ^(c. 1945-1948) 'In The Village', a product of his involvement in a Government survey of rural poverty. He now sees the village with other eyes, from the standard of the city where he had been living since 1938. For instance, when he looks at the inside of a poor caneworker's hut, he now sees all the absences:

The hut inside was almost empty. A few sugar-sacks were dumped in a corner; some faded, non-descript garments hung on a line that was stretched from one wall to another; a pair of work trousers hung from a nail on the wall; from another nail hung a felt hat that had seen better days... Everything in that hut seemed to be competing for a prize in drabness. 20

Thereafter there are few Indo-Caribbean portrayals of rural life

which are not made from the perspective of the city. V.S. Naipaul has written of his own experience:

I liked the move to Port of Spain, to the emptier house, and the pleasures and sights of the city... After the shut-in compound life of the house in Chaguanas, I liked living in a city street. ²¹

The rural setting his father had once taken for granted, is now exotic. The young Naipaul is taken to visit 'the Indian village life I had never known... when we went to the country to visit my father's own relations... it was like a fairy tale come to life'. ²² Those of V.S. Naipaul's aware characters who live in the country all have that outsider's view. In The Mystic Masseur (1957), when Ganesh comes back to live in Fourways, though his experience of Port of Spain has been uncomfortable ('too big, too noisy, too alien'), he no longer feels he belongs in the village:

He began to feel a little strange and feared that he was going mad. He knew the Fourways people and they knew him, but he sometimes felt cut off from them. ²³

Similarly, Naipaul's description of Fuente Grove, where Ganesh moves with Leela, indicates an urban response which sees from a distance and from the outside:

They had few thrills. The population was small and there were not many births, marriages or deaths to excite them... Once a year, at the 'crop-over' harvest festival... Fuente Grove made a brave show of gaiety... men, women and children rattled the piquets on the carts and beat on pans, singing about the bounty of God. It was like the gaiety of a starving child. ²⁴

The last intrusive sentence, with its uncharacteristically awkward rhythm and forced metaphor, suggests a response not quite under control. In A House For Mr. Biswas (1961), the ironically titled chapter describing Mr. Biswas's childhood, 'Pastoral', and the chapter dealing with his time as an incompetent shopkeeper in The Chase, both portray the village as a place where human life is unaccommodated, effort ineffectual and results temporary. The 'pastoral' world of Biswas's village childhood is made up of the 'unnecessary and unaccommodated', of useless people like Bipti's father 'futile with asthma' or the people in Ajodha's rumshop, 'useless people crying in corners'. ^(p 52) It is a world where Biswas's malnutrition gave him eczema and sores 'that swelled and burst

and scabbed and burst again until they stank', ^(p 19) where children are robbed of their childhoods so that they have the 'mannerisms of adults'. It is a place where the crumbling mud huts symbolize the people's failure to make any mark on the earth. Though the rituals performed for Biswas's birth suggest a people whose reverences are still intact, Naipaul sees no community in the village. It is a brutish world where Dhari terrorises the widowed Bipti as he digs for Raghu's buried money. Similarly, when Biswas goes to keep the Tulsi shop in the Chase, Naipaul emphasises its singular lack of charm, whether natural or human. Yet coming to the Chase stimulates in Biswas a nostalgia for moments in his childhood, though these memories are characteristically presented as evanescent and uncertain. The scent of roasting poui sticks brings: sensations, not pictures, of an evening meal being cooked over a fire that shone on a mud wall and kept out the night, of cool, new, unused mornings, of rain muffled on a thatched roof and warmth below it: sensations as faint as the poui itself, but sadly evanescent, refusing to be seized or to be translated into a concrete memory. (p 131)

There is a similar moment of recall in Shiva Naipaul's Fireflies (1970), when Ram Lutchman goes on a trip to the rural south of Trinidad with his Presbyterian friend, Doreen James. ²⁵ The episode is important because it reveals to Ram the real nature of his relationship to Doreen, and because it suggests something of the richness which has been lost by the urbanised Khojas. The trip brings out all Doreen's silliness, and in her patronising 'anthropological' attitudes Ram sees what he must be in her eyes. He, on the other hand, finds a world he had thought lost, and though Shiva Naipaul emphasises the poverty and discomforts of the village, it still gives 'the impression of completeness and self-sufficiency'. The description of the easy courtesy and generosity of the family who invite Ram and Doreen in and kill a fowl for them to eat gives an authentic picture of rural hospitality which is surprisingly rare in Indo-Caribbean fiction. It is one of the few moments in the novel when Ram is completely happy, eating with his hands, sitting on the earth floor and talking to the old man. As Ram watches the

fireflies outside the old man's hut, for the only time in the novel they are seen as images of freedom 'wheeling in the air, tiny flakes of coloured light'. The episode is without parallel in Shiva Naipaul's fiction. More typical is the portrayal of Coalmine, where Mrs. Lutchman goes to live with her friend Gowra, an anonymous village, set in monotonous vistas of cane, where life is little removed from the animal, mechanically following the annual cycle of cane production. This kind of image of village life is even more emphatically drawn in The Chip-Chip Gatherers (1973) in the portrayal of the Settlement from which Egbert Ramsaran escapes, a place where the eye 'shied away from focusing on the mean huts'²⁶ and social relationships are no more than the mutual corruptions of the weak and the strong. The poor engage in an 'orgy of self-incrimination and self-denigration' when they petition Egbert for favours, while he plays the role of the slave-master, advising his son to 'Frighten them a little! Horsewhip them'.²⁷

The novelist's eye indeed shies away; it refuses to see any human individuality, seeing only children who grow up 'with the fated sameness of animals born and bred to a particular role in life'²⁸ and pretty girls who are destined to become coarse and brutish.

In Harold Sonny Ladoo's unremittingly bleak view of rural life nature itself is part of the awfulness. In No Pain Like This Body (1972),²⁹ snakes and scorpions are both natural enemies of people and symbols of human and cosmic malevolence. Pa, the sadistic persecutor of his wife and children, is like a snake 'watching with poison in his eyes', and 'smarter than a snake' when he starts pelting the snake holes in the rice-bed to make his son, Balraj, come out of the water so he can beat him. When the lightning falls on Tola Trace it falls like snakes. Scorpions are the source of pain in the cane-fields, the literal sting in the tail of Ladoo's claustrophobic world of inescapable suffering. Thus when the sick child, Rama, is put inside the rice-box as the only dry place in the hut, he is stung by the scorpions which Balraj dislodges as he tries to repair the leaking roof. Like the lightning,

the scorpions are 'fire stingers'.

Few novels convey so graphically the sufferings of unaccommodated man from rain and flood. When the rains come, the dampness rises from the mud floor of the hut 'and touched their bodies as dead fingers', and soon the trash roof fails to give any shelter:

Rain began to fall through the holes in the roof, soaking their heads. Some of the needle grass was blown off the roof by the wind. Rain poured through the holes more and more. Inside the kitchen, the floor was getting slippery; almost too slippery to stand...³⁰

As an entirely natural structure the hut teems with insect life. As the rains fall there are crickets inside it 'jumping crazily' and red stinging ants come out from the cracks in the walls.

They started to sting. Real hard. It was as if fire was burning their skins. They moved from against the wall, but the ants were still stinging them. ³¹

When Nanny and Nanna try to take Rama and Balraj to hospital, nature still conspires against them; the flood making it difficult for them to cross the swollen river.

Unaccommodated man is reduced to an animal level. As Chapter Twelve outlines, the low caste inhabitants of Tola Trace possess only a degenerate Hinduism, an inadequate source of consolation and moral instruction. Constantly characters are compared to animals which are low in the chain of being, such as the parallel drawn between the children and the crapaud fish (tadpoles) they are catching, the relationship of the children to Pa and the relationship of the people to the Sky God who sports with their lives. Just as the tadpoles (which 'behaved like drunk people in the water') don't see Balraj creeping up on them, he fails to see Pa lying in wait to beat him. Pa eats mangoes 'like a pig' and Panday sings to Ma 'you ugly like a rat, rat, rat'. When Rama dies, the Pundit gives Pa the comfort of the farmyard: 'you just have to ride you wife to make anodder chile'.³²

If the material circumstances of the inhabitants of Karan settlement in Ladoo's Yesterdays (1974), set in 1955, is no longer so constrained, (though it is portrayed as a revoltingly odiferous place) the emotional and spiritual quality of the inhabitants' lives is, if anything, even

more debased. The settlement is riven by the casus belli of Poonwa's plan to go on a Hindu mission to Canada. He is enthusiastically supported by his mother and her friend, Rookmin, because they know that:

All the young scholars in Karan settlement were doomed. The sugarcane estates were monsters; they were in the habit of yawning and swallowing young men; those who were lucky enough to get away from the estates were trapped into a career of rum-drinking and fighting. ³³

Yesterdays, like No Pain Like This Body, which is set in 1905, is a virulent attack on sentimental attitudes to the past such as Choonilal's complaint that 'Everybody in dis island want to go to school. Nobody don't want to work in de cane or plant tomatoes and ting...'. If the middle class Indians at the University talked of the sense of community to be found in the villages, Ladoo portrays a village life where a preoccupation with sex and excretion is the only real link between people. Sook, the village queer, who spends his time seducing the young men and manipulating the quarrels of his neighbours, sentimentally tells them, 'All you livin in one village man. All you must try to live good'. ³⁴ The hypocrisy of what passes for community is sharply satirised in the episode when Poonwa pretends to be dead as part of his campaign to make his father borrow the money to send him on his mission. The presence of the weeping mourners is outwardly a sign of communal solidarity, but all present are in reality pursuing their own self-interest. ³⁵ Choonilal's wife, Basdai, is screaming hysterically in order to trick her husband; Tailor, their idle lodger, who thinks that Poonwa is dead, weeps to impress Basdai so that she will take him in permanently; and Ragbir, their lecherous neighbour, throws himself on the floor in grief so that he can look up the women's dresses.

Ladoo evidently had good reason to loathe rural Trinidad and escape to Canada; on one of his return visits to see his family he was found dead with head wounds in mysterious circumstances. ³⁶ Other writers have seen in rural life many of the same ills savaged by Ladoo, though few have portrayed the lives of rural people so rebarbatively.

There are a good many stories about the scourge of alcoholism such

as Amir Jairam's 'Ram Take A Gamble' (1971), Carl Kowlessar's 'Gambage' (1970), Vishnu Gosine's 'Daddy's Dead' (1973) and 'Uncle Jai' (1974), Celia Dharanpaul's 'Bushrum' (1971), Diane Ramdass's 'The Drunkard' (1974) and the character of Harrilal in Selvon's The Plains of Caroni (1970). Most are merely censorious, though Gosine's 'Uncle Jai' deals more sympathetically with the alcoholic figure. However, the boy narrator's switch from seeing his uncle with contempt for his moral failure to seeing him sympathetically as a victim of circumstance is only the substitution of one oversimplified construct for another. Indeed, for all the quantity of fictional emphasis there is little enlightenment; here fiction lags behind the sociological approaches of Agrosino and Yawney.³³

Other stories focus on rural violence, such as Vishnu Gosine's 'My Grandfather's Story' (1974), S.K. Ragbir's 'Ratface' (1980), Cyril Dabydeen's 'Bitter Blood' in Still Close To The Island (1980) and in several stories in Harry Narain's collection Grass-Root People (1981). In nearly all, outbreaks of violence are portrayed as the consequence of tensions brought on by scarcity or the inarticulate response of simple people to a world which perplexes them. In Dabydeen's 'Bitter Blood', Bull has been inured to violence by his childhood beatings and driven to assert the manhood lost by his lowly position on the white-man's estate by bullying his fellow villagers. When Crabdog, a stranger, comes into the village and, though only a small man, shows no fear of Bull, the latter suspects he is working obeah on him. Crabdog is found murdered with Bull the chief suspect. In Harry Narain's stories, there is an ambivalence between portraying the casual cruelties of village life as intrinsic and as the product of specific, external political pressures. Narain's collection has few literary pretensions, but as the work of a rice farmer (formerly a teacher) it gives an exact picture of how the rice farmers of the Essequibo have suffered from P.N.C. Government policy and the corrupt party bureaucracy which has all but strangled the industry. In 'Letter To The Prime Minister' he describes

how the blockages in the milling and marketing system make farmers employ 'dog-eat-dog tactics...All ayou in the same rat race. Everyone o' you want you paddy gon fust'³⁹. Those pressures are seen in the general callousness of behaviour. In 'Frugal Minded', a youth caught stealing mangoes which would otherwise have gone to waste is sadistically punished by the children who catch him. In 'Man or Beast', an old man is provoked by the greater energy and drive of a younger into horribly mutilating one of the younger man's cows. In 'Phagwah Story', the festival is portrayed as being celebrated without any mirth, only an 'ugly drunken laughter'. When a sickly baby catches pneumonia and dies after being drenched by a group of drunken women, few of the neighbours attend the funeral.⁴⁰ 'It was only a little child, a baby...'. However, if Narain's picture of Indo-Guyanese rural life in the 1970s is unromantically harsh, there is always implicit in the stories a norm of Indian rural conduct against which the behaviour of the story offends. Thus in 'Man or Beast', the villagers are revolted to the depths of their being by the mutilation of the cow. Other stories which deal with an unneighbourly, dog-eat-dog side of rural life include Amir Jairam's 'The Missing Bull' (1974) and Vishnu Gosine's 'The Mango Raid'. However, there are also stories which dwell on the moral courage and stoic dignity of rural people. For instance, Neville Matadin's 'The Cycle' and 'Environment' (1973) both celebrate the rural struggle to survive, and Vishnu Gosine's 'The Last of The Jaikarans' tells without sentimentality but with great power, of the altruism of the widow who labours in the cane fields and has no thought for anything other than her children's welfare.

The need to escape from the restrictions of village life is a theme which is frequently explored.⁴¹ In Clyde Hosein's collection The Killing of Nelson John and Other Stories it is a constant dream. In 'Crow', Crow Kernahan dreams that his good singing voice and ability to compose jingles will help him to leave the village with its 'heat, the cinema, the farting contests, the endless punning'. But he discovers that

the advertising company only employs professionals and he fluffs his audition. As he returns to his village on the bus he watches the 'ajoupas and cane patches fly by'. Crow both loves the land and is suffocated by it:

It gave him a thrill to sit in one place and watch the earth change. Across the fields, in the canecutters', mud hutments orange flambeaux flared. Stars began to show in the powder-blue sky. A bullfinch flew down to the lowest tier. A great sadness overcame him; yet he began to sing: And the Little Senorita.

He sang for the croaking frog, for the cane, the savannah, the poor people huddled before their rag-and-bottle lamps, for his dead mother, the boredom and materialism of Esperance: You're breaking my heart; Unforgettable; Some enchanted evening. ⁴²

In 'Shoes' Hosein shows alien dreams gripping the impoverished country imagination of Sonnyboy R. Ramsundar, who becomes Rock Ramsundar and takes to riding his mule dressed like a Hollywood cowboy.

The theme of frustrated rural talent is also explored in Vishnu Gosine's 'Ganga Ram', a sentimental story of a homespun philosopher who cries 'like a child' when he tells the boy narrator the story of Charles Dickens, the 'Father of writers' and shows him his bundle of rejected short stories. He tells Johia that 'One day you'll become a writer because you can think. But do not live here. Go away. This place can kill your creativity'. ⁴³

However, there are several writers whose stories recognise that alongside the pressures to escape, there remained continuing attachments to the land. The consequent tension between these two feelings, often expressed in conflict between generations or the resentments of those left behind and the guilt of those who had left, forms the theme of a number of stories. In both Carl Mohammed's 'A Cry For The Land' (1974) and Sheik Sadeek's play, Goodbye Corentyne (1974) ⁴⁴ the conflict is between a husband who feels attachment to the land and a wife who desperately wants to leave it. In Mohammed's story the husband pleads: 'If this land must live again, part of this life must come from my hand, and, all the people who have in they vein the blood of this rich black earth' His wife runs away to town where he finds her short-skirted, lip-sticked

and hair-dyed. She is unimpressed by his poetic description of the town as being like ' a dry coconut that nice outside, but the inside hard and hollow. Nothing real in this place'⁴⁵. In Sadeek's play the husband, Hassan, has similarly negative feelings about townspeople:

From the first time me get to know them man me hate them...
big mout', big talk. Town people rotten! Rotten an' stinkin'
like dead dog ah roadside after rain!⁴⁶

Though his wife insists that without the civilising influence of the town, country people would become wholly barbarian, Hassan insists that in the country 'we will be free jus' like kis-ki-dee on coconut branch'. The argument continues between the wife and two country girls and its vituperativeness suggests that Sadeek was aware that both sides had become increasingly uncertain in their loyalties. The increasing interaction between town and country and the tensions provoked by the drift away are more consciously and wittily explored in Monar's 'Town School Girl' (1974)⁴⁷ which satirises both the pretensions of the country girl attracted to the town who spends her time reading romantic novels and wishing she was whiter and the animus of the narrator who is more than a little pleased that Radha's ambitions come to nothing. For him she is only 'wan country gal who bin a go Night-School in Town and t'ink she mo sma't dan me an yuh who see sun befo' she'. Stories such as Toodesh Ramasar's 'The Mango Tree' (1976) , Vishnu Gosine's 'In The Shadows of The Night' (197?) and Hemraj Muniram's 'A Matter of Circumstance' (1970) deal with the conflicts between idling, decultured village youth and their elders. Harry Narain's 'The Terminal Days' is about the derangement of an old man abandoned by the last of his children who have 'departed the country one after another for overseas utopia'.

Several of Cyril Dabydeen's poems⁴⁸ have as their theme the guilt of one who has left behind other members of his family. In 'Brother' he sees the choking of a life once like his, 'ready to spring out into the world':

Now the voice
is choked; hands
will soon become
gnarled...

He pictures himself waiting:

anxiously
 for you
 to be free
 from that domain
 locked in the fastness
 of vines and trees
 stunted in growth. 49

There is, indeed, remarkably little evidence in the writing discussed above for the creole stereotype that Indians love the land. There are very few Indo-Caribbean attempts to turn rural experience into pastoral. The only exceptions are to be found in Rajkumari Singh's collection A Garland of Stories (1965) and a comparatively small quantity of nature poetry. In Rajkumari Singh's stories a pastoral tone is quite deliberately employed, though other than providing the pattern of an idyll which is subsequently broken, it is not clear why. Certainly, there is no reason to suppose that she actually thought that rural Guyana was a place where lovers met for a 'tryst' in a bower made 'poignant with the odour of crushed jasmines' or where the dreaming cowherd, like the shepherds of Greek pastoral, sits 'on a wide, verdant pasture...gazing into the azure sky flecked by fleecy cloud' or where the 'smell of the soil is the intoxicating perfume of the creator'.

As Chapter Eight has shown, much of the Indo-Caribbean nature poetry of the missionary-influenced period is Anglicised and dutiful. In the work of Selwyn Bhajan, however, rural life finds a genuine celebrant. For Bhajan, nature has a Wordsworthian significance as the moulding influence of childhood and a symbol of the presence of the divine:

That child-discovered pulse of bliss
 Which age-wised men call God. 50

The idea of peasant attachment to the land is used as a symbol of his own religious quest for oneness with the infinite. The religious significance of the land for Bhajan has, in my view, both positive and negative influences on his verse. Sometimes an acutely observed image is diluted by a subsequent moralization, sometimes the image of the peasant is sentimentally indulgent:

Peasant, you have the gentle land to care
 The morning breath to sober waking blues
 Peasant, sometimes I wake to feel that
 I belong to every vibrant fibre of your earth
 And every peaceful peasant pore of you. 51

Yet there are also occasions when Bhajan sees with wholly unpastoral eyes as in 'Swamp Woman':

Her back is bent from too much bearing
 Too much bending to the rice,
 See her, mother moulding mud
 A vessel veined by flesh-diced suffering
 A life wasted in mute, pained plod.⁵²

But there are also poems where Bhajan's vision of peasant figures in harmony with the landscape is much more convincing. For instance, in 'Girl in the Garden' he refuses to see the girl other than for what she is, but sees her with affection and respect:

Damp mud
 Softened by last night's dew,
 Gloved her fingers
 Shoed her toes...
 And she looked
 Like she was,
 A girl in the garden
 Flavouring the early morning wind
 With her sweat.^{51a}

Similarly, 'Poet of The Pod' movingly recollects his father as:

Gentle poet of the pod
 I remember you
 How you smelled
 When I hugged
 The perfume of your pale brown skin
 Dabbed in dried cocoa mud.^{51b}

Between pastoral and counter-pastoral it is evidently difficult for the writer, whether his experience be urban or rural, to come to any accommodating view. Clearly both what Bhajan and Ladoo portray has a subjective and partial kind of truth, but attempts to encompass the whole complexity of rural experience or to work towards a balanced view are rare. One short story which does attempt something of this kind is Ismith Khan's 'A Day in the Country' (1962)⁵³ where the balance derives from a carefully defined point of view and the awareness that the experience of rural life is always historical, and interpreted by people who are at particular junctures of their own experience. The 'I' narrator is a boy who has come to spend a holiday away from the city in his uncle's shop in Tunapuna, still then a village. His is the central consciousness, but the story also reflects other ways of seeing the country. The story describes the Saturday activities in and around

his uncle's shop. He observes his aunt's and uncle's humorous and gently combative relationship, notices that beneath his aunt's business there is an intense enjoyment of 'each moment of the day, each word of conversation'. Like Mohun Biswas, Rajo, the boy's uncle, has been moved out of the family home, equipped with a 'good hardworking girl' from the sugar estates and set up in a shop in the country. It is not what he has wanted, but his 'soul got used to shopkeeping' and Rajo has learned to derive his pleasures from his contacts with people. No moral point is made, simply the observation that there are satisfactions to be had in the country for those who look for them. Indeed, the older Indians who question the boy about the city, look on him with 'a kind of pity' for having to live there. The boy himself experiences awe when, listening to the incessant insect noises of the night, he senses that 'there was nothing outside at all, but only the sound of the earth rolling slowly through the vastness of its mysterious void'.⁵⁴

But the story also shows how the country itself is changing, as gleaming oil refineries are built in Indian areas and draw in labour which until then has been rooted to the soil, or as the picture house brings images of the outside world and makes the boy's cousin feel, 'No more small island for me. Soon, soon, soon as I grow up I leavin' '.⁵⁵ For the older generation there is still the security of a world which moves slowly in its parochial way; but it is a world which is ending as a new political consciousness touches its youth. This is suggested deftly in the scene in the cinema when a youth courts arrest by refusing to stand for the British national anthem: 'And what the hell the King ever do for me - tell me dat',⁵⁶ he protests.

A different kind of doubleness of perception of the country and village life is suggested in some of Samuel Selvon's fiction. In A Brighter Sun (discussed more fully in Chapter Fifteen) Tiger is one of the restless souls who even in semi-urban Barataria feels 'the great distance which separates him from all that was happening'. Yet at the

same time he can also feel an intense satisfaction with the rhythms of rural life, 'as if he were living in accordance with the way things should live'⁵⁷. The attraction of the arcadian dream and its impossibility for Selvon's restless heroes is a theme that runs through his fiction. In An Island Is A World (1955) Foster is briefly tempted by the simple life lived by Father Hope in Veronica, a place that had stayed 'beautiful ...because only poor peasants lived there', people who 'lived simply and worked hard, tilling the land and rearing a few odd head of livestock'⁵⁸. It is a place of innocent virtues in contrast to the cynical, amoral turbulence of urban life. However, Foster knows that for him the dream is impossible, even before he discovers that his confidence in Father Hope is misplaced. Again, Those Who Eat The Cascadura (1972) explores Roger Franklyn's cocoa estate as both an idyllic and an imprisoning spot, an eden where people have a frank innocence and a place which is itself infected by the 'evil spirits, dissension, confusion and every conceivable badness' which the housekeeper, Eloisa, mistakenly imagines is only found in the world beyond the estate. Yet if the thread of pastoral and counter-pastoral runs through Selvon's work, he has also given, in Turn Again Tiger (1958) one of the few portrayals of village life which shows both its warts (its tedium, narrowness and jealousies) and its vigour as a place where diverse individuals share a community of interests. Though Tiger has been too much exposed to the world outside to stay in Five Rivers, he learns an important lesson there about the limitations of possibility and a mature response to that fact:

Whichever way he looked at it, there was no denying that here was life being lived...Whatever dissatisfaction he felt made no difference to the acts of living carried on day after day by the people he knew: the eating, the sleeping, the working, the laughter and the drink in the evening. The women became pregnant and the children were born to take over when the old ones died. There was excitement and jealousy and love and hate and every emotion that could possess a man.⁵⁹

That sense of life being lived is also caught in an unremarked and unpretentious short novel by Harricharan Narine, Days Gone By (c 1975).

One of its strengths is that it was written for a local Trinidadian audience. Although it occasionally gives superfluous explanations about an Indian village past which might be unfamiliar to a contemporary urban audience, and although there are a few intrusive moralisations about the ill-effects of drink, in general the novel simply shows in a non-judgemental but shrewdly observant way, something of the texture of village experience which has tended to disappear behind the attitudinal shaping of other writer's work. Here there is neither pastoral nor counter-pastoral. There are the joys of the boys' holidays playing by the dam, their persisting friendships and their sense of the loyalties amongst the villagers; and there are the pains of beatings and their growing awareness of the dereliction of some adult lives and the casual brutalities meted out to animals. Above all, it is a portrayal of people who simply are. They are thoroughly Indian and thoroughly Trinidadian but spend no time puzzling over their identity. Lives follow archetypal patterns, but the village is never sterile ground. Pleasures are found in the textures of living.

Narine's novel describes a world just before the call of the city broke the insularity of rural life. As Chapter Seven describes, a minority of Indians became city dwellers as soon as they had finished their period of indenture. The Indians of the city were more heterogeneous than any other group. There was from the mid-nineteenth century on an underclass of porters, sweepers, night-soil collectors and beggars. There was also developing a broader group engaged in commerce, with a merchant middle class at one end, small shopkeepers and craftsmen in the middle and hucksters at the bottom. Later there developed the small but growing class of professionals.

The perspective of most Indo-Caribbean writing about the city is that of the internal migrant, coming from a simpler, securer but restrictive background to a place of freedom, hazard and complexity. As Chapter Twelve shows, the essential Indian experience of the city, as portrayed in literature, was contact with the Afro-creole world. Neverthe-

less, Indo-Caribbean writers inevitably also saw the city shaping Indian lives.

The moment of arrival is explored in several stories and novels. In Ismith Khan's short story, 'The Red Ball' (1964), the experience is recorded from the point of view of a boy whose family has just moved to Port of Spain. He is disoriented by the movement of the city, feeling that 'people were chasing him down', and discovers that though his skills at cricket give him access to the company of the Black boys, there is always some barrier between them, such as when they buy pudding and souse (product of the unclean pig) and he slides away fearful that some will be pressed on him. He notices that his parents become increasingly tense as they realise that they have exchanged rural poverty for city poverty; and his father beats him savagely when he takes some money from the house to buy a ball to impress his new friends because he fears that the city is corrupting him. Khan's novel, The Jumbie Bird (1961) explores the aftermath of that arrival, as a Muslim family tries to come to terms with the way that living in Port of Spain accelerates the problems of cultural change. In the remoteness of the country, Indians have been left to get on with their lives without interference, but in the city there is the constant presence of the Government's rules. For some of the family the city offers opportunities not found elsewhere. Binti, the grandmother, estranged from her husband, achieves independence and self-respect as a 'real business woman' selling coal and ground provisions. Her son, Rahim, initially finds greater opportunities for his jewellery trade and her grandson, Jamini, discovers the city's constant novelty, and the freedom to pursue his adolescent friendship with Lakshmi in a way the country village would never have permitted. But the city also undermines certainties and destroys people's sense of who they are. Kale Khan, the family's patriarchal head, who has 'reigned' as a community leader in Indian Princes Town, is marooned in the city, an anachronistic nuisance, shut in with his memories in the small dark room at the bottom of the house. Rahim

discovers that in the city he cannot find apprentices who respect his painstaking approach to his craft and he loses his shop when he becomes entangled in the competitive commerce of the city. Jamini discovers that if the city offers freedom, it does so at the expense of community:

He was learning that he was alone, locked up within himself; that everyone was locked up within themselves, and quite alone. You saw the outer surfaces only... 62

He experiences the city as a place where lives pass without mark, and the streets, which had offered him freedom, come to seem callously indifferent. As a place of isolated individuals the city encourages Indians to abandon inconvenient identities. There is Dr. Gopaul with his white wife who wants to forget that he grew up in the same village as Rahim and Salwan, the time-serving lawyer who tells Kale: 'We must learn, we must learn not to court trouble, we Indians'. They are part of the middle-class Indo-Saxons of the 'India Club':

People with brown skins whose accent, dress and taste for whiskey and soda seemed ridiculous. They would have looked equally ridiculous in Indian dress, or would have gone hungry at a wedding where the aroma from the great cauldrons of curry coiled up to their noses and there was no silverware to pass the food from banana leaf to mouth. Their bones had tautened too long, they could no longer cross their legs and eat on level ground like their parents did. 63

In A House For Mr. Biswas (1961), V.S. Naipaul portrays the Indian experience of the city in broadly similar ways, though he emphasises its positives more strongly. When Mohun Biswas first enters Port of Spain he feels 'free and excited' and senses the city as an organism greater than the sum of its individual parts:

He comprehended the city whole; he did not isolate the individual, see the man behind the desk or the counter, behind the pushcart or the steering-wheel of the bus; he saw only the activity, felt the call to the senses and knew that below it all there was an excitement, which was hidden, but waiting to be grasped. 64

In the city he finds that people like Ramchand and his sister Dehuti, who had eloped from Ajodha's and their position as virtual serfs, have achieved a measure of genuine independence. Their migration to the city has shown the 'futility' of the repressive sanctions of the caste-ridden community which ostracises them. And though Ramchand does not quite fit into the creole life around him, he nevertheless moves in a larger

world. Similarly, when Biswas gets his job on The Sentinel he discovers that the city is linked to the world beyond the island and also that it is a place where relationships can be made on an individual basis. His friendship with Owad, before the latter leaves for England, would have been impossible in Hanuman house.

Inevitably, however, the city reveals more of itself, and the insecurities of his job and accommodation make Biswas see it more soberly:

Up to this time the city had been new and held an expectation which not even the deadest two o'clock sun could destroy. But now not even the thought of the Sentinel's presses, rolling out at that moment reports of speeches, banquets, funerals, could keep him from seeing that the city was no more than a repetition of this: this dark dingy cafe, the chipped counter, the flies thick on the electric flex...the shopkeeper picking his teeth, waiting to close. (p.327)

As Biswas's situation worsens in the chaotic house of the readers and learners, the city comes to seem to him altogether more hazardous, where 'everyone had to fight for himself in a new world', where competitiveness provokes people into a kind of lunacy like Govind's six three-piece suits or W.C. Tuttle's absurd four-foot high statue of the naked woman holding a torch. It is an environment which exacerbates cultural confusion; Biswas wonders of Tuttle, '...and heaven knows what he would be in that morning: yogi, weight-lifter, pundit, lorry-driver at rest'. (p.435)

Yet Naipaul never loses sight of the fact that the city is also a place where, for the individual who secures his portion of it, as Biswas does when he buys the house in Sikkim Street, 'lives would be ordered... memories coherent'.

Although the dominant image of the city in Indo-Caribbean fiction is of a place to be discovered, there were always Indians who were already there. In his 'Prologue to An Autobiography', V.S. Naipaul indicates the rural newcomer's perception of these city Indians:

Hat was our neighbour on the street. He wasn't negro or mulatto. But we thought of him as half-way there. He was a Port of Spain Indian. The Port of Spain Indians - there were pockets of them - had no country roots, were individuals, hardly a community, and were separate from us for an additional reason: many of them were Madrassis ...not people of caste. We didn't see in them any of our own formalities or restrictions... We thought of the other Indians in the street only as street people. 65

These perceptions are expressed in V.S.Naipaul's Miguel Street (1959), where only incidentally does the reader become aware that characters like Hat, Boggart, George and Eddoes, with their city-negro names, are Indians. Clues are given, but rarely explicitly. Thus Boggart's background is suggested by the fact that he has abandoned wives in Tunapuna and Caroni, both Indian districts; George's Indianness is suggested by his pink house, his cows, his wife-beating and the arranged marriage he makes for his daughter, Dolly. Eddoes's Indianness is a remnant of caste memory; he sees his occupation as a scavenging cart-driver as a hereditary one. But the continuity is only apparent. In India sweepers and scavengers are the most down-trodden of the low-caste; in Port of Spain 'the men were aristocrats. They worked early in the morning, and had the rest of the day free. And they were always going on strike...'. There is a little episode when Eddoes tries to take over the boy narrator's brush as he is sweeping the pavement in front of his house which illustrates this point:

I liked sweeping and I didn't want to give him the broom.
 'Boy, what you know about sweeping?' Eddoes asked, laughing.
 I said, 'What it have so much to know?'
 Eddoes said, 'This is my job, boy. I have experience. Wait until you is big like me.'

At one level a low-caste man insists on his lowness when he sees a Brahmin boy doing a sweeper's job. At another, a Trinidadian working class man whose occupation gives him prestige in the urban working class community insists on his skills.

There was one stage further in the process of shedding the traces of a rural background travelled by the urban Indian middle class. As yet their experiences and sensibility have received only scant attention in Indo-Caribbean writing, in novels such as V.S.Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967), Dennis Mahabir's The Cutlass Is Not For Killing (1971) and Peter Ramkeesoon's Sunday Morning Coming Down (1975).

Ralph Kripalsingh in The Mimic Men passes through two stages in detaching himself from the Indian world. The first comes in his youth when he joins his cousin Cecil's set, the sons and daughters of the Indian business class, a self-conscious elite which was 'small and new'

and devoted to the display of their money and modernity, with their talk of the 'occasions they had just staged and the occasions that were about to be staged'. They are still an Indian group, but a group for whom:

there was no talk of past injury, no talk even of the past. These young people were of the new world...⁶⁷

When he returns from London with Sandra, his white wife, Kripalsingh detaches himself still further, joining the 'neutral, fluid group' of young professionals, white, Indian or Coloured, with their 'expatriate and fantastically cosmopolitan wives or girl friends'. They are a group for whom 'There were no complicating loyalties or depths; for everyone the past had been cut away'⁶⁸. Their habitat is the new suburbia, their habits: dinner-parties, barbecues, owning beach-houses and swimming pools, gossip and marital infidelities, a life ready-made from the North American magazines.

Dennis Mahabir portrays the longer established Indo-Saxon Christian group in The Cutlass Is Not For Killing. Stephen, one of the Karmarkar brothers is honest about his desire to 'make money, buy a big American car, a big house with tennis court, lawns and a swimming pool. Eat, drink and be merry - and no blasted coolies around me, either'⁶⁹. The two older brother's show their attachment to older Indo-Christian ways. They are proud that they have been educated into a 'rich mentality', so that they are able to become consumers of literature and the arts. But all three brothers share the urge to separate themselves from the taint of an Indian cultural background.

The nadir of the process is described in Peter Ramkeesoon's Sunday Morning Coming Down, which explores the life-style of the young Indian middle class of the 1970s, in their smart Valsyn or Blue Range high-cost housing developments, driving their air-conditioned Ford Galaxies or Ramblers, drinking Chivas Regal, reclining on modern Danish furniture and wearing silk shirts and expensive watches. It is never entirely clear whether Ramkeesoon is celebrating this affluent style or satirising its vulgarity: Jason Ranjitsingh's only concession to Indianness

(other than his hostility to the Black political establishment) is the ring he wears mounted by a pundit against malju (evil eye). Otherwise he has become a perfectly assimilated member of the North American influenced elite.

The passage from estate or village to city and affluent suburb is a passage away from Indianness. It is the passage of one section of the Indian population, but it is not necessarily the route that all will follow, for the cultural patterns associated with estate and village show considerable resilience. Yet though the majority of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana lead lives which are predominantly rural, one suspects that no work of fiction has yet done justice to their experience. Most of the writers discussed in this chapter appear to have been too close to feelings of having 'escaped' from the rural areas to have been able to show why many of the Indians who live in the country, despite their resentments over political and economic neglect, prefer living there to anywhere else. There has been, for instance, no work of fiction which has revealed as much of the inner workings of the Indian village (of the kind which survived until the 1960s at least) comparable in insight to Morton Klass's work of cultural anthropology, East Indians In Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence (1961). However, there is a new generation of young Indians who have been through the higher education system, but who have remained in the Caribbean and not moved away from contact with rural Trinidad and Guyana. From their midst might well come a richer and more insightful portrayal of Indo-Caribbean rural life, the core of the Indian experience in the West Indies.

The Indo-Caribbean Woman: Experience, Image and Voice.

This chapter examines the portrayal of Indian women and their experience both in male Indo-Caribbean imaginative writing and in the nascent creative expression of Indo-Caribbean women themselves. It calls attention to the actual historical experience of Indian women in the Caribbean, in so far as it is possible to construct a true statement of it from sources which are sketchy and mainly male-oriented, as a means of identifying both emphases and silences in imaginative writing and explaining the belated appearance of women's writing. The chapter has a number of aims. Firstly, in a very small way it attempts to repair a deficiency in virtually all existing literary, historical or sociological studies which have tended to relegate the experience of half the Indo-Caribbean population to the background. The chapter aims both to identify the nature of the various male perspectives to be found and the extent to which women writers have begun to define their experience differently. Secondly, the topic permits an exploration of how Indo-Caribbean writing has dealt with the most intimately felt of cultural changes. For instance, the focus on the portrayal of women in marriage and the family shows how imaginative writers have dealt with the fundamental shift from a communal to an individual framework of values. Finally, the chapter attempts to explore the extent to which in the portrayal of women and gender relationships it is possible to see the survival of a cultural sensibility which is specifically Indian in origin.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first attempts a brief historical survey of the changes in the situation of Indo-Caribbean women; the second deals with the nature of the images of women in male writing and shows that it is in such fiction that one finds both the best and sometimes only existing insights into the possible nature of that experience, and also the clearest exposure of the stereotypes which have been fixed on the Indo-Caribbean woman. The last section deals with the emergence of writing by Indo-Caribbean women.

The Historical Experience.

As Chapter Seven reveals, the experience of Indian women during the indenture period was one of multiple oppression: as an indentured worker in a system of quasi-servitude, as an Indian whose culture was despised as barbaric and heathen by all other sections of the population, and as a woman who suffered from the sexual deprivations of the overseer class, the violence of the Indian male and later from the restrictions of the reconstituted Hindu and Muslim family structure. However, as that chapter pointed out, the experience of women in the indenture period was paradoxical. Because of the imbalance of the sexes and the woman's role as a wage-earner, some women were able, for a period, to achieve a considerable though contested degree of independence. However, when village settlements were established with a partial reconstitution of North Indian village culture, women once more became subject to a traditional patriarchy. Whether women resisted this process or welcomed it as a return to 'stability' is not known. Certainly, though, in the process of village settlement, many women were removed from the labour market as individual wage-earners, some were returned to a state of domestic seclusion and, because of their continuing scarcity, child-marriage, sometimes to much older men, became the norm for girls.

In the period after indenture the most significant aspect of the Indo-Caribbean woman's experience has been the restrictions placed in the way of her education and access to non-domestic spheres of activity. Indeed, the effects of the restrictions have only just begun to disappear. In Trinidad in 1899, after thirty years of Canadian Mission schooling, girls comprised only 28% of total enrolment in the primary schools. This reflected only part of their educational disability since girls were much more likely to be kept at home to perform domestic chores and withdrawn from school early, as soon as their marriages were arranged. Above the primary level inequalities sharpened. Although some secondary education for Indian boys began in

1883, it was not until 1912 that Naparima Girls High School was founded. V.S. Naipaul almost certainly gives an accurate portrayal of common Indian attitudes to female education, right up to the 1930's at least, when, in A House For Mr Biswas (1961), Biswas hears his future bride's scholastic achievements outlined:

'...She is a good child. A little bit of reading and writing even.'

'A little bit of reading and writing —' Mr. Biswas echoed, trying to gain time.

Seth, chewing, his right hand working dexteriously with roti and beans, made a dismissing gesture with his left hand.

'Just a little bit. So much. Nothing to worry about. In two or three years she might even forget.' (Fontana Ed. p.78)

Even when the Canadian Mission made specific attempts to attend to the education of Indian girls, their motives were chiefly to provide suitably domesticated and Christianised wives for the Indian teachers and catechists they were training. Basic literacy and numeracy were taught, but the emphasis was on housewifely pursuits.

The results of this neglect are predictable. Up to 1946 only 30% of Indian women in Trinidad were literate (against 50% for men) and amongst those over 45 only 10.6% were literate. In the census of 1931, only four Indian women were listed as having professions, 72 as teachers (there were 368 male Indian teachers), about 13% were classified as self-employed shopkeepers, peasant farmers and other proprietors, but over 83% of all women in paid employment were domestic servants, general labourers or, the biggest group, agricultural labourers.³

The Indian Centenary Review of 1945 was only able to include 16 women in its section of 223 biographies of persons in the professions or in business. (Kirpalani et al. pp 131-169). All were Christians and most came from families which had attained professional status a generation before. Although one, Gladys Ramsaran, was a barrister, none could be described as being in public life. Voluntary social work appears to have been the one 'public' contribution non-professional Indian women were permitted to make. One woman included in the 'Who's Who', Amanda Nobbee, is described as a part-time writer of 'amusing articles on topical subjects' which appeared occasionally in the press,

a collection of pieces called English With Tears (c. 1940), and some time later a collection of children's stories, For Small Fry (1957). Apart from the symbolic step of 'being' a writer, no great claims can be made for either the literary quality or the interest of this work.

In Guyana, Indian access to education lagged sharply behind that of Indians in Trinidad. Here the colonial government actively connived at denying Indian girls an education. One recommendation of the Swettenham Circular of 1904, which remained in force until 1933, was that no pressure should be placed on Indian parents who wished to keep their daughters in seclusion. In 1925 only 25% of the Indian children in primary schools were girls. Literacy rates were just as low as in Trinidad, though data from Guyana suggests that Indian women benefitted from the shift from the use of Indic languages to English. Whereas women comprised 30% of all Indians literate in English in 1931, they comprised only 16% of Indians literate in Indic languages. However, a truer index of Indian women's social status in Guyana can be gained from the voters register of 1947, the last year in which the franchise was limited by property and income qualifications. Indian women comprised 1.8% of all voters, 6% of all Indian voters and only 9.9% of all female voters⁴. Of the 1082 Indian women entitled to vote there was an even smaller number who had begun to emerge from a traditional restricted role. Principally this group numbered the wives of the most westernised section of the Georgetown middle class. The major focus for the activities of this group was the British Guiana Dramatic Society, despite its name an exclusively Indian organisation. The role of the B.G.D.S. has been discussed in Chapter Eight ; but it is worth remembering that it appears to have been one of the very few organisations of its time in which women participated on something like an equal basis. At its centre was a strong minded and cultivated woman, Alice Bhagwandai Singh, married to one of the leading politicians of the time, Dr. J.B. Singh. She directed plays

(the group functioned between 1929-1947) wrote several articles on cultural and social issues in journals such as The Indian Opinion, and was the founder in 1936 of the Balak Sahaita-Mandalee, a voluntary child-welfare society, a rather belated recognition by the Indian middle class of the desperate poverty on the estates.⁵ However, women like Mrs. Singh took no part in political groups such as the British Guiana East Indian Association.

During the 1940's and 1950's there seems to have been only very gradual change in the position of East Indian women in Trinidad and Guyana. For the rural majority life changed scarcely at all. Girls were kept under surveillance once they had reached puberty and their marriages arranged, for about one third by the age of fourteen and for the majority before the age of nineteen. Women still very rarely owned any property, passed through the restriction of being the daughter-in-law (doolahin) in a strange household, and were obliged to show ritual respect to male kin.⁶

Two things began to change the position of Indian women in Trinidad. Firstly there was a rapid expansion in the provision of schooling in both urban and rural Indian areas, the product very largely of the Indian community's own initiatives. The Hindu Maha Sabha, to a lesser extent the Arya Samaj and Islamic organisations, all built denominational schools during the 1950's. Attitudes to education, for both boys and girls, had changed sharply within the Indian community as it attempted to catch up with other sections of the population.⁷ Secondly, during the late 1960's and 1970's there has been rapid economic expansion in Trinidad, stimulated by the boom, now over, in oil prices. As a consequence, many semi-rural areas have become enmeshed in the cash economy and the explosion of consumerism which is deeply affecting many areas of Indian social and cultural life. One consequence is that there is a much greater acceptance of the contribution the Indian woman can make as a wage-earner to the family's participation in the consumer economy. However, not all parts

of Trinidad have participated equally in the economic expansion, and there is evidence of a clear link between the level of an Indian settlement's participation in the cash economy and the extent to which women's roles have changed. For instance, Nevadomsky's re-investigation of the settlement of Felicity near the rapidly expanding town of Chaguanas (the 'Amity' of Klass's classic study of cultural retention in the 1950's in East Indians in Trinidad (1961)) shows very marked changes in the position of Indian women. His data indicate, for instance, that whilst only 17% of women over 35 had any choice in their husbands, 66% under 35 had; that although the average age for first marriage for women over 35 was 14, for those under 35 it was 17.5; that whilst a bride might live with her husband's family for a short time, 85% of married women under 40 were in their own houses less than three years after marriage and that in general, relationships between husbands and wives were becoming more equal, openly affectionate and sexually close.³ Nevadomsky also asserts that as a consequence of the new career and wage opportunities, East Indian women were beginning to control their own fertility to an increased extent.⁴ Whereas up to 1946 the fertility rate for Indian women in Trinidad as a whole had been nearly twice that of women of African descent for the age group 15-29, by 1970 the ratio had declined to 100/106 at age group 15-19 and to 100/131 at 25-29. However, Nevadomsky indicates that the degree of control women have over their lives varies sharply in terms of the socio-economic position of their families and their own success in the education system. A girl who showed the promise of attaining higher education and higher status occupation was likely to have much more scope in evading family pressures towards early marriage. This is confirmed by research carried out by Shamate Sieunarine in El Dorado in 1980 which showed that whilst employed Indian girls wanted free marital choice and later marriage, unemployed girls would still accept early, arranged marriage.¹⁰ What must be noted is that the percentage of Indian girls

with the qualifications which would take them into higher education is very small. There are no figures which give an ethnic breakdown, but for all girls in the 15-19 age group in Trinidad in 1970, only 9.2% achieved any 'O' levels at all and only 0.4% achieved 2 'A' levels; 78.7% left school without any qualifications.

In those areas of Trinidad which have remained part of the rural economy, the position of women has changed far less. For instance, Judith Johnson's field work in 'Rampat Trace' (carried out between 1968-1976 in the Debe/Penal area of South Trinidad) shows that whilst men have become much more involved in the wage-economy (particularly in the service industries) women's labour has become more important in the subsistence agricultural sector. Restricted to unwaged labour women's status has remained circumscribed. In Rampat Trace there are still extensive restrictions on adolescent girls and early, arranged marriages. Motherhood remains the main means whereby a girl can attain any status and bring to an end the most submissive phase of her life as doolahin. Johnson notes that in general women are less healthy than men because girls are less well nourished than boys, and because women still have incomplete control over their fertility. Contraception is widely available but not much used; instead abortions are widely practiced. Johnson argues that this happens for two reasons which reveal much about the role of women. Firstly, many males are hostile to contraceptive methods which put women in control of their own sexuality; secondly, in a culture in which a woman's main status is gained as a reproducer, abortions demonstrate a woman's continuing capacity for fertility.¹² Corroborative evidence for the continuing social and sexual restrictions on the lives of Indian women in rural communities in both Trinidad and Guyana are to be found in the persistence of 'matikor', particularly amongst older women, and the large-scale involvement of women in the Kali-Mai churches in Guyana. 'Matikor' is an all female ceremony which precedes the public stages of a wedding in which women drink, dance in sexually suggestive ways and

sing 'gaari', extremely bawdy, ritually insulting songs.¹³ During the state of possession in Kali-Mai worship women and girls quite frequently behave in highly uninhibited ways.¹⁴ Both occasions may be seen as licenced expressions of revolt from norms which require the suppression of overt expressions of female sexuality.

Amongst the very small percentage of Indian girls who have achieved some level of higher education and occupational choice (a much smaller number in Guyana than in Trinidad), there are still obstacles of gender and ethnicity to face. As yet, the few who reach positions of status and power in business or the professions still warrant special features in Trinidad's glossy magazine for the new elite, People. For some of these, occupational achievement can still only be made outside of marriage,¹⁵ both because of the degree of additional commitment a woman needs to succeed in a male oriented society and perhaps because even amongst university-educated men, some traditional role-expectations survive. As yet Indian women are almost wholly unrepresented in political life in both Trinidad and Guyana. In the Trinidadian elections of 1976 only 11% of all candidates were women, and only 4.4% were Indian women. No Indian woman sits in either parliament.

What is true of the position of women in the poorer rural areas of Trinidad has a more general applicability for Guyana. In a society which was always poorer (and is now on the verge of economic collapse) there has been no parallel to the stimulation of the semi-urban areas as occurred in Trinidad. In the past the access of Indians to non-agricultural employment was frustrated both by the absence of secondary educational facilities in the rural areas and by race discrimination in such Afro-Guyanese dominated areas as the civil service. Thus when the International Commission of Jurists investigated racial imbalances in the public services they found Indians seriously under-represented. The report recorded, but did not comment on, the even more dramatic under-representation of Indian women. For instance, at a time when Indians were 50% of the population, in 1965, Indian women comprised

only 2.85% (395) of all employees and only 13.5% of female employees on the staffs of all the Government ministries. Even in teaching, Indian women were seriously under-represented, numbering only 12.7% of the whole teaching force and 26.8% of all women teachers.¹⁶ Since 1964, Guyana has been ruled by a party which has manipulated the anti-Indian fears of its minority Afro-Guyanese supporters and wholly corrupted the electoral process to stay in power. Virtually all Guyanese suffer from the Government's mismanagement, corruption and oppressive rule; Indians who refuse to bow and scrape to the ruling party find themselves excluded from public employment or restricted to its lower levels. Indian women suffer both economically and sexually. Like most other Guyanese women their energies are consumed by the desperate daily struggles to find food and other basic domestic essentials. Indian women in Government employment also speak of coming under sexual pressure to obtain or retain their jobs. The Government controls 85% of the economy. It is impossible to quantify or independently verify such¹⁷ allegations, but the sense of threat felt by many Indian women and their families is illustrated by the widespread Indian opposition to the introduction of the Guyana National Service in 1973. When G.N.S. was made compulsory for both men and women wishing to enter higher education, it was seen by many Indians as an attempt to force racial integration, or rather the sexual integration of Indian girls. The fact that when the lists for compulsory induction were published at the University of Guyana they contained 53 Indo-Guyanese of the 63 persons listed, and that of the 25 women listed 90% were Indian, meant only one thing to the majority of Indians. Many Indian girls are reported to have dropped their university applications.¹⁸ For those able to, escape to North America has been the main route out of these difficulties. For those unable to escape, the poor and unskilled majority, high unemployment has driven many women back into the home.

This outline of the historical experience and contemporary situat-

ion of Indo-Caribbean women . . . is regrettably sketchy and impressionistic. With honourable exceptions lamentably little historical research or empirical investigation has been devoted to this topic. However, if the outline serves to show why it has taken so long for any Indo-Caribbean women's voice to emerge, it will have served its purpose.

Images in Male Imaginative Writing.

It is only really in the last decade that any distinctive women's voice has been heard. In its absence, the only portrayals of any of the texture of women's lives are to be found in the imaginative writing of men. In such writings are to be found both the stereotypes against which Indian women have had to struggle for self-definition, and moments of insight which, for all the limitations of a male perspective on women, have revealed at least something of what their feelings and inner experience may have been.

The first portrayals of Indian women appear in non-Indian writing and have been, tangentially at least, discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six. In the indenture period, as Chapter Four shows, with the exception of Edward Jenkins's Lutchmee and Dilloo (1877), the Indian woman tends to appear mainly as the victim of wife-murder, the temptress of unwary overseers or the dutiful and submissive wife, depending on whether the writer wishes to demonstrate the need for a more repressive apparatus for the handling of barbarous coolies or to present the indenture system as one of infinite benefit to the immigrants. As Chapter Five indicates, Euro-Creole fiction, with a few exceptions, restricts the role of Indian women characters to being the mistresses of the white male, though it is worth recalling that Edgar Mittelholzer's portrayal of Edna Bisnauth in A Morning At The Office (1950) is one of the very few sympathetic portrayals of the emergence of the new Christian 'Indo-Saxon' middle-class women of the 1940's and 1950's. It is, of course, also the case that the very reason that Mittelholzer

has for portraying Edna Bisnauth so sympathetically, (because she represents his Euro-centric ideal of the person who has shed the last traces of her Indian culture) is what has led writers of Hindu origin, such as V.S. and Shiva Naipaul, to portray the Christian Indian woman so satirically. In Chapter Five it was also noted that it is in Ian McDonald's The Hummingbird Tree (1969) that one finds the first explorations of ethnic and gender protest in the Indian woman. The portrayal of Indian women in Afro-Creole writing is, as Chapter Six argues, perhaps even more stereotyped and limited both by a lack of knowledge of Indian life, and by the assumption of superior attitudes towards Indian culture. Both are reflected in the commonness of portrayals of the Indian woman as the victim of a backward community or as a sexually exotic prize. There is one major exception to the limitations outlined above: the portrayal of Beti in Wilson Harris's The Far Journey Of Oudin (1961). As Chapter Eighteen shows, Harris combines an acutely realistic perception of the illiteracy, inarticulacy and oppressed spirit of an Indian country girl with a non-realist but persuasive portrayal of her inner yearnings for freedom of the spirit and self-dependence.

In discussing the nature of male Indo-Caribbean writing about Indian women, the focus inevitably shifts. There is obviously familiarity, though it must be recognised that a writer with a Christian creolised background, such as Samuel Selvon, for instance, will have been as remote from the experience of women in traditionalist Hindu families as most Creoles. Nevertheless, the focus does shift, drawn by the nature of the writing itself, to examining male perceptions of female experience within contexts which are both more taken for granted and more highly specified. To some extent the images of women in male Indo-Caribbean fiction undoubtedly reflect more faithfully the kind of changes in their position described in the first part of the chapter;

though there are significant emphases and significant silences. However, it is also possible to detect in these male images not only the inevitable biases of the observer, but also the presence of some more archetypal ways of looking at women which, it has been argued, have a deep presence in Indian culture.¹⁹ Often it is impossible to disentangle archetype and naturalistic image. For instance, the basic Hindu duality between the image of woman as wife and as mother is both the subject of and the shaping influence on many of the male portrayals. There is, inevitably, much realistic emphasis on the low status of the wife, but there is also a revealing absence of images of her sexuality. In contrast there are abundant and often hagiographic portrayals of the woman as mother, and as I will suggest, many of the wives in male Indian novels play the role of mother rather than sexual partner to their husbands. This bias has much to do, I believe, with the strong tradition of the debasing nature of female sexuality and the corresponding reverence for the mother-ideal. However, in Hindu mythology even the mother has two aspects: the gentle nurturing Laksmi and the omnipotent 'terrible' Maha Kali. Both figures are still important in Indo-Caribbean religious culture and both have found their literary reflection. Laksmi is honoured in Abhimar Gajadhar's Diwali Poems (1973) and begged:

Mother, stay always
In the nights and days
To protect us from bad... 20

and though devotees of Kali have not yet begun to celebrate her in verse, Krishna Prasad in 'Goddess of Horror'²¹ describes her bloody iconography and B. Ramsaran in 'Maha Kali'²² attempts to purify the image of the goddess from its local associations with blood-sacrifice and explore her creative power as 'Mother of the Universe'. In addition, the commitment to a tradition in which the divine is not exclusively masculine can be seen in Omartelle Blennessequi's (Chauramanie Bissundyal) long poem Glorianna (1976) an account of a vision brought to the narrator in the midst of his sugar estate existence by the Goddess

Glorianna to rescue him from the 'web of material glammers'. She is described as the second feminine part of a trinity, the link between Nature and the 'Great Power', and no doubt owes something to the cult of the virgin:

She is an example
Of wife and mother
For those who search
For peace of mind...
She is a lake of crystal water.

In general, however, male Indo-Caribbean writing has been primarily concerned with social and historical images of the Indian woman, and where the image of the destructively possessive mother is used in any symbolic way, it is as a figure who must be broken from if the Indo-Caribbean is to have an authentic cultural independence in the Caribbean.

The discussion which follows attempts to interweave four approaches to such images. Firstly, there is a transhistorical focus on prominent themes such as the image of woman as victim, as mother-ideal and the comparative absence of images of revolt or sexuality. Secondly, there is a particular focus on the work of two writers, Seepersad and Shiva Naipaul, both sensitive interpreters of the Indian woman's experience. Thirdly, there is an attempt to counter the historical falsifications of the thematic approach by indicating how fiction has taken up or been silent about actual changes in the position of women. Lastly, the nature of sexism in male fiction is explored.

Seepersad Naipaul was not only the first Indo-Caribbean writer to give a close and sensitive picture of aspects of Indian life in Trinidad closed to most non-Indians, but his short stories first collected in Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales (1943)²⁴ remain, in particular, remarkably sympathetic and perceptive portrayals of the changing position of Hindu women. He wrote both from his intimate and frustrated experience as a rebellious son-in-law in the large traditionalist Capildeo clan, and from the articulated position of a supporter of the local

Ary Samaj campaign against child-marriage and other aspects of what they regarded as Sanatanist backwardness.²⁵ He had himself married as a youth a young woman he had never met before, but in his stories he deals most frequently with the situation of the arranged marriage from the woman's point of view. 'Sonya's Luck' and 'The Wedding Came, But -,' both deal effectively with the feelings of women who already have men they love, but believe they are being forced to marry strangers. In 'The Wedding Came, But -,' the narrative is told through the consciousness of Leela, an independent-minded young woman who cherishes her Garpat because he is so unlike the other village men, 'crude glum fellows... who were so frightfully frigid and domineering with their wives.' For a male India: writer of the time to suggest that a woman should want love and equality from her husband was revolutionary.

In other stories Seepersad Naipaul focusses on the position of the doolahin, as an ill-used statusless slave. Dookni in 'Dookni and Mungal' is the object of scorn and blows from her sharp-tongued spiteful Mai because she is childless, whilst Mungal dare not defend her or show affection to her in front of his parents. But Naipaul is more than just a polemicist on behalf of ill-treated doolahins. He portrays with considerable subtlety how Dookni must convey her misery through gesture rather than word and how she must manipulate her husband's feelings without letting him think she is attacking his mother. At the same time Naipaul also suggests in Mai's behaviour a frightened insecurity that the role of mother-in-law, the one position of authority in her life, is under threat in a rapidly changing world. In 'Gurudeva', Naipaul looks sardonically at the career of a youth who expresses his pride in his kshatriya (warrior) heritage by becoming a cowardly stick-fighter and beating his wife with purposeless zeal. But Naipaul's ironies also encompass the wife who accepts the beatings as her karma, the due of her unworthiness merited by her misdeeds in some previous life. Here Naipaul goes beyond sentimental pity to assert that the

woman too has moral choice and implies that she must learn to use it rather than connive at her martyrdom.

Even in a story which works on the frustrations of his own domestic situation, Seepersad Naipaul manages to balance his treatment of the husband and wife in a spirit of humane comedy. The husband, Gopi, is more than a little absurd in his attempts to make his wife imbibe a little culture and share his interest in the world outside. He is a fantasist and has an exaggerated sense of being close to 'world-shaking events'. She is stolid and unimaginative, 'more good than intelligent', but eminently practical. She constantly makes her husband feel guilty by her long-suffering resignation to his restlessness. She is described as:

A drudge, not minding being a drudge, the philosophy which stood her in hard moments, was the philosophy of surrender; but not the cheap surrender of a coward or a weakling, but calm co-operation with all that life brought her. 26

The perception is undoubtedly male and reflects both a frustrated recognition of the gap between the unequal developments permitted the Hindu man and woman (the one increasingly drawn away from the traditional world, the other still cocooned within it) and an admiration for the woman's calm inner strength.

After the publication of the collection, Seepersad Naipaul continued writing stories for most of the next decade until his death in 1953. His range broadens and he moves away from the didacticism of some of the earlier stories, simply observes and weaves his sometimes discrepant responses into a seamless whole. Stories such as 'The Engagement'²⁷ are both richer and more problematic. The focus once more is the arranged marriage, but in this story the conflict between tradition and change is explored with an openness which allows us to see the same event in different ways. The core of the story comes when the girl is brought out for the graceless prospective bride-groom's inspection. Naipaul makes it very clear that what is occurring is a demeaning financial transaction. But he also shows how the girl, by her demeanour, brings dignity and solemnity to a situation where one would least

expect to find it. At one level the description stresses the girl's sense of violation; she has a 'leaden shyness that was like a physical pain'. But when she meets the boy and his father she somehow manages to preserve her integrity:

And Kamla came: a small girl, barefoot, in quite plain clothes, without a single item of adornment. In both hands she bore a brass jug filled with water. Her head and breast were orhani covered... (p 131)

The ritual works because the girl believes in it. The boy's father, himself not quite sure whether this is the way to settle his son's future, is 'too moved, too humbled at so much respect and so much reverence from so small a person.' But then Naipaul reminds us of the commercial nature of the transaction and how young the girl is when the boy's father embarrasses her by giving her some money to buy cake. Later he tells his wife how favourably he views the girl:

'Ah she is a gow' - a cow - meaning indeed that she was a lamb - gentle -, sweet, long suffering... (p 134)

Both views co-exist troublingly within the same narrative enabling us to see why there was attachment to such ceremonial and how a beauty and solemnity of ritual could be present along with personal injustice.

The themes of Seepersad Naipaul's stories have been repeated with some frequency in Indo-Caribbean fiction right up to the present. The suffering of the woman forced into a marriage against her wishes is portrayed, for instance, in M.P. Alladin's 'The Betrothed'²⁸, Sheik Sadeek's play, Goodbye Corentyne²⁹, S.K. Ragbir's 'The Disappearance',³⁰ Samuel Selvon's novel, The Plains of Caroni³¹ and, interwoven with the theme of the Indian girl who wants to marry outside her race, in such stories as Errol Tiwari's 'Ultimatum'³² and Mohammed Hamaludin's 'No Greater Love'.³³ These stories of suicide and ruined lives, written between 1956 and 1984, attest to the longevity of the theme. Even in the present when few marriages are arranged the social pressures on women to marry is seen as a source of debasement in Harry Narain's story, 'Going to See Girl'.³⁴ Bharat is persuaded by a colleague to visit his unmarried sister. He finds her, none too young, graceless

painted like 'a third class Bombay film star' to disguise her depreciating wares. At first we are made to share Bharat's repulsion, then Narain makes us see the girl's desperation to escape from a situation in which she is a failure and a family liability.

Although much of this writing scarcely extends what is to be found in Seepersad Naipaul's stories, both his sons, V.S. and Shiva Naipaul, were able, by virtue of their being part of the next generation, perhaps their greater personal detachment and their use of the more extensive canvas of the novel, to deepen their father's insights and, in particular, to explore how women adjusted to the change from their position in the extended family to their new roles within the nuclear family. Though the female-headed family described in V.S. Naipaul's A House For Mr Biswas (1961) is in some respects atypical of the classic patriarchal joint family, both in this and in Shiva Naipaul's Fireflies (1971) there are highly observant portrayals of women's lives within a communal order. Shiva Naipaul uses biological metaphors frequently in Fireflies to describe the nature of the Khoja clan; the acts of persons within it have little to do with individualised rational volition, but rather with the automatic mechanism of parts of a body responding to threats to the whole. Baby Lutchman, youngest sister in the family, cannot intellectualise what is happening to it, but feels a 'wordless, instinctive' distress over the signs of dissolution, and tries to keep the Khoja communality alive, not from any abstract piety, but because she needs to preserve her vision of herself in the world. She cannot conceive of herself outside the clan. Both Naipauls describe the communal world from the perspective of a male, western individualism, but their pictures are sufficiently wide and sufficiently open to enable us to see why women, in particular, seemed to have a vested interest in the preservation of that world. Explicitly their commitment is shown to be one of deliberate self-restriction, but in the narrative it is possible to see that it was much more than that. Women are shown to feel that meaning is achieved in the fulfilment of a series

of biological roles which can only be performed within the extended family:

to be taken through every stage, to fulfil every function, to have her share of the established emotions: joy of a birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at death. Life to be full had to be this established pattern of sensation.... For Shama and her sisters and women like them, ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow. 35

Within this script there are more detailed scenes to be acted out.

When Mr. Biswas's wife, Shama, is pregnant she fans herself and spits often because 'pregnant women were supposed to behave in this way.'

There are also the ritual abasements that women must willingly perform to demonstrate that they have no individual pretensions to rise above the common sisterhood. In Fireflies, Shiva Naipaul describes sardonically how the sisters, particularly at family celebrations, cultivate a deliberate primitivism, dressing themselves like the poorest peasant women and joyfully celebrating their martyrdom to hot, dirty and heavy kitchen work. The youngest and most attractive sister yearns to be 'old, fat and widowed.' When the communal order is threatened its response is merciless. In A House For Mr. Biswas there is an episode when Biswas brings a large and expensive doll's house for his daughter, Savi, the only one of his children he feels really belongs to him and not to the Tulsis. The gift breaks all the rules of equality in poverty, and the affronted sisters draw together to exclude Shama, threatening their children with fearful beatings if they touch the doll's house or play with Savi. It is a test for Shama and she chooses her sisters, smashing up the doll's house after Biswas has left the house. Yet though Shama later weeps and gives Biswas an apologetic explanation about why she has done it ('Everybody behaving as though I kill their father... So I had to satisfy them...') there is little evidence that she feels that what she has done is wrong. By contrast when Biswas sees the smashed house it is as if part of his body has been mutilated. Yet though the explicit commentary stresses the denial of self-hood of women within the joint family, both Naipauls are sufficiently perceptive to see what the clan offers to women, and their novels show,

why women should cling to institutions like Hanuman House in such 'disloyalty' to their husbands.

In the first place, the joint family is a place of security. The fate of Bipti, Biswas's mother, who is left destitute after her husband's death, forced to give up her children to the care of others and rely on the cold charity of more distant relatives, demonstrates the virtues of being part of such a family. Even Mr Biswas's sister, Dehuti, who runs away with her low caste husband to achieve independence and material security in Port of Spain, later feels the need to attach herself to Hanuman House, going to weddings with the Tulsi sisters to sing 'the sad songs which had not been sung for her.' Being part of Hanuman House also gives the sisters the opportunity to play confident leading roles in a constantly unfolding if predictable drama. V.S. Naipaul makes frequent use of dramaturgical metaphors to describe activities in the house. When Shama gives Savi a mild ritual beating she:

...moved about with a comic jerkiness, as though she knew she was only an actor in a farce, and not, like Sumati at the house-blessing ...a figure of high tragedy. (p. 172)

There are scenes of grand guignol such as Mrs. Tulsi's sick-bed performances with their elaborate stage props of bandages, candles, medications, febrifuges, rubs, smelling salts and the bay-rum which Shama over-enthusiastically nearly drowns her mother in. For Shama the scene is a grand opportunity to stage-manage the drama of her mother's forgiveness of Biswas for his incompetence and ingratitude to her family. For the sisters Hanuman House is a theatre with a large stage and full supporting cast. Performances there give Shama's life meaning in a way that living in isolation with Biswas in the shop at The Chase can never do.

There is a brief conversation in Fireflies between Govind Khoja, head of the clan, and Mr. Cardoso, a Portuguese merchant, which neatly illustrates a different way in which the joint family is both a limitation and a protection of the wholeness of women's lives. Cardoso comments on the prettiness of Renouka, one of Govind's nieces. Govind is taken a-back because he has never thought of Renouka in this way, but

only as a scarcely visible and junior member of a communal whole:

'You think so? Yes she's not bad at all when you think of her in that sort of way.'

'How else do you think about her then?' Mr Cardoso looked at him curiously. (p 91)

Later, when Renouka is one of the early rebels from the clan it is her fate to be looked at in 'that sort of way'. She throws herself into the delighted arms of a Negro travelling salesman who boasts of her as a sexual and racial conquest to his friends. For them all that Renouka is is the vision 'of a naked brown body tutored in all the arts of love'. (p 263)

However, as both Naipauls show, the world Shama and Baby Lutchman cling to was breaking up under the pressure of 'modern times'. Women had to learn new roles for themselves within nuclear families. Although Ganesh in V.S. Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur (1957) follows his aunt, the Great Belcher's advice:

'These modern girls is hell self,' she said. '...All she want to make she straight as a arrow is a little blows every now and then.' (p 60 Penguin ed)

and duly beats his new wife Leela (' a formal affair done without anger on Ganesh's part or resentment on Leela's) it is not long before Leela becomes assertive and deflatingly disrespectful of Ganesh's follies. As she says later, 'I ain't the stupid little girl you did married, you know.' (p 93) For those like Shama or Baby Lutchman whose marriages begin within the sanctuary of the extended family the passage to becoming wife within the nuclear household is more problematic. However, even within Hanuman House, Shama has two modes of relationship. Downstairs she is the 'thorough Tulsi'; upstairs, alone with Biswas, she demonstrates to him that he 'however grotesque, was hers and she had to do with what fate had granted her.' From that unpromising assumption a relationship of a kind grows. However, the portrayal of that change in relationship is portrayed from an unreflectively male point of view. It is presented as one of Mr. Biswas's triumphs that Shama learns 'a new loyalty, to him, and their children' an assessment of reward which makes sense when one reflects that the move away from Hanuman House to Sikkim Street in fact reverses their previous power

relationship. In Hanuman House, she has had the status of kin, he merely an appendage who can be dispatched to remote country places to run the Tulsi's businesses. In Sikkim Street, or before that when the family live on their own in Port of Spain, he unquestionably becomes its head. It is difficult not to read as an expression of male ideology the narrator's comment that it is in the nuclear household that Shama becomes a person in her own right.

Despite the Great Belcher's insistence that 'these modern girls is hell self', it is noticeable that there are few portrayals of women who revolt from their expected station, which are either extensive or particularly sympathetic, in male Indo-Caribbean fiction. It is true that in The Suffrage of Elvira (1958) V.S. Naipaul gives cameo portrayals of two young women who escape. There is Dhaniram's doolahin, abandoned by her husband, obliged to wait on her idle father-in-law, who on each of her appearances makes some gesture of recalcitrance - a sucking of the teeth, a toss of the head - which Dhaniram, besotted with his good fortune, fails to notice. Eventually, of course, to his total surprise, but not the reader's, she runs off with her lover. Similarly, Nelly Chittaranjan, by some astute indiscretions, also manages to escape from the marriage designed to seal the political solidarity of Hindus in Elvira, and go to the London Polytechnic she has dreamed of. Nelly Chittaranjan is only a minor character in Naipaul's novel, and one must note that as yet no novelist has yet explored the experiences of a Nelly Chittaranjan after her initial moment of revolt. Nor is there any extensive exploration of the experiences of that group of women who in real life moved away from traditional roles - the daughters of Presbyterian middle class. Invariably such women are satirised in terms of the stereotypes held about them by Hindus. There is Daisy Seetolall in the second part of Seepersad Naipaul's 'The Adventures of Gurudeva' over whom the now pious pundit makes a fool of himself. She is painted, pert, short-skirted and sexually provocative, the stereotypical opposite of the modest and asexual Hindu wife. Similarly, in A House For Mr Biswas, though V.S. Naipaul

indicates that the attitudes of the sisters to Shekhar's Presbyterian wife Dorothy are malicious, the portrayal of Dorothy hardly escapes their stereotype. She is pretentious and arrogant and 'wore short frocks and didn't care that they made her look lewd and absurd.' (p 247) Even as humane a novelist as Samuel Selvon seems unable to take the idea of women in revolt wholly seriously. Although in Turn Again Tiger (1958) he begins to portray Tiger's wife Urmilla as a person with a considered point of view, in the episode when she leads the village women's attempt to curb their husband's drinking-habits, Selvon cannot settle on a consistent narrative attitude. At first the tone is serious:

...and as they thought about it they became conscious and excited, and suddenly felt new emotions and new thoughts.

But then it becomes patronising and mocking:

At these expressions of unity - and there were even one or two strange shouts about the rights of women, coming from the dormant depths of some mind - (p 100 - 101)

Afterwards the beating of the women by their angry husbands is treated comically: the men refer to it as 'The-night-we-wash-the-women-with-licks.' There is a similar ambivalence of presentation of the character of Polly in Selvon's later novel, I Hear Thunder (1963). Polly is a wholly creolised, liberated and educated young Indian woman, whose break with tradition is presented as wholly admirable. However, Selvon then seems to suggest that in becoming 'liberated' Polly has also become rootless and irresponsible. Quite casually she allows Randolph, a white Trinidadian, who she knows to be a feckless playboy, to make love to her and duly leave her pregnant. There is little in the novel which counters her father's view:

She too creolised for my liking. If you did bring she up Indian, that never happen.' (p 145)

A similar ambivalence in the treatment of both gender and ethnic identity also undermines Sheik Sadeek's intention in his novel Song of the Sugarcanes (1975) to write a saga which celebrates the achievement by its heroine of a new Indo-Guyanese and a new female identity. What Lillawattie becomes, from her origins as a grubby child of nature on a sugar estate, is not a new Guyanese or a new woman, but a mimic English woman who uneasily and implausibly combines a crude tomboyish-

ness and an extravagantly coquettish femininity.

The uncertainties of Selvon's and Sadeek's portrayals reveal either a lack of clarity in intention or the presence of unconscious attitudes at variance with the overt aim. Shiva Naipaul's novels, on the other hand, express an explicit philosophical attitude towards the issue of revolt. Irrespective of whether the agent is male or female, revolt is always uncreative, a symptom of moral sickness or simply a destructive quirk of personality. However, when Naipaul's women revolt they do so in ways which are circumscribed by stereotypes of female discontent. Thus, in Fireflies, Renouka's revolt against the suffocating hypocrisies of the Khoja clan takes the form of a sexual adventure which subverts family sexual taboos. She is described as being 'ruled by a frenzy that had been threatening to overwhelm her.' Later, when she takes part in destroying Govind Khoja's garden, she gloats over the destruction: 'Yes. That's right. I gone mad. Insane.' When her rebellion ends she is left only with 'an overpowering sense of futility and with it, weariness.' In Shiva Naipaul's next novel, The Chip-Chip Gatherers (1973), female revolt is treated even more dismissively. In this novel neither passivity nor rebellion are the result of conscious choices, but simply the product of accidental arrangements of character traits. Sushila, for instance, has ample reason to revolt against the crippling constraints of life in the Settlement, but Naipaul portrays her revolt as being motivated solely by a quirk of personality. She rejects all the old cultural patterns: obedient wife, devoted mother and home-maker, but in their place is only a monstrously bloated egoism which takes the form of a stereotyped rebellion against the fact of ageing. Her first grey hairs 'were a death sentence.' She is a woman who has lived, as Naipaul moralises in a mealy-mouthed way, by exploiting 'the considerable resources of her youth and beauty with reckless disregard for the future.' When that future catches up, she abandons her daughter and runs.

The Trinidadian born Kit Pura Singh's Saraswattee: A Novel of India

(1982) , deals with the same alternatives (though for Singh they involve real choices) between passive despair or revolt against the crumbling ruins of an oppressive Hinduism. Unlike Shiva Naipaul, Singh argues in his mythopoeic novel that people must revolt against injustice if they are to be fully human, though he shows dramatically that revolt can be both creative and destructive. The theme of the novel as a whole is the titanic struggle between the mythic religious vision of the dying goddess Durga Kali and the godless scientific ideology of her old adversary, the buffalo demon Mahisha, reincarnated as the geo-thermal engineer Mahisha Narayana. The human struggle, interlocked with it, concerns the beginnings of revolt by the women of Nagar against the centuries of their oppression under a religion which has decayed into superstition, caste contempt, self-interested punditry and mindless ritual.

At the heart of the misery of the women in the village is the insistence that girls be married before puberty comes. Always there is the insidious voice of the odious Pundit Ayer:

...chee,chee, chee, such an old girl,so close to her monthlies,and not married yet,a shame and disgrace on her father's head,she has an evil spirit,she must be whipped to be exorcised of her evil spirit,such a shame,such a disgrace, so close to her monthlies and not married yet,chee,chee,chee

Those who cannot be found husbands become temple prostitutes, to 'purify' the casual lusts of pious men. But it is not only men who oppress women, but women's own hopeless resignation to tradition. When Chintamani, who has just been savagely whipped by her uncle, rejects the offer of marriage to his son, Gopi, the other village women take her rebellion as their personal shame, prostrate themselves, tear their clothes, beat their breasts and pour dirt on their heads. As Chintamani's aunt tells her:

...the public humiliation of one woman is the universal degradation of all women. For ours is the greatest sin of all. You know why? Because we think ourselves sin. Yes. Look at us. The debris of our village... Look at us, our downtrodden eyelids weighed down by the menstrual slime of our menfolk.'

(p.55)

The collective spirit of the women, though occasionally their strength, is also the source of their greatest weakness because true revolt, the novel argues, can only be based on individual knowledge and individual

choice, and true solidarity based on freely contracted relationships, not on automatic loyalty to caste, sex or kin.

Standing against the collective misery of the village women is the character of Saraswattee, 'curious child, stubborn child'. Whilst the other village girls accept the whippings carried out under the vast statue of Kali which dominates the village as their fate and a sacrifice to the goddess, Saraswattee has an altogether more adversary, though intimate relationship with Kali. She knows that if Kali wasn't asleep she would slay evil men like Kahar, who whips the girls, or the pundit. Saraswattee spends much of her time sacrilegiously climbing on the vast statue, looking for signs of life and trying to browbeat Kali into coming to the women's aid. Kali, however, has abandoned humankind and seeks only mortal death. She has been sickened by the ages of human wickedness and is heartsick that she has lost her formless, sexless, godhood when for 'a fleeting moment of ecstasy' she took on the female shape of the goddess Parvati to experience love as a woman with the god Shiva. It is one of Saraswattee's tasks to discover that she can no longer rely on the old gods, but must develop the divinity within herself.

The other basis of Saraswattee's revolt lies in her freely made relationship with Gopi, boy of desert wisdom. However, Saraswattee must also learn that though Gopi has much to teach her, she must ultimately also free herself from dependence on him. At first she feels despair when she discovers that Durga Kali is dying; she cannot imagine what can follow, cannot find any traditional authority to tell her. Gopi helps Saraswattee see that the only way of knowing truth is by personal investigation. He has learned by his own observation of the desert that the earth is round, contrary to what the pundit says, and he takes the girl out into the desert to observe this for herself. In the desert, on her own, Saraswattee, girl who has only 'answered to the name Saraswattee out of habit', wants to 'become' Saraswattee. She weeps and knows the pain of being absolutely alone, until she discovers a self and is no longer alone:

Then came a discovery greater than the discovery of the curvature of the earth; a discovery greater than the discovery that Gopi was her point of reference: she discovered that she - Saraswattee, girl, woman - she was the first and foremost reference point to herself and by herself and for herself: she: Saraswattee. (p.219)

The learning though is not one-sided, boy to girl. Gopi has at first been swept away by the persuasive rhetoric of Mahisha Narayana, the geo-thermal engineer, that the truths of science are the only ones. Although Saraswattee is prepared to accept that Kali has only appeared alive because the statue has been built over thermal springs, she will not accept that that truth is necessarily incompatible with the higher religious truth embedded in the legend of Kali's struggle against evil. She sees in Mahisha Narayan, an evil man, a demon, motivated not by the desire to drag Nagar into the twenty-first century, but by revenge for what the superstitious villagers have done to his mother, and to set up his own counter-myth of science. She persuades Gopi that the demon plans to violate and destroy Durga Kali and set up his own dominion.

When they return from the desert they find Mahisha, now in the form of the buffalo demon, about to violate the most sacred orifice of Kali (one of the geo-thermal springs) with the steel shaft of his drilling bore, 'steel lingam of the twentyfirst century'. It is only at this point that the village women stand up and challenge Mahisha. They behold Kali's rape as their own. However, when a rich stranger appears in the village looking for wives for his sons, the defiance of the women crumbles as they rush off to ready their daughters for inspection. Saraswattee and Gopi are left alone to face the demon. At first Gopi tries vainly to reason with Mahisha, taking his apparent scientific rationalism at face value; Saraswattee knows that the demon is motivated only by the evil in his heart and must be destroyed. She wills Kali to intervene to protect herself and aid the humans, but descending into the chest of the statue discovers that Kali has no heart. She realises that she must challenge the demon Mahisha herself. A mighty battle follows which ends when Mahisha destroys himself with his own

science when his drill breaks through the rock cap covering the vacuum under the volcanic crater the statue is built on. It crashes down and Mahisha is buried under the rubble. At that moment Saraswattee perceives that true godhead lies within. She sees herself as a reincarnation of Saraswati, the river goddess:

I am the river of knowledge and wisdom and learning. I am the goddess of speech, of intellect, of memory. I am the goddess of poetry and truth and literature. I dwell in the heart of all those who would know me. I dwell on the tips of the tongues of all those who utter my name. (p 273)

When the dust settles and the cosmic fades to the everyday, Saraswattee has another truth to teach her sister Chintamani who urges her once more to know her place. Specifically, Chintamani wants Saraswattee to take of the shell thali (marriage necklace) that Gopi has given her since he has been revealed to be their brother. Saraswattee insists that she will wear it ' To keep pundits away from me - pundits and other evil spirits!'. She looks to new relationships between people that are not necessarily circumscribed by their sexual roles. She will:

...accept no thali from anyone that he might give me a face. It is not the responsibility nor the right of any man to presume to give me a face. I already have a face - and a beautiful one at that. (p 275)

If, with the exception of Kit Puraan Singh's novel, the theme of female revolt has produced uncertain or negative treatments, the theme of Indian women and their sexuality has evidently been an even more difficult one for the male Indo-Caribbean writer to face. It is in many novels a significant absence. One notes, for instance, that though V.S. Naipaul in The Mystic Masseur and A House For Mr Biswas and Shiva Naipaul in Fireflies show arranged marriages blossoming into affection, they do so in almost entirely asexual ways. It is clear that what each of the husbands wants is a mother. In The Mystic Masseur, Ganesh's relationship with Leela improves after it becomes obvious that they can't have children. He loses interest in her ' as a wife' and simultaneously stops beating her. As she grows to be a mature and efficient domestic manager she becomes 'ruler in the house' and Ganesh comes increasingly to lean on her for advice. In A House For Mr Biswas, the

only two scenes of tenderness described between Shama and Biswas are both of a maternal kind. The second of these occurs when Biswas is in terrible distress over the circumstances of his mother's death and Shama takes his head in her lap and strokes it like a child's. Of course, it can be argued that we are simply being given objective portrayals of the relative unimportance of sexual intimacy within traditional Hindu marriages, but it is a curious fact that whereas all the Indian women in V.S. Naipaul's fiction are invariably asexual, the European female characters are treated in ever more sexually explicit ways. It suggests the presence of strong cultural taboos. Lest this should be thought to be merely a Naipaulian quirk, it is worth noting that in Samuel Selvon's fiction, though the relationships his Indian couples such as Tiger and Urmilla (A Brighter Sun and Turn Again Tiger) Foster and Jennifer (An Island Is A World) and Adrian and Polly (I Hear Thunder) are treated with almost total reticence, we see a good deal of the more passionate sexual contacts between Indians and European characters: Tiger and Doreen Robinson in Turn Again Tiger, Polly and Randolph in I Hear Thunder, Romesh and Petra in The Plains of Caroni and Sarojini and Gary Johnson in Those Who Eat The Cascadura.

According to Richard Lannoy in The Speaking Tree :

It is very widely believed in India that a woman's cravings for sexual satisfaction constitutes a threat to a man's physical and psychological well-being. According to the ideas of popular Indian hygiene, a man should, as far as possible, practice seminal thrift, for the loss of semen is considered weakening. (p 114)

This cultural taboo seems to find some echo in the way that all the European women in Naipaul's fiction, from Margaret Stone in Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion (1963) to Yvette in A Bend in The River (1979) in some way violate and threaten the wholeness of the male personality. There are several episodes where the male is quite explicitly robbed of his manhood by the sexual voracity of the woman. In Guerrillas (1975) Jimmy Ahmed is 'swallowed' by Jane's 'wide kiss' and her hungry, graceless sexual appetite causes his 'little strained strength' to leak

out of him.³⁸ In A Bend In The River, Salim's relationship with Yvette is partly destroyed by his feeling that their passion is 'corrupt' and his shame that the relationship has in some way reduced his manhood.³⁹ In all these novels from 'In A Free State' onwards, the European woman suffers some act of verbal or physical revenge on her sexuality. Linda in 'In A Free State' is abused as a 'rotting cunt', Jane is buggered and murdered and Yvette beaten by Salim who then spits between her legs as his final gesture of contempt. One can only speculate, but it is tempting to suppose that the contrasting treatments of Indian and European women in V.S. Naipaul's fiction represent a displacement of ambivalent feelings towards the Indian woman's sexuality, so that only positive feelings are invested in portrayals of the Indian woman as mother, whilst the negative feelings against the sexuality of the wife are projected onto a non-taboo object, the European woman.

There are exceptions to the silences about the Indian woman's sexuality, but they tend to confirm the picture of male revulsion suggested above. For instance, in Peter Ramkeesoon's crudely sensational novel, Sunday Morning Coming Down (1975) one of Jason Ranjitsingh's rejected conquests, Rita Baboolal, is described as looking like 'a small-breasted wide assed, washed out young whore...hoping for a greasy fuck.' She is disposed of rapidly when, dancing with Jason, she 'began to writhe in torment like a tortured soul as though a sudden spasm of excruciating desire had blistered the furnace of her great maw-like womb.'⁴⁰ Behind the crude prose, one sees again a male fear of being consumed. The same kind of crudity in the portrayal of female sexuality marks Harold Sonny Ladoo's immeasurably more serious novel, Yesterdays (1974). Sex for women, and men, is a constant indignity. There is the occasion when Basdai is raped by a passing taxi driver when he catches her outside shitting in the glare of his headlamps, or the time when Basdai and her husband get 'stick up like dog' until their parts are extricated by the laughing village neighbours. Basdai, though, is no innocent. She has had many 'affairs' with their neighbour Ragbir, because

'he had the largest penis in Tola.' The novel ends with Basdai's friend Rookmin stripping naked in front of her neighbours, complaining that yet again her husband has gone off to have a homosexual affair:

'A you watch good! Watch de nice fat ting I have. Sook does leave dis fat ting and take man. Tell me if dis world have any reason in it? ' 4

Ladoo is very consciously exploding Indo-Caribbean literary taboos and portraying a coarseness in rural life which other writers had shrunk from or sentimentalised. However, far from portraying a world of 'animal joys' as one of Ladoo's admirers has suggested, ⁴⁴ sex in Yesterdays is joyless and demeaning. Ladoo's is the prurience of the puritan moralist fascinated by human awfulness. However, if the view presented in this novel is debasing, it is no more so than his view of men.

Perhaps the most ambitious approach to the theme of sexuality is to be found in David Dabydeen's collection of poems Slave Song (1984). He acknowledges the 'vulgarity' of expression and the conflict present in the sexual relationships of Indo-Guyanese men and women of estate background, but unlike Ladoo, Dabydeen wishes to explore what is life-giving and potentially tender in sexuality, as well as what is destructive and violating. In the introduction to the poems (all written in Creolese) Dabydeen indicates that he sets out to explore the paradoxical and the complementary in the sexualities of men and women. He notes, for instance, that whilst early in their partnership, women tend to suffer at the hands of men, later, when men are 'physically at an end', the women are still sexually alive and often take over control of the household. (It is a pattern hinted at in the relationship of Gowra and Ravi at the end of Shiva Naipaul's Fireflies) Dabydeen also suggests that he wants to relate male and female sexuality to the complementary tasks men and women perform on the estates: 'one continuous and conflicting ritual of cutting and planting.' Unfortunately, the poems never quite realise what Dabydeen promises in the introduction, though they explore a buried subject in a serious way. In 'Song of the Creole Gang Women', he portrays their sexuality as central to the way they experience their lives. Subjection to work is pungently described as

'Booker own me patacake' (cunt) and seeking rest from work is related both to the desire for release from the burdens of sexuality:

...an who go loose me caad?
 Shaap, straight, sudden like pimpla, cut free
 An belly buss out like blood-flow a shriek?
 (and who will loose my cords. [tying in the womb] ?/Sharp, straight,
 sudden, like pimpla, [a sharp thorn] cut them free/ And belly bursts
 out like blood-flow shrieking)

or relief through sexual comfort:

Or who go paste e mout on me wound, lick, heal, like
 starapple suck? 43

However, Dabydeen never really escapes from a perspective that treats the female body as simply the object of male pleasure. In 'For Mala', a lament for the brutal rape and murder of an Indian girl during the racial disturbances of 1964, he treats her body as something sacred which has been desecrated. However, whilst it is men who spoil the girl, what they spoil is the enjoyment of other men:

Somebody juta Gaad holy fruit so man can't taste she
 sweetness no mo! (p.19)

Elsewhere too in the collection the imagery Dabydeen uses - the vagina is 'de honeypot' or a 'star apple buss open' - seems to suggest women as objects to be consumed by men. It is significant too that Dabydeen relates the tenderness of sexual relationships almost exclusively to the dreams the male cane-workers have of the unattainable white woman, whom they long both to possess and to degrade. In 'The Canecutters' Song' the canecutter begs the white woman:

O Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!
 Wash dis dutty-skin in yu dew
 Wipe am clean on yu saaf white petal!

but he also dreams:

..how me hold you dung, wine up you waiss
 Draw blood from yu patacake, daub am all over yu face
 Till yu dutty like me an yu halla. (pp 25-26)

In truth, male Indo-Caribbean writing has been much surer of itself portraying Indian women in more passive and unthreatening guises: as victim or as ideal mother, or better still as a combination of both. Favourite subjects include the seduced and abandoned girl who then suffers paternal beatings and/or commits suicide. Examples include:

S.K.Ragbir's 'Neesha- The Story of A Girl Who Loved,' 'The Trouble With Shanti,' and 'Aftermath,'⁴⁴; Kusha Haraksingh's 'Descent in the Village'⁴⁵

in which the daughter of a poor peasant is taken advantage of by the wealthy shop-keeper's son, is made unmarriageable and nearly killed by the abortifacient she is forced to take. Lauchmonen's Old Thom's Harvest (1965)⁴⁶ deals with the pressure on a country girl in an impoverished village to turn prostitute as a means of survival. The same point is made in a powerful prose polemic, 'The Pagan Prostitute' by Winston Gannesingh.⁴⁷ The abandoned wife is another quite popular theme. Khalid Ali's short novel A Second Chance (1982)⁴⁸ deals with the helpless dependence of the wife who is forced to return to her unsympathetic father, though in this case there is a sentimental reconciliation. A much more powerful treatment occurs in Cyril Dabydeen's 'A Vampire Life'⁴⁹ in which the conventional story of suffering is made more vivid by being refracted through the image of rural folklore and the boy narrator's awakening to his mother's sexual vulnerability. The blue bruises on her thigh are seen as the marks of the ol' higue 'sucking the life blood out of her.' In general the female victim is the object of male pity, but in Shiva Naipaul's The Chip-Chip Gatherers, the portrayal of Rani, Egbert Ramsaran's abandoned wife, is done with great savagery. She is a 'bloodless, boneless creature' who gives way to a death-in life, a 'vacuum round which people skirted, afraid of being sucked in', incapable even of resentment over her treatment. Ramsaran's assessment of her: 'Right from the beginning she was food for the worms'^(p.96) is all too fitting. However, if Shiva Naipaul avoids sentimentality (the ideal victim is someone who is pitiable because they 'can't help it') of the obvious kind, the portrayal of Rani is no less designed to provoke an emotional response, in this case despair since no character in this novel is free to make any meaningful choice.

For both V.S. and Shiva Naipaul, to be a victim is to be absurd and unworthy of the novelist's deeper attention. Harold Sonny Ladoo's novel, No Pain Like This Body (1972)⁵⁰ shows that by an unrelenting and unflinching concentration on suffering it becomes possible to attain a proper wonder at the tiniest spark of resistance and the capacity

for endurance in even the most ineffectual. Set in 1905 in a low caste settlement in swampland, which is itself hostile to all human endeavour, the novel explores the relationship between those who punish, like Pa, earthly representative of the sadistic and uncaring gods, those who whistle in the dark and endure like the grandparents and the surviving children and those who collapse under the weight of their suffering like Ma. Ma's status as victim is born not from any insufficiency of will but from her physical vulnerability as a woman and the falsity of her hopes that there is a just God. She resents Pa's cruelties bitterly ('she talked as a spider that is full of poison') but when Pa nearly drowns her in a washing-tub, the description stresses her human vulnerability. She has neither the strength nor the resilience of things in nature. She shakes 'as a banana leaf shakes' but later the child narrator asserts, '...Ma was a fool...Ma was not a banana leaf; she was not as strong as iron... she was thinner than a burned sugar cane.' She is a fool because she feels and believes that 'God does see de trobble I does see in dis house.'^(p 34) She is brave, 'but only as a woman is brave' and so she stays with Pa and the children until it is too late and she breaks down into insanity. The form her madness takes is highly logical. Because she has suffered through her human illusions, her madness takes the form of becoming an object in nature. She sits in the mud of the yard smearing it over herself and eating it. When she finally runs away, it is noticed that she has defecated in the kitchen. The point is not made explicit but this desecration of the shrine of Indian womanhood must surely be seen as her belated and only act of rebellion.

Next to the image of the suffering woman in popularity is that of the mother who endures and holds her family together whatever tribulations are poured on her. Here there is a happy coincidence of a cultural piety and the evident experience of many writers. Vishnu Gosine's story, 'The Last of the Jaikarans'⁵¹ is a version of this theme which derives its power to move by virtue of its emotional restraint. Similar

images of stoic care can be found in Cyril Dabydeen's 'Mother of Us All,'⁵² M.P. Alladin's 'The Hot Sun,'⁵³ Clyde Hosein's 'The Signature'⁵⁴ and in poems such as Yusuf Mohammed's 'Hard Were Those Days, Mother'⁵⁵ and Selwyn Bhajan's 'Flower Among Flowers' and 'Mother's Child.'⁵⁶

The wife-mother is also portrayed as invariably realistic in comparison to the men in her life. In Ismith Khan's The Jumbie Bird (1961),⁵⁷ for instance, mother and grandmother are both pragmatic and committed to the process of simply being; by contrast grandfather and father are beset, on the one hand, with romanticised visions of the past, on the other, with uncertainty of present identity. Binti, the grandmother, has her wounds but confines them to her dreams, and concentrates on establishing her independence through her commercial skills, holding the family together after the old man dies and impressing on her son and grandson that they must look to Trinidad for their future.

There are other less hagiographic maternal images. There is the mother in the aspect of Kali, the fiercesome enforcer of floggings, to be found in such novels as Lauchmonen's Guiana Boy (1960),⁵⁸ Harricharan Narine's Days Gone By (1975)⁵⁹ and comically in the character of Mrs. Baksh in V.S. Naipaul's The Suffrage of Elvira (1958). There is also the image of the possessive mother, most strikingly portrayed in Samuel Selvon's The Plains of Caroni (1970): Seeta has so dominated her milksop son Romesh that when she squeezes his hand in farewell:

At the physical contact he went limp, as if he were a baby and she had given him the nipple of her breast. (p 47)

The same theme, of the need to escape from maternal dominance, is explored in George Moonasar's play, It Pays to Live an Independent Life (1966).

Many of these portrayals of the mother-figure are deeply felt and some are vivid, but the ease with which she becomes a stock character emphasises how externally drawn, how lacking of exploration of inner feeling so many of them are. Piety, one feels, gets in the way of deeper exposure.

It is only really in Shiva Naipaul's portrayals of Baby Lutchman

in Fireflies and Dina Mallingham in A Hot Country (1983) that one finds in male Indo-Caribbean fiction extensive and interior exploration of female characters. In Fireflies, Baby Lutchman emerges through Shiva Naipaul's need to have a character to act as an inner consciousness on the stresses within the Khoja world, but by mid-way through the novel she has become the novel's real focal point. As the Khoja clan disintegrates, some clinging to old masks, others assuming false, inauthentic personas, her story is of a growth to genuine personhood. She is in many ways unpromising material: she is no rebel, her enthusiasms are overwhelmingly domestic and Ram Lutchman's reference to her as his 'fat wife with her lust for commerce' is not wholly unjust. She passes through several stages of self-deceiving blindness and self-limiting dependence before she reaches an independent and disabused vision of the world. Though no thinker, her intuitions serve her well. Long before others of the clan, she divines that the virtue has gone out of it, and that her future place is with her husband where lay, 'if not the happiness, the contentment.' Her grief over his death (met with fierce disapproval by her sisters for whom widowhood is the apotheosis of a woman's life) and her decision to keep Ram's ashes by her rather than consign them to the river show how far her loyalties have become individual rather than collective. However, she has then to disabuse herself of illusions specific to individualised relationships within the nuclear family. She becomes dependent on Ram's memory, creating a cult on the basis of his failings. She begins to cherish all the objects - like the camera - which mark Ram's abandoned crazes: 'It was their very failure in her husband's hands which enhanced their value in her eyes.' ^(p. 227) It is, though, an ambiguous observation, pointing both to the dangers of a sentimental dependency, but also reminding that it has been Ram's frailty which has given her the space to grow. At the same time she invests herself in the role of the ideal mother: 'Her life expressed itself in the service of others. She could not live ^(p. 224) solely for herself.' The assessment seems appreciative, but the consequ-

ence is that she never develops her own personhood or her own independence of judgement. She fails utterly, and damagingly, to recognise the inadequacies and the true characteristics of her own children. By the time she recognises Romesh for what he is, it is too late. After he is sentenced for the destruction of Khoja property, she can only see him as a 'ghost, a purely physical replica of the true son she carried still-born within her.' In the same period of her life that she acknowledges her loss of Romesh, she also consigns Ram's ashes to the river.

The final part of the novel is less concerned with the specific position of Mrs Lutchman as an Indian woman and more with the her journey as a person to individuation and detachment. However, before that stage is reached, she goes through a further period of blindness before she can see the illusory nature of two myths of individualism. She has to explode the commercial myth of material security, which she reluctantly does after the failure of the chicken-farming and the keeping of lodgers; and also the myth that it is possible to tame circumstance by anticipating it, which she does when she belatedly sees through the fraudulence of Mrs. McIntosh, the clairvoyant. With the collapse of these myths, she also loses her precarious material independence. Then in the narrowest of circumstances, in the unpromising environment of Coalmine, a settlement tied to the annual drudgery of cane-labour, Mrs. Lutchman shows that she has reached a state of independence of the mind and freedom from illusion. But by now she has no future other than death, though she is capable of moments of enjoyment and good humour, expecting nothing and longing for nothing. If the pattern of her life communicates a painful truth, its picture of the possibility of human integrity is hopeful. Naipaul shows very convincingly how personalities, particularly those of women, can remain constricted or become distorted by external agencies. Nevertheless, it is a limitation of his vision that it appears inconceivable that personalities can also grow in contact with others. When that solipsist-

ic view is wedded to a deterministic application of a personality-trait theory of behaviour as in The Chip-Chip Gatherers, the possibility that people can learn and their personalities grow disappears from Shiva Naipaul's fiction. The one character who appears to possess the capacity for making choices, Sita, Sushila's daughter, begins her youth 'blissfully free from false hope', with the detachment that Mrs. Lutchman has reached only after years of learning. Sita's detachment is, like the capacity to endure or the urge to rebel, simply an accidental quirk of personality. Thus though she escapes from the 'absurdity' of the lives of those women who accept 'the fated sameness of animals born and bred to a particular role in life' and the absurdity of her mother who revolts against life itself, because her stance is essentially accidental the choices she makes are meaningless. Having trapped his characters in these cages, Shiva Naipaul can only leave them there or dismiss them peremptorily from the novel. Sita becomes a tiresome character, incapable of doing more than utter Naipaulian clichés of despair: that no one action is superior to another, that she lives on sterile ground, that nothing matters.

At first Dina Mallingham in A Hot Country seems no more than an extension of Sita (though she is more articulate and self-analytical and the process whereby she arrives at her despair is documented more convincingly). At first she seems no more than a stereotype: sexually repressed because of her narrow Christian upbringing and lacking identity because of her mixed Indian-Portuguese background. At first she even seems like a plagiarised version of V.S. Naipaul's Ralph Singh in The Mimic Men (1967). Like Singh she has dreams of shipwreck, of Aryan horsemen in the snow-filled spacious plains of Central Asia, feels that 'Nothing worthwhile had ever been created in this sterile patch of earth.' She has, by the time she reluctantly marries Aubrey St. Pierre, come to feel that life is quite meaningless and allowed others to make all the vital decisions which shape her life: going to university, marrying and having a child. However, within this ideologically

closed construction of character, Shiva Naipaul attempts something else, the clue to which is suggested by a phrase used by Aubrey when he tries to explain Dina to his visiting journalist friend. In a society such as Cuyama (a thinly disguised Guyana) he says:

...the intelligence does not have a great deal to feed on.
...it seems to collapse in on itself. To undergo a kind of implosion - if you know what I mean. (p 90)

The idea suggested by the word 'implosion' is, I suspect, borrowed from the critical vocabulary of Wilson Harris, who uses it to describe a fiction which collapses the surfaces of the apparently real to explore what is latent or hidden.

It is in the portrayal of Dina's inner life (or aspects of her life hidden from Aubrey), in her preoccupation with omens, her dreams, her involvement in the novels of D.H. Lawrence, her relationship with Aubrey's hedonistic cousin Beatrice and her visits to 'Madame', the black spiritualist, that the novel comes alive and hints, ambivalently, at some alternative perspective to the clichés of despair and emptiness. In the main these explorations of the interior are seen conventionally as a 'flight from the facts of life.' Dina's explanation is more ambiguous, suggesting both escapism and a willingness to challenge appearances: 'What are called the facts of life can be a prison...what, for instance, do the facts of life in a place like Cuyama amount to?' (p 41)

This ambiguity is reflected in the nature of Dina's dreams, which are open to several interpretations. A recurring image is of seeing herself immersed in mud and water. Clearly this can be related to Dina's day-time fears that she is being sucked down by Cuyama's descent into primal barbarism. But the womb-like images of caves and still pools also suggest images of rebirth, or of being physically part of the land, a feeling which Dina consciously denies. Typically, she apologises for her Cuyamese University degree, yet this buried sense of belonging surfaces when Aubrey writes to the British press protesting against the moves towards constitutional dictatorship in Cuyama:

'But we're supposed to be independent now, aren't we? We're masters of our own fate now, aren't we. It was what we wanted wasn't it? So why go on begging for attention and sympathy. (p 42)

Although she has warned Aubrey that she is 'sterile...barren', other images suggest a buried potentiality for life. There is an episode when Alex, the visiting journalist friend, learns that a vine in their garden in which hummingbirds fly is known as a 'Bleeding Heart'. He tells Dina Oscar Wilde's story of the nightingale which feeds its life's blood to a rose, 'sacrifices herself for love - so her beloved can have the reddest of red roses.' The relevance of the reference to Dina is suggested by her earlier attention to the hummingbirds flying in the garden and her concern over the corpse of a shrivelled bird and by the description, on the same page as the Wilde allusion, of Dina's 'glossy-red' painted toe-nails. Aubrey, in constant psychic opposition to Dina, dismisses Wilde as 'Too voluptuous for my taste anyway.' The adjective is significant; it is picked up to describe Dina's feelings about her visits to Madame.

These are presented with a similar ambiguity. On the novel's dominant ideological level, the visits represent Dina's own temptation to descend into the atavistic darkness which she fears is Cuyama's fate. She feels that it is a 'malign' influence which brings her there, and her motivation is described as being a 'voluptuous self-surrender' and 'an appetite so elemental and so squalid.' At this level the visits to Madame seem to be occasions when Dina can express her sense of worthlessness fully and acknowledge her desire to be immersed in filth. Yet, the visits to Madame, other than her jaunts with Beatrice, when Dina can reject the false personas imposed on her, first by her father and then by Aubrey:

...It was only here that she was able, after a fashion, to expose and acknowledge herself to herself. (p. 171)

There is also a contradiction between the presentation of the episode as one in which Dina belatedly exercises choice by running away from Madame's, and one in which Dina fails to accept Madame's challenge to come to terms with herself: 'What it have for you to be 'fraid of.' [It is possible to see Dina's involvement with Madame as an attempt to restore contact with a painfully repressed libido, strangled by her father's oppressive rule, and symbolised by his change of name on

conversion from Mahalingam (literally 'great penis') to Mallingham with its upper-class English associations of respectability. Similarly it is possible to see that it is only in the company of other women that Dina begins to free herself from the roles imposed on her by men. However, all this is only hinted at. The absence of any detailed depiction of Dina's interviews with Madame or her relationship with Beatrice are major silences in the novel. One can only see these silences as a failure of imagination and a failure on Naipaul's part to escape from his prior ideological commitment to nullity.

Some of the deficiencies in male Indo-Caribbean writers' treatments of women are easy to identify. There is the crude sexism of the kind found in the work of Peter Ramkeesoon as well as the blatant contradictions found, for instance, in the work of Sheik Sadeek. His political thriller, The Malali Makers (1979) contains both set-piece lectures on the positive role women play in the Guyanese 'revolution' and a sex-stud hero whose main girlfriend is both a lawyer and 'the charming and alluring housewife a tired fellow dreams of'.⁶²

There is sexism of a more subtle kind in the work of a writer such as Samuel Selvon. It is not so much, as one female critic has asserted,⁶³ that 'In Selvon's world women are merely the property of men', since it can be argued that Selvon portrays what he sees without necessarily wishing things were that way. Indeed, in A Brighter Sun, he portrays Tiger's behaviour very clearly as force-ripe male chauvinism, just as in Turn Again Tiger, when Tiger decides not to beat Urmilla for her role in the women's revolt, Selvon makes it very clear that we are to see his 'tolerance' as patronising and self-congratulatory. Where Selvon's sexism lies is in the contrasting portrayals of Tiger's and Urmilla's routes to maturity. Tiger's is an unsteady, intellectual growth; Urmilla's an easy process of biological maturation, something almost vegetable. As she says of her pregnancy:

You can't force nature, Tiger. Same way with your cabbage or melongene, same way with me. (p.42)

The original title of the novel was to have been 'Soul and Soil'.

Another kind of sexism occurs in descriptions which may have a truth on the basis of observation but which fail to question the situatedness of behaviour or the limitations of the observer's perspective. For instance, V.S. and Shiva Naipaul both portray Hindu women in traditional families as unthinking and on several occasions comment explicitly on their incapacity to formulate thought. There may be a certain naturalistic truth in the observation, but one wonders how far such behaviour was simply that which was expected in the presence of male kin. But to assume that such women were incapable of thought or did not express ideas in other situations, is clearly illogical and sexist.

Nevertheless, there exists the danger of falsely charging male writers with sexism by mistaking the views of their characters for the authorial view, by demanding images of women in novels set in the past for which there was little social reality and by failing to note small but significant elements of self-awareness in male novels.

For instance, it is possible to argue that the absence of Shama's point of view is one of the deficiencies of V.S. Naipaul's A House For Mr. Biswas. The novel is shaped round Biswas's subjective, often egocentric concerns. All other characters, not least Shama, tend to be seen from his caricaturing point of view. It is clearly possible to defend the novel on the grounds that this concentration is what gives the novel its unity and, even with its breadth in space and time, its intensity, and accept the loss of other perspectives as a necessary consequence. But there are in fact several occasions when something Shama does or says throws Biswas's egocentricity and the novel's own limitation of focus into sharp relief. There is, for instance, the occasion when Biswas's new supervisor, Miss Logie, takes the whole family to the sea-side. Shama talks animatedly to the English woman:

She was throwing off opinions about the new constitution, federation, immigration, India, the future of Hinduism, the education of women. Mr. Biswas listened to the flow with surprise and acute anxiety. He had never imagined that Shama was so well informed and had such violent prejudices... (p437)

The episode reveals not only how unperceptive Biswas has been of Shama,

but warns us that we need to beware of the limitations of Biswas's point of view in other matters. It reminds us that behind Shama's characteristic behaviour there is an unknown person the novel scarcely reveals, just as beyond the focus of the novel on the struggles of Mohun Biswas in his small area of concern there is a wider social and political world.

Of other absences from male fiction it is harder to speak. Indo-Caribbean women writers will no doubt show us what they are. Elaine Showalter in her study, A Literature of Their Own (1977) suggests that the distinctive elements of women's writing have been: 'feminine realism, feminist protest, and female self-analysis.'^(p 304) It is true that male writers have given us glimpses of the lives of Indo-Caribbean women, but there are many areas of silence. It is true that they have given us an inkling of what Indo-Caribbean women have to protest about, but we can be sure that there is an angry, long-silenced voice soon to hit us. Finally, we may be sure that though only a couple of novels by male writers portray Indian women as being capable of self-analysis, of that area we know nothing yet.

Voice: Indo-Caribbean Women's Writing.

The domestic, educational, occupational and social disadvantages suffered by Indo-Caribbean women are reason enough not to be surprised at the small quantity of imaginative writing they have produced. To date some forty individuals have contributed poems and stories to local journals; one collection of short stories and a dozen slim volumes of poetry have been published; as yet no novel has appeared. Much of the writing is undistinguished; many of the journal contributions are by adolescents who have subsequently gone silent. In addition to the more general reasons why people in the Caribbean (or anywhere) stop writing (lack of talent, lack of encouragement, lack of publishing outlets, lack of audience) there are clearly reasons more specific to

women which are almost too obvious to mention. There are several male Indo-Caribbean writers who are enabled to write full-time because they are supported by their wives, but there are not, one suspects many males who look after their children to give their wives the same opportunity. Moreover, as is the case in societies where writers must publish their own work, it is not necessarily those with the least talent who keep silent. Not only is it often those who are more self-critical about their work who are less inclined to publish, but those without the material resources and those without the necessary self-confidence. One suspects that women feature disproportionately in the latter two categories. As yet there are, in my view, only three women who have achieved any real individuality of voice - the late Rajkumari Singh, Shana Yordan and Mahadai Das - though there are several others who, on the evidence of the small quantity of material they have published, display real potential.

If there is one over-arching concern in Indo-Caribbean women's writing, it is with human happiness and its denial by social injustice, religious bigotry, racism and sexism ; and, to a far greater extent than in male writing, personal relationships are seen as central to that happiness or its absence. Although a good deal of writing on such personal themes belongs to the sentimental genre of women's magazine romance, in dealing with such themes as the pain of unrequited love or the awakening of sexual feelings it can be seen as challenging the stereotype of the maternal and passive roles imposed on women in a patriarchal culture. In Leela Sukhu's collection, Scattered Leaves (1968) in the midst of much Mills and Boonish sentiment, there is an arresting description of the joy and horror of submission to the consuming power of love:

For a moment it seems like madness
 To see beauty in the gaping jaws of a reptile
 But oh! this feeling that runs in my blood
 Will send me like a child to a mother
 For the love of it
 Into the jaws of the monster. 65

The outstanding achievement in the exploration of personal feelings is to be found, though, in Shana Yordan's cycle of love poems, This Listening of Eyes (1976)⁶⁶ which portrays a tension between a feminine feeling of delight in the immersion of the whole personality in the minutiae of love's exchanges and a feminist awareness of the inequalities of power and the disparities of commitment between the man and the woman. In the making of these poems Shana Yordan also displays a rare, careful craftsmanship. Several poems explore a conflict between the pleasures of dependency and the urge to protect self-hood. The male is asked:

How can you walk into the garden of my life
And trample on the neatly laid beds of habit?
Or break the buds from struggling trees of thoughts...

but the woman has to admit that:

...in all learning I am untaught
Save in what you shall teach me.

What is desired is not submission, but equal joining:

Touch not nor break the buds that fragrance lend
But graft them to that other self of mine
Which is you. (c)

This poem illustrates how the effectiveness of the metaphors Yordan uses frequently depends less on their intrinsic originality than on the way they are developed logically within a coherent structure. Sometimes, though, images are more startling, as in the fourth poem in the sequence, in which the woman recognises that though she has given herself wholly, the man holds part of himself aloof:

So I play the age-old game with you
And run the gamut of cold safe intellect
While my soul shivers beside the unlit fire
Watching the tiger devour your bowels.

Here there is a metaphysical wit and intensity in these lines as she shifts the scene from the terminology of the 'modern' self-analytical lover, to a 'stone-age' scene of primitive emotions by the play on the literal implications of 'age-old' and the link between the 'cold' intellect and the unlit fire which would have saved the man from his fears. She plays with the reader as well, for we are led to assume that what frightens the man is his fear of 'this primal thing'. It is not:

But rather the touch of soft returning fingers
 Holding your hands but reaching for your dreams. (D)

This theme of male-female tension is developed in later poems in the sequence where the woman divines that the male feels threatened by the naked exposure of her personality and attempts to reduce that threat by making her simply an object of sexual desire:

But you in your arrogance would fashion me
 After the foolish delights of men
 Fearful lest my utter nakedness
 Causes you to discover the essence of my soul. (F)

She wonders about the possibilities of shaking off involvement:
 If you walk straight ahead
 How far can you get?

but has to admit the imperative of:

The urgent call to walk the streets
 Leading always to the abodes of men,
 Houses with mysteries of their own..

and accepts that :

...one must endure the caterpillars
 To be rewarded with butterflies. (L)

The image is denser than might at first appear, not merely opposing the unpleasant and the beautiful, but the closed-up male and the possibility of his opening and the earth-bound contacts of sex and the spiritual flowing together of the inner persons.

Only in a single poem by the Trinidadian, Niala Rambachan, 'Picture the Diab⁶⁷lesse', does one find any comparable attempt to go beyond romantic clichés. Rambachan's poem is a witty and ironic fable on the attitudes of men and women to female sexuality. At first it reads like a mocking telling of the old-old story of men who are tempted from their boring wives, 'white flour bag aprons covering our domestic bellies' by the diab⁶⁷lesse (the she-devil with cloven hooves who lures men to their fate in forests), even though they have been warned by the 'straight, tough, leathery tongues' of their wives. The male is always tempted:

He had been expecting her all along
 Has come on this path just for her...

but always manages to escape back to his domestic wife. However, the fable is not simply a satire on men who are tempted but frightened by the sexuality of women. Rambachan makes the diab⁶⁷lesse more than a folklore demon, giving her the image of a woman pursued by her own

sexual desire, ('Driven madly by that power and weakness'), which like her cloven feet is hidden 'under the frilled skirt' which she tears as she pursues the husband. Always she is left alone:

As she sadly closes the file on this victim
And starts preparing for the next prospect.

Then it becomes clear that the identities of domestic wife and diablesse are connected. The narrating wife speaks both of her 'dark skirt and white apron and closed face' and her inward 'obscene thought' as the errant husband returns; while the diablesse is pictured in the domestic task of mending her torn skirt,

In the dry daylight when the forest is no longer black
And she is no longer a myth to be feared.

The diablesse it becomes clear is the nighttime sexuality of the domestic woman, whose threat the man runs from, though she senses 'the loss he experienced briefly.' But the diablesse is also 'our fear', women's fear of their own sexuality. The identity of the two female images is made clear in the ironic last two lines of the poem when the narrating voice, who speaks as one of the domestic wives, asks of the disappointed diablesse:

Does she then, maybe,
Sit down and write poetry?

In general though, writing specifically focussed on the position of Indian women has not notably extended the kind of treatments found in male fiction. Occasionally, indeed one finds regret for the loss of the traditional 'protected' role of women. Ann Marie Bissessar regrets the discarding of orhni and sari and asserts:

Young men were meant to be warriors
To protect their women and kin. 68

More usually though the literary focus is on the image of woman as victim: as the beaten wife (Diane Ramdass, 'The Drunkard,')⁶⁹ the mother struggling against poverty (Veronica Raganonnan, 'Underprivileged,')⁷⁰ or most popularly as the girl trapped or revolting against an arranged marriage. From Mary D. Kalloo's story, 'Doolarie,'⁷¹ written in 1948 up to Rajnie Ramlakhan's 'The Doolaha' written in 1974, the theme has⁷² attracted several tellings,⁷³ often interwoven with protest against

religious or racial bigotry. Of these stories only Rajnie Ramlakhan's could be described as even mildly feminist in perspective. Ramlakhan is also one of the first to attempt to dramatise the kind of conflicts experienced by the first generation of Hindu women with higher education. In her story, 'Flight',⁷⁴ the heroine is pressured on the one side by her parents to marry a 'good Hindu husband' and on the other by her radical Christian Indian boyfriend to abandon religion, family pieties and convention. She wants to have a career, be socially committed and involved in cultural activities, but she also wants children and within the security of marriage. The boyfriend rebuffs her. At first she contemplates suicide, but then sees that she must become truly independent: 'From now on her life was to be hers and hers alone.' However, she still hopes that one day the right man will come along. The story is too brief to permit any real development of character or exploration of the woman's feelings, but one suspects that it outlines a theme which will be popular in future Indo-Caribbean women's writing. In general though these stories of victimised women are simply part of a wider repertoire of stock Caribbean social protest themes, which though they relate to real social ills, have been reduced to a formulaic clichéd literary response. Protest themes in women's writing include indignant portraits of such oppressed figures as the cane-worker, stories of poverty which drives to crime and, more unusually, anti-war protest.⁷⁵

With the exception of Shana Yordan, Rajkumari Singh and Mahadai Das, few Indo-Caribbean women have dealt explicitly with the theme of ethnic identity in their writing. It is no accident that all three are Guyanese, the most self-analytical and, in the case of Singh and Das, the most politically committed of all the writers discussed.

In 'Earth is Brown',⁷⁶ Shana Yordan explores her part Indian ancestry, laments what has been lost, but indicates her own sense of distance from that past. Even for her grandfather, India is only memory, while his sons 'with their city faces' scorn his attempts to hold onto old

traditions. For Yordan herself even the physical inheritance has become a liability in a Guyana dominated by the Africans:

Oh grandfather, my grandfather,
 your dhoti is become a shroud
 your straight hair a curse
 in this land where
 rice no longer fills the belly
 or the empty placelessness
 of your soul.

By contrast, both Rajkumari Singh and Mahadai Das, whose work is considered separately below, embraced their Indo-Guyanese identity much more positively.

For someone who has known Rajkumari Singh even briefly it is difficult to write dispassionately of her work. She was a warm, courageous, politically conscious woman, acutely alert to the wrongs of oppression, whether of one nation by another, one race by another or one sex by the other. Though physically crippled by polio from infancy, hospitalised frequently, frequently in pain and her life ended prematurely by ill-health, she was a woman of great vitality and inner strength. During the last decade of her life, her strenuous involvement in public life would have taxed a far healthier person. Before that she had raised eight children and was invariably a surrogate cultural and artistic mother to younger writers and artists. Almost certainly she was more generous with her time to other people than was good for her own work, though that concern with people is what nourishes her work with honesty and good feeling.

Her involvement with the arts, politics and the politics of culture was life-long. As a teenager in the 1940's she had been involved in the British Guiana Dramatic Society and had been an articulate promoter of the society's belief that Indians had a right and duty to maintain their cultural integrity. She wrote in 1945:

We have experienced many attempts from without to absorb us as a distinct cultural group, and now more than ever, in our midst we find organised propaganda at work, aimed primarily to plunge us into the general melting pot towards a homogeneous culture... This we hate... 77

During the 1950s she was inevitably heavily ^{occupied} with her young family, though she managed in 1960 to publish her collection of short stories

A Garland of Stories. During the 1960's she became more involved in political activity in the People's Progressive Party, and in the mid-1960's she was made a member of the commission which investigated the dreadful racial savagery largely suffered by Indian women and girls during the Wismar disturbances of 1964. It was perhaps this experience which made her feel that racial understanding between Indians and Blacks was the most urgent cause in Guyanese politics. It was this feeling which lead her to make a well publicised split from the P.P.F., which she felt had become stuck in a sterile mould of opposition and ethnic chauvinism, and join the ruling People's National Congress, which appeared to have taken a lurch leftwards. She was aware that the P.N.C. was an equally chauvinist organisation, but believed that unless Indians participated in national politics and culture, they, though a majority, would be reduced to total voicelessness in the country's affairs. In hindsight the decision to join the P.N.C. must be seen as a mistake. Though she was sincere, for its part the P.N.C. leadership was only interested in a cosmetic Indian presence in the party. Nevertheless, whilst she was involved with the P.N.C. as a Captain in the newly formed Guyana National Service Cultural Division, there was a brief period of visibility for Indian artists and writers, which stimulated a small explosion of Indo-Guyanese writing. Rajkumari Singh was particularly involved with the formation of the Messenger Group which was dedicated to bringing to public notice that 'Coolie art forms' were equally part of the Guyanese tradition. They put on several public shows and produced a few issues of their journal, Heritage.

Perhaps of Rajkumari Singh's own literary contribution it must be admitted that she lacked that ultimate gift with words to lift her poetry, drama and fiction to the truly memorable; yet she invariably had something interesting to say, always spoke with her own voice and generally communicated very effectively. Her work emerges out of a number of creative tensions: though intensely active in public affairs

her poetry speaks of a deep need for spiritual withdrawal; though she was politically committed to the future and radical social change, her collection of short stories speaks of a longing for a static, pastoral, edenic past. She was always very consciously Guyanese, but equally concerned that the Indian material and cultural contribution to Guyana should not be overlooked.

The latter desire is expressed in several poems in her collection, Days Of The Sahib Are Over (1971) and in a short play Heritage (c. 1973).

⁷⁹
Heritage is more a colloquium than a play, but it airs frankly the differences between those Indians who advocated a boycott of all Government functions as a protest against the P.N.C.'s corruption of the electoral process and the discrimination against Indians in the public sector, and those like Mrs. Singh who favoured participation. In poems such as 'Days of the Sahib Are Over,' and 'Per-Ajie' she affirms the Indian contribution to Guyanese history. The former is an Indo-Guyanese equivalent to the African's 'Massa Day Done'. She does not glorify the past under:

the overlord whose, hard, harsh discipline kept the
brown man cringing,
crawling and grinning in sickening sycophancy.

But she also commemorates the resistance and argues that writers must pass on a record of that past because:

...to know is vital, for the young, the unborn
must never bow their heads believing
theirs offered naught to the fight.

And, as is so often the case in Guyana, much is coded in the poem. The third line implies that there is now a new sahib, the black middle-class over the Indians:

Days of the 'Sahib
are over
or should be
now that our land is free of the overlord's yoke.

However, she urges that this history be used to inspire rather than become trapped in the 'complexities of inferiority and hate', which she feared was the psychological basis of Afro-Guyanese politics.

In 'Per-Ajie' Rajkumari Singh pays special homage to the steadfastness of Indian women, whose virtues she saw as central to the character of

the Indo-Guyanese as a people 'bred to sacrifice and to achieve'. It is an important attempt to restore the Indo-Guyanese woman to the stage of history, but unfortunately the attempt to create a dignified language of tribute results in a poem which is archaically stilted. Nevertheless, Per-Ajie is strongly defined:

Per Ajie
 I can see
 How in stature
 Thou didst grow
 Shoulders up
 Head held high
 The challenge
 In thine eye. (p.15)

Proud though she was of her Indian heritage, Rajkumari Singh was never uncritical. Above all she believed that Indians should see themselves as Guyanese. In her fable 'Karma and the Kaietur'⁸¹ tragedy occurs because of the dual loyalties of the Indian youth who returns to India to care for his aged mother, and because of the girl's lack of faith in her lover's return. Indians have to learn to stop looking backwards, and other Guyanese must learn patience until the need has gone. In other stories she deals with suffering caused by an arranged marriage⁸² ('Sakina, I Love You Still,') caste prejudice ('Sardar Birbal Singh')⁸³ and Indian racial prejudices ('Hoof Beats After Midnight,')⁸⁴ and 'Juman Maraj,'⁸⁵ In her play, The Sound Of Her Bells (c.1974)⁸⁶ she explores in Tagorean style the theme of religious intolerance as Baba, a pious, zealous and priggish Hindu pundit refuses to allow a professional dancer, Nirmala, to perform in front of a statue of Lord Shiva in his temple. He protests that she is a 'consummate prostitute' and that her presence will desecrate the temple grounds. One of the devotees, the liberal and sympathetic Krishna, asserts that temples are for sinners and attacks Baba's hypocrisy for taking money from those for whom he performs pujas. Baba storms out of the temple but inevitably he returns to watch Nirmala dance. Against his will he is moved and begins to question his previous attitudes. However, Mrs. Singh then rather blurs the case she is making against male prejudices. Although she

suggests rather hesitantly that the sexuality implicit in Nirmala's dance is a legitimate vehicle for her act of worship (Nirmala admits to Baba that, 'I do satisfy my biological urging by means of the dance.') she then weeps contritely for her sexually adventurous past. However, in 'No More Kitchree For the Groom,' she speaks without any hesitancy of the male-centredness of Indian culture, berating the custom of giving the son-in-law a dish of kitchree, which he will only begin to eat when the bride's family have given him sufficient gifts :

as though, treasured maiden daughter
was snatched from brothel
to bag a husband. 87

By the mid 1970's Mrs. Singh was moving towards a livelier, more demotic diction.

There was also a more personal, private side to Rajkumari Singh's work. Here her poetry speaks of an intense loneliness and pain which sought at times for peace in bodily dissolution and spiritual withdrawal. In a very early poem, 'Alone' she compares the solitary soul to:

The pregnant paddy-sheaves
Waiting to be threshed
Waiting to lay down precious grains of rice
To be relieved of the burden of bearing them. (p 6)

The two urges - for action and achievement and detachment and dissolution - are bound always to remain in tension. There is symbolic resolution in the figure of Shiva, dancing god of creation and dissolution, whose devotee Rajkumari Singh declares herself in the opening poem of her collection, but as the poem 'Stealing Across the Poignant Silence' suggests, they were tensions which, in life, could only be acknowledged but not overcome. Listening to the conch calling worshippers to prayer, she feels a restless yearning :

For harmony with what is
To scatter from the sphere
The cacophony of men
Clamouring for rights
That mock the sermons of yesteryear.

The sermons, however, speak with two voices: the other-worldly sage:
Spurning the dues
Of Action
Striving instead for perfection.

and the practical, achievement-oriented Indo-Guyanese:

Inspiring with edicts
That teach of doing
Before having... (p.9)

Though there are undoubted inadequacies of technique in Rajkumari Singh's work, she wrote out of a complex perception of the world around her, was concerned with exploring the situation of the Indian woman in the Caribbean without allowing herself to become restricted to either an ethnic or a gender ghetto, and achieved a distinctive voice. For that, as well as for what she made of her life, her memory should be honoured.

One of the younger former members of the Messenger group, Mahadai Das, has followed Rajkumari Singh in fusing Indo-Guyanese, feminist and radical-nationalist perspectives in her work. Unlike other women's writing in the 'protest' tradition, Mahadai Das's work derives from a genuinely revolutionary framework, is distinguished by the originality of its perceptions and by the constant attempts to refine the form of its expression.

Her earliest poems are those of a sensitive adolescent about loneliness and disappointed love but written with a gothic excess of image and delight in words which mark them out from the usual. Whilst these poems are full of undigested literary influences, she was soon afterwards exploring the potential of demotic creolese in poems such as 'Chile Is Who You Fooling', a sharp satire on empty-belly pretensions and 'Me and Melda', a lively portrayal of an offended woman about to do battle with a rival:

Yuh can bet de frack yuh gat on
De portals a she ais
wide open
An de blood runnin red-man thru she brains...
...Aye girl
She gan tear out she hair
And dig out she eye
When she done... dat bitch
She ain' gan good fuh no man. \$9

Between 1973-75 Mahadai Das, along with other members of the Messenger group, joined the Cultural Division of Guyana National Service. She remained with G.N.S. long after others had left, an idealistic

revolutionary whose enthusiasms and hopes are to be found in her first⁹⁰ published collection, I Want To Be A Poetess of My People (1976, 1977) In this period one feels that she was not always well served by those who supported and promoted her work. She was regarded as a valuable ornament by the cultural establishment of the ruling party, as an Indian, and a woman, and an exceptionally photogenic one at that. She was flattered and the least meritorious aspects of her work encouraged, and not given the kind of constructive criticism which would have helped her to see what was genuine in her work and what was not, which has now been left high and dry by events and its own noisy sloganizing. Poems such as 'Militant', 'Akarra Did You Hear Us Marching,' and 'He Leads The People,' have a naively exalted tone and are full of revolutionary clichés. More interesting are the poems written in response to her experiences of Kimbia, the G.N.S. camp in the Guyanese interior, where there was an attempt to revive cotton production. In 'Look in the Vision for the Smiles of the Harvest,' Das displays an acute sensitivity to the doubleness of experience, exploring the satisfactions of taming wild nature whilst hinting that there is something historically disquieting in the regimented production of acres of cotton and suggesting that something has been violated in the destruction of the wilderness:

When the darkness falls around this Kimbia jungle
 ...like a cascade of tenderness
 ...like a mantle of love...
 Hear the eerie cries of baboons of desolation driven into
 the forest,
 Listen their whimpers of subjugation of lost dominance.

However, the poems in this collection which best represent Mahadai Das's gifts are those which explore her consciousness of the complex heritage of being Indo-Guyanese. As a child of a peasant family, she was sharply aware that the history of indenture and plantation labour had shaped her own evolution. She reviews that history in 'They Came In Ships,' a poem which achieves compression and impact through an allusive, montage construction, picking up scraps of her own researches like the voice of Des Voeux:

I wrote the queen a letter

For the whimpering of the coolies
in their logies would not let me rest.

and making effective use of the simplest rhetorical devices such as repetition:

They came in fleets of ships
They came in droves
Like cattle
Brown like cattle
Eyes limpid like cattle

The poem also demonstrates a taste for verbal wit which becomes an increasingly important element in her later work. Referring to the complacent attitudes of the British Government investigators who came to the colony in 1870 she puns neatly:

The Commissioners came
Capital spectacles with British frames.

If 'They Came in Ships' is weighted towards a picture of what was suffered, the next poem in the sequence, 'Cast Aside Reminiscent Foreheads of Desolation,' (she had a weakness for lengthy titles at this stage) warns against becoming trapped in a prison of suffering, reminding Indians that there was creation too:

...you have helped build this land
Brought forth, out of your womb a new industry
of waving paddy leaves...

Although in this collection Das is not immune to that sentimental abstraction, 'the people', she also portrays actual people rooted in their customary ways of looking at the world and their resistance to new ideas. In 'Your Bleeding Hands Grasp The Roots of Rice,' she writes of a return to her parents, full of a sense of indebtedness to them for enabling her to have the education which has estranged her from them:

Your bleeding hands grasp the roots of the rice
in my fields
And the seed of life you delved into the earth
Has sprung up to mock me.

By 1977-1978 Mahadai Das was writing a very different kind of poetry from the optimistic enthusiasms of I Want To Be A Poetess Of My People. She had seen the P.N.C. for what it was, a cynical party of the middle class which had fraudulently assumed the clothing of revolution to hang on to power. Perhaps alluding ironically to Jesus's parable of

the impossibility of a father offering his son a stone when he has asked for bread, she writes:

Cold is my bread of stone.
My bitter tea fouls
Its inner course in the duodenum... 91

and of a society plagued by deceits and material scarcities:

Call me the need of rain
For I am want for the shower of truth.
I am starved for bread and the milk is too dear.
Call me this need of rain. 92

However, unlike many others, her disillusionment did not mean the abandonment of ideals and political activity. During the late 1970's she became active in the genuinely radical and multi-racial Working People's Alliance. However, after Walter Rodney's murder in 1980 and the killing of a number of other W.P.A. activists she left Guyana for the United States where she still lives, though still deeply involved in Guyanese politics.

What is immediately noticeable about the poems in her second collection, My Finer Steel Will Grow (1982)⁹³ is that they are both tighter in form and more controlled in diction and more imagined: metaphor rather than rhetorical statement carries the burden of meaning. They have an edge of passionate commitment, but there is also a new note of sometimes self-mocking detachment. They are poems of distress and anger which never lose hope. However, after the strident optimism of the poems in I Want To Be A Poetess of My People, hope is seen from a newly chastened perception of human vulnerability. Working in a very disciplined way through two dominant metaphors, the images of warfare and the image of the body broken into separate inanimate parts, Das conveys very effectively a sense of how shattering defeat feels, how hostile the world:

How soon the cold rain, pellets
shattering the thin grass.
Shivering
in my inadequate skin, I inside
huddle pondering a sudden treason,
a ransom that unprepares: a watch
unconsidered.

Unarmed against the sky, the earth
bears barren limbs; inarticulate arms

that hide origins. This heart
 is a handful of tissue I must coat
 in warmth before the guerilla air. (p.6)

Even those who declare war on tyranny only come,
 with our string of beads and our naked
 spears... with our shield of courage
 to repossess
 Our native waterfall. (p5)

Hope is found in a vision of cosmic justice, in solacing images of
 the inevitability of natural and seasonal change. Yet there is no
 thought that change comes through some miraculous divine intervention,
 but only through the workings of the individual and collective will
 in the political here-and now. In 'My Finer Steel Will Grow', it is out
 of the very humiliations of defeat and exile that new resolution is
 willed to come. The image of a hunted, outcast creature, a flea-ridden
 pot-hound, is used to describe the sense of inconsequence, placeless-
 ness of the defeated exile. The 'felled star' refers, of course, to
 Rodney's murder:

The felled star is like a dagger
 Stuck deep in my heart. Anon. I am gone.
 There is no place to rest
 my accidental head.
 It is a dog's life. Today there are no bones.

The flea-ridden creature is tormented by its humiliations, its nature
 corrupted by rage and by fears of death:

my paws trace out this path
 of death too often that I smell.

But in the process of this suffering a metamorphosis takes place:

...They [the fleas] pound
 like a carpenter gone
 beserk: hammering
 rains the bullets
 on my back.

Whilst the hammering arm,
 in rhythmic falter flags,
 my final steel will grow.

The shift in image from fleas to bullets to the hammering arm are per-
 haps awkward at a visual associational level, but there is a kind of
 metaphysical intensity. One suspects that Das is making deliberate use
 of echoes from Blake's poem, 'Tiger, Tiger,' in the image of the hammer-
 ing arm of the oppressor which is transforming the seedy pot-hound
 into a creature of 'fearful symmetry'. A similarly ironic use of liter-
 ary allusion is made in the second part of the poem to suggest the

enormity of the betrayal she has felt and perhaps mock her own former credulousness. Here the passage into exile is made wittily analogous to Paradise Lost, in the flight of a rebellious Lucifer from a corrupted heaven:

Ah yes! the government of heaven
has grown corrupt:
my passage to earth's eden
is laid with fire. (p.5)

On earth, Eden has been corrupted by the 'knotty schemes' of 'Spider', a neat amalgamation of the serpent in the garden and the Guyanese folk-perception of the political leader as the trickster spider, Anansi.

Not all the poems are equally successful. Sometimes Das seems unaware of the visual inappropriateness of the images she creates. For instance, in trying to find an image adequate to the evil of the murder of a priest, Father Darke, by Government thugs, she writes:

Like the bullfrog who croaks, they
bare their teeth and prepare for the slaughter.
While their fangs drip
with the blood of priests and the aborted
day; ... (p 7)

The image of some ludicrous horror film is unfortunately called up. However, such lapses are rare.

The other development illustrated by this collection is Mahadai Das's capacity to demonstrate that her political and personal concerns are aspects of the same experience, that the desire for a society which encourages human creativity within an environment of freedom is simply an expansion of what she seeks in personal relationships. In a long poem, untitled, in the collection, she explores the painful irony that it is the man's political despair which kills his capacity to respond to her, making him mimic the behaviour of the ruler protecting his boundaries from attack, and her take up the role of adversary to one she loves. She writes with a mature synthesis of understanding:

But only new time
Can be your adequate mistress.
The days are miserly, the hours
thin and vaporless, the new season a dream. (p.13)

and assertion of her wound:

... your back
a keel of stone bruising the red lake
of my womb... (p 11)

Again, she shows a new ability to work through the controlling framework of an extended metaphor which both shapes the poem and ironically describes the invasion of their relationship by political frustrations.

He defends :

But I am learning your roster:
the bugle call at dawn,
your gate-shutting rites,
the changing of the guard.

While she plays the role of rebel:

I am the insurrection
your strong hand put down.

However, she cannot decide whether her guerrilla struggle to resist his rejection is not more self-destructive than outright confrontation. The image of course also relates back to the world of political choices, between the heroic risks of staying and fighting, and the guerrilla tactics of retreat, survival and exile:

...Had I stood
against the wall of my courage,
or had they fired at the dutiful
hour, it would have been
final.
I would have won
the case of my belief. |
Instead, this
wretched sentence exiling me
to memory. (p.13)

The last in this short sequence of love poems, in seeking an image of love which is whole, uncomplicated and freely given, returns to an idyllic picture of East Indian peasant life. In the context of the collection as a whole the image is both touching and ironic. Touching because it admits a yearning for a simpler peasant life before the complications of knowledge and political involvement, and ironic because it is a world the poet knows she cannot return to, and a role for women she would reject:

Let us sling our pails
upon our arms' strong rods
and dance to the well.
Our men will still be sleeping
while we stoke the fire. The coals
will leap like joy in our hearts,
to flame. Our lords will wake
to hot curries and fresh-baked
wheat.
And while it is still dark, they
will make their way to the fields.

Mahadai Das is still a young woman and her work will undoubtedly continue to develop. Nevertheless, even at this stage it represents an important attempt to explore the sometimes conflicting commitments to being a political radical, being a woman and being an Indian in the Caribbean.

Chapter ThirteenThe 'Douglas' Sensibility: A Study Mainly of the Fiction of Samuel Selvon.

In the past the social and fictional image of the mulatto was frequently that of an unstable person at ease neither with black nor white. Now, however, many who would formerly have described themselves as coloured are proud to call themselves black. Such a process was probably inevitable after the virtual disappearance of the white colonial elite and the gaining of power by predominantly black supported political parties in both Trinidad and Guyana.²

What then of the identity of the much smaller groups of mixed Indian and African or Indian and European parentage? Here, in the first case at least there has been no disappearance of either of the cultural and ethnic parents. The empirical evidence is sketchy, but what there is suggests that socially and culturally the Afro-Indian mixed group has tended to move towards the Afro-creole community. This is likely given other evidence that while the black community has been generally accepting towards the offspring of the mixed relationship, there is more likely to be hostility amongst Indians.³ However, there is also evidence from Jamaica and Martinique, where the process of racial mixing between Indian and Negro has gone further than anywhere else in the Caribbean, that even amongst 'Indians' of mixed backgrounds there has been a tenacious holding on to an Indian racial identity.⁴

This chapter discusses the work of three Trinidadian writers of mixed but predominantly Indian parentage, Sam Selvon, Freddie Kisson and Mustapha Matura. Most of the chapter is devoted to the work of Sam Selvon, not so much on autobiographical grounds (Selvon's maternal grandfather was Scottish) but because, besides their quality, his

novels have as their predominant theme the plight of the person who is in a position of 'in-betweenness'. Inevitably this focus requires a selection from Selvon's exceptional range of material; there is thus no discussion of his London novels (The Lonely Londoners, 1956; The Housing Lark, 1965; or Moses Ascending, 1975) and little mention of what has tended to attract most critical attention to his work, his use of dialect. What will be argued is that it is precisely Selvon's concern with the theme of in-betweenness that motivates the form of his novels, giving them a coherence and artistic unity which has been missed or denied by the majority of his critics.

Though there is little empirical evidence on the size or social disposition of either the Indian-Negro or the Eurasian groups in either Trinidad or Guyana, the very origins of the word 'dougla' and its different connotations to Blacks and Indians indicate something of the anomalous position of the group. The Hindi, 'dogala' or 'dogla' means bastard,⁵ and the term is invariably used contemptuously by Indians. Since most Indians disapprove of intermarriage with Negroes, persons of mixed parentage are a visible sign that racial endogamy has been breached. On the contrary, the term 'dougla' tends to have positive associations for many blacks since, in the past at least, Indian physical features (straight hair and light-brown skin) were much appreciated.

The numbers of persons of Eurasian background is probably also very small. The missionary H.V.P. Bronkhurst noted, however, that by the 1880s there were a few Eurasian children to be found on every estate. He refers to them as 'Mamzerim' or 'Shatukim', 'the parent's reproach and dishonour'.⁶ Whether these were local Indian terms or South Indian terms used specifically by Bronkhurst is not clear. But Bronkhurst also adds that such children were 'becoming very

prominent in the colony'. It is likely that Eurasians were simply identified as Indians by most non-Indians, but Indian attitudes were probably more ambivalent. Lightness of skin was appreciated but the circumstances of the conception may well have been felt as shaming. Many were the product of casual liaisons between managers and overseers and female labourers, and such liaisons frequently created tensions on the estates. No Indian or popular contemporary term for Eurasian appears to exist, though the Niehoffs note that the term 'kirauni', which they translate as 'Eurasian', was one of the words used derogatively by Indians of Blacks, in this case black women.

These differences in social attitudes are replicated in the literature of the area. From stories dating from the 1930's to a more recent novel one can find Creole images of the dougla which consistently stress the idea of physical desirability. C.A. Thomasos's short story, 'The Dougla', (The Beacon, vol. II, no. 10, 1933) is fairly typical in this respect. Elaine, the dougla girl, is described as:

...black and elegant. All men liked her company. She was always merry, always laughing at the top of her voice. She was feline and vicious.

A male version of this figure is Maxie in A.H. Mendes's 'Sweetman', (The Beacon, vol. I, no. 7, 1931). In a more recent novel, Michael Anthony's Green Days By the River (1967), Rosalie Gidharee is 'a first class little dougla jane' whose mixed features are particularly attractive to Afro-Trinidadian Shell and his friends.

While Ismith Khan presents his hero, Zampi, in The Obeah Man (1964) as the ideal of the future, a mixture of all races, the portrayal of Singh in Shiva Naipaul's The Chip-Chip Gatherers (1973) seems to me far more typical of Indian attitudes. Singh is the dougla offspring of Egbert Ramsaran's brief period of licence in the city, a Caliban figure who is banished to the wilderness of an abandoned estate.

Singh seems to represent the 'monstrous' outcome of a forbidden union, a tormented creature who alternately cringes before and threatens his 'pure' half-brother, Wilbert. His distress is expressed in his obsessive carving of human faces with 'thick negroid lips' which he gives to Wilbert as an image of the wrong he feels their father has done him. He rages against the contamination of his blood: 'You think is my fault I have nigger blood running in my veins?' and sleeps like 'a creature crucified'.⁷ But though his own child is even less Indian in appearance (her mother is a 'dark skinned woman of uncertain race- probably Indian and Negro')⁸ Singh's naming of the child 'Indra' indicates his desire to stay within his father's race. The hysteria of Shiva Naipaul's treatment of this character is not unrepresentative. It is, for instance, clear that one of V.S. Naipaul's most depressing experiences on his Caribbean circuit reported in The Middle Passage (1962) was his visit to an Indian village in Martinique where the evidence of cultural assimilation and racial intermixing (the sight of a 'coarse-featured, kinky haired woman' and 'Indian women who were quite negroid')⁹ fill him with disgust.

The treatments discussed above tend to reflect the racial biases of each parent group. What of the work of those writers whose own background is mixed? What are its tendencies? As I have argued in Chapter Three, it would be mistakenly deterministic to suppose that ethnic background necessarily predicates an ethnically biased way of seeing. Nevertheless, there is a clear relationship between the biographies of the writers discussed in this chapter and certain common tendencies in their work. The individual biographies are outlined below, but it is possible to say that common to the work of these authors is both an involvement with creole life as their raw material, and a certain detachment from the values of that lifestyle. In the work of Selvon and Kisoorn there is an even more negative response to 'traditional' Indian values, and considerable scepticism about Indian 'spirituality' in Matura's work. Each

stresses the individual in contrast to group or community. This is not an unexpected perspective for the writer who starts from a point between cultures and ethnic identifications. Though there is little explicitly personal treatment of the issue of ethnic mixing, there is a significant concern in Selvon's work with the theme of relationships, particularly sexual ones, between Indians and Europeans.

The dramatist Freddie Kissoon, also an actor, teacher and director, has an Indian father and a French-creole mother. He reports that much of his life experience has been in creole areas and in the 'dominant Creole culture.' He writes, 'I hardly know the way of life of a 'typical Indian' in the country.' He works with a predominantly Creole performing company, largely before Creole audiences.¹⁰ All this is reflected in the subject matter and its treatment in his plays. He is a prolific writer, with claims to being Trinidad's first genuinely popular dramatist. He is predominantly an entertainer, whose plays deal with perennial situations given a topical flavour. If there are personal ideas which animate his work they are chiefly religious and moral ones. Two or three plays stand out from the rest in that they go beyond merely topical themes and the middle class values of decency, normality and order which most express. King Cobo, (1966), is a forceful if melodramatic portrait of a sexually diseased and crippled misanthrope; Pahyol, (1966), explores the psychological relationship between oppressed villagers and their hated landlord whilst Fugitive from The Royal Jail, (1968), shows that Kissoon can sometimes pursue a poetic image and arrive at conclusions which are subversive of the normative values the bulk of his plays espouse. In general Kissoon's plays stay clear of the subjects of race and class in Trinidadian society. Poor people and their complaints form part of the subject matter of the naturalistic documentation of Calabash Alley (1971) but only from the perspective of hardship

as an accepted fact of life. The one play in which Kisson does recognise the existence of Indian and Creole cultural differences, Doo-Doo (1966), very clearly treats supposedly Indian cultural values as deviant and Creole values as the approved norm. Dahlia, alias Doo-Doo, is the dougla daughter of an Indian cart-man, Koden, and Rose, his Creole wife. Dahlia is in love with Kisskidee, a Negro calypsonian. Her mother approves, but Koden has plans to marry off his daughter to an aged and decrepit Indian, Mr Ramsingh, in order to take over Ramsingh's rumshop. Both Koden and Kisskidee are comic stereotypes. Koden is a hard-working, hard-drinking man, perpetually threatening to use his cutlass, keeping his daughter shut up at home, scheming and adept at emotional blackmail. Kisskidee is all style and flair, a sharp-witted picaresque hero, who speaks most of his lines in rhyming robber-talk. He announces, "I am not a rich man in material wealth but I am rich in talent.... Someday I will be calypso king of Trinidad, the goal of every true-blooded Trinidadian." (my italics).¹² Koden's 'Indian' definition of marriage is "to get in a family with good name or good hair or one ah de same race",¹³ which contrasts with Dahlia's 'dougla-creole' declaration that she will only marry for love. 'Ah doh care how poor a man is, or how ugly or what race he belongs to.'¹⁴ The contradiction in Koden's position, that he has married a Creole but wants his daughter to marry an Indian, is never explained. Koden's scheming is thwarted when Ramsingh announces that his doctor has given him another twenty-five years to live if he is carefully looked after, and that he expects his future parents-in-law to take on that role. Koden begins to see the error of his ways ('Ramsingh making me feel that I is a bound coolie', he complains.) and when Kisskidee turns up while he is feeling depressed, Koden, like the king in a fairy story promises Kisskidee anything he wants as long as he can cheer him up. Kisskidee duly entertains him, converts Koden to the pleasures of the calypso, and persuades him to agree to

his marriage to Dahlia. Koden's only complaint is that, 'The damn¹⁵ thing is, Koden go only have grandchildren with picky head.' The action and character stereotypes are deliberately broad, but what the play unmistakably celebrates is the triumph of creole over Indian values. Mustapha Matura's background is not dissimilar to Kisson's; he reports that his father was 'a dark skinned Indian', a car salesman in Port of Spain, and his mother 'a fair skinned Creole.' His experience was also urban and without contact with the main-stream of Indian life. He mentions an incident when as a fair-skinned Indian he had been expected to 'keep an eye on' the black workers in a bar he was working in, but contrary to management expectations he had become friendly with them.¹⁶ The incident illustrates Matura's personal position within Caribbean race relations. Like Selvon, Matura left Trinidad to pursue his writing career in Britain, and some of his plays are set in Trinidad, some in London. There are other similarities; both are ultimately concerned with the individual and suspicious of any programmes for human action which are based on ethnic identity. Both, though unfailingly aware of the hardships suffered by Blacks in Britain, are often comically astringent about what they see to be the failings of the black community: the tendency to complain but not to act, to add imagined slights to real ones, for black males to be chauvinist in their treatment of women and hypocritical in mouthing black power slogans but still chasing after white women. In plays like Black Pieces (1972), Rum an' Coca Cola (1980) and Welcome Home Jacko (1980) Matura's view of black lives is simultaneously that of an insider and of an outsider. In 'Party' in Black Pieces, Matura satirises the conflict between blacks involved in the inter-racial scene and those committed to black separatism, mocking the one for its escapism and the other for its puritanism and revolutionary clichés.

living a fantasy that their slender talents will bring them fame and fortune who are trapped by their ambivalent attitudes towards whiteness. They are on the one hand resentful and on the other continually looking for white recognition. It is in many respects an Indian perception.

Welcome Home Jacko casts a sharp eye on the generation of young Blacks in Britain who have left school with few skills, fewer opportunities, and constant police harassment on the streets. Rastafarianism has become a style for them, gutted of its religious and moral significance, a fantasy world where they can dress up in 'African' robes, speak bombastically and imagine Jah's intervention in the football machine games which provide them with the only activity which really involves them. Their fantasies are derided by Jacko, a young black who has just been released from prison. True blackness, he says, is 'seeing ting de way it is.' Again, though he is sympathetic to their situation, Matura's treatment of 'black fantasy' is echoed in the work of Selvon and V.S. Naipaul.

It is only in As Time Goes By (1970) that Matura actually focuses on the 'douglas' predicament. The play's central character Ram, an Indo-Trinidadian, has migrated to London and set himself up as mystic living off the simple-minded who consult him. He is an engaging, chameleon-like trickster figure who nearly manages to be all things to all men. But Ram is also chameleon-like in a less calculating way. He has his more vulnerable pretences such as the story he sends back to his village that he is training for the law, and it is evident that the poses he adopts answer his need not to be tied down to any fixed ethnic or cultural position. The one person Ram cannot charm is Batee, his thoroughly Indian wife, who tells Ram that he is 'busy assing up' himself. Batee hates everything about England and wants to return to Indian village life in Trinidad. While Ram sees himself as black (in Trinidad he had nearly married a black girl), Batee

protests her brown Indianness. The only Trinidad that Ram can look back on with any yearning is the creole Trinidad of Carnival; but even beyond this is a humanism which Ram, for all his roguery and the advantages he takes of people, genuinely espouses:

'...Ye have ter get out an' meet people, get ter know dem, get ter understand dem...' ¹⁸

That humanism underlies all Mustapha Matura's plays. .

One of Samuel Selvon's grandfathers was an Indian from Madras, the other a Scottish coconut estate proprietor who married an Indian girl. ¹⁹ There is a reference to a Samuel Selvon who in 1891 was appointed a Tamil interpreter in the courts, ²⁰ and so it is probable that on his father's side Selvon's family was both Christian and 'middle class' from quite early on. Selvon's father himself was the manager of a white-owned dry-goods store in San Fernando. Although Selvon's mother spoke fluent Hindi and tried to pressure him into learning it, he recalls that neither his father nor 'any of the numerous Indian relatives who visited' ²¹ spoke anything but English. It was a home which was Christian and creolised, neither prosperous nor poor. Selvon records that their diet was mainly Creole, that they observed no Indian religious or cultural ceremonies. His cultural influences were the American films showing at the local cinemas and as a child he was not going to 'bother with any stupid "Kar-har-jar"'. ²² At school in San Fernando, Selvon's playmates were of all ethnic groups but he records that no real significance was attached to their backgrounds. The consequence is that Selvon grew up with very different self-concepts and attitudes to other ethnic groups compared to a writer from a purely Hindu background such as V.S. Naipaul. It is clear that as a child and youth Selvon felt not only an outsider to the core Indian community ('To me, the Indian was relegated to the countryside where I went to spend the holidays in Princes Town or Gasparillo and saw workers in the canefields

or thatched huts along the roadside...²³ but estranged from it. He writes: 'one even felt a certain embarrassment and uneasiness on visiting a friend in whose household Indian habits and customs were maintained....' He indicates that this period of childhood was one where 'I had a complete freedom of choice about my life',²⁴ meaning specifically that he had a choice of ethnic identity.

That question of ethnic choice is the essential feature of what I have described as the 'douglas sensibility'. It is, of course, a choice made within the framework of very different kinds of pressures from each of the 'parent' ethnic groups. As Selvon himself has said, to be in such a position of choice can give a wide outlook on life, but it can also lead a person to say, 'but, who the hell am I? And where do I fit into it, have I got roots, am I an Indian? Am I a Negro? Who am I? What is a Trinidadian?'²⁵ Selvon himself, in interviews and public addresses has revealed just such dilemmas. In an interview with Peter Nazareth he speaks throughout as a black writer:

I feel that in this world, I cannot afford to be identified as a white, I have to be identified as black. It doesn't matter if I'm Indian or not, I feel that in the eyes of the world I am a black man. I have to identify with this cause, this feeling.²⁶

However, in Trinidad, particularly in contemporary Trinidad, Selvon has to see himself as an Indian. In his opening address to the Second Conference on East Indians in the Caribbean (UWI, St Augustine 1979) he speaks as an Indian ('we') to a mainly Indian audience. Whereas living in London, to the English it didn't matter 'if you came from Calcutta or Port of Spain', 'as long as you were not white you were black', but in Trinidad: 'Black Power came into vogue, it widened the gulf and emphasised the displacement of the Indian. Black Power was never for the coloured races as such. It was for the Black man only. Like the White Bogey, we now had the Black Bogey to contend with'.²⁷ One notes both the different

definition of Black (Afro-Trinidadian) and the use of the Indian 'we'. In the same address he criticises the apparent 'low profile' of the conference:

These new words and phrases don't baffle an old Trinidadian like myself. You could construe your own meaning, but what that mean to me is that we best hads don't talk too loud before we antagonise the Black people and cause further botheration. If we feel that we are being oppressed and suppressed, all the more reason, I say, to blow our trumpet loud, and fly our kite high.²⁸

The interview and address are separated by only a matter of months. Truly, as Selvon says of himself, 'I do not know if I am East Indian, Trinidadian, or West Indian'. It is out of this perplexity, this wrestling with identity, that Selvon has made his art.

The great variety of Selvon's published work is one indication of the openness of his racial position. Even before the publication of his first novel, A Brighter Sun, in 1953, Selvon's short stories show great variety of theme and setting: rural Indian in 'The Great Drought', 'The Baby' and 'Cane Is Bitter'; urban creole in 'Steelband' 'Carnival Last Lap' and 'Murder Will Out'; the experience of exile in 'Come Back Grenada', 'My Girl and The City' and 'Poem in London'; stories concerned with the reflective alienated individual experiencing the pains of love and existential dread such as 'Two Minutes Silence', 'Talk' or 'As Time Goes By'; stories which appear to be autobiographical such as 'We Also Served', 'Some Places I Remember' and 'A Child's Christmas'; and stories which, in a middle class milieu, deal with the vexed relationship between Art and Life, such as 'Echo in the Hills' and 'Rhapsody in Red'. The styles in these early pieces are similarly varied, ranging from a tough 'hard-boiledness' in such pieces as 'Steelband' to the realistic and comic uses of creolese in a story like 'Calypsonian'; to the more

experimental prose-poetry of 'Poem in London' and 'My Girl and the City'.²⁹ It is a range of subject matter and styles which shows Selvon unwilling to be tied down to any fixed social, ethnic or artistic orientation.

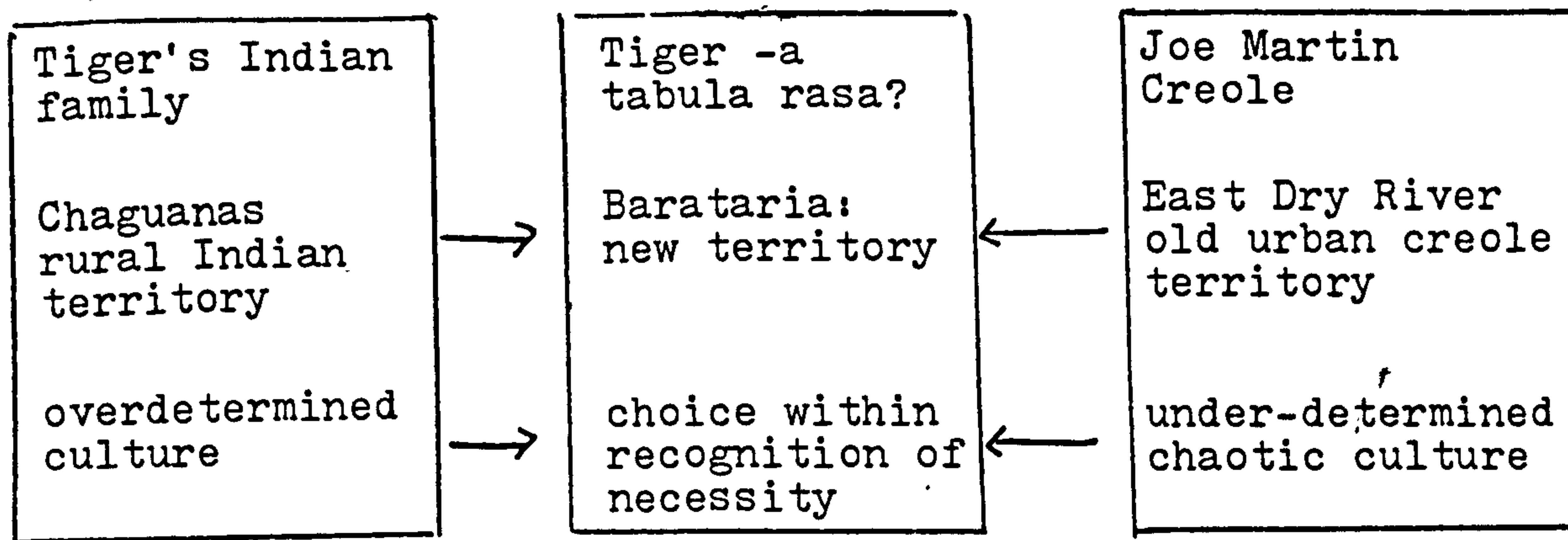
Selvon's later work, published in London, shows some narrowing of focus, but no writer catches more of the variety of Caribbean life. There are the urban creole scenes and the new suburban life of Barataria in A Brighter Sun, the urban Indian setting of An Island Is a World, the rural Indian world of Turn Again Tiger, the middle class cosmopolitan setting of I Hear Thunder and the lives of the mainly black West Indian migrants in The Lonely Londoners, The Housing Lark and Moses Ascending. The significant omission is a detailed, authentic portrait of the 'inner' Hindu world, such as is found in V.S. Naipaul's fiction. That world, as Selvon has said, is foreign to his intimate experience.

However, it is not in the sheer extensiveness of his scope that Selvon's importance lies, but in his deep and sympathetic portrayal of the condition of 'in-betweenness', a theme artistically expressed through the structure of his novels. In respect of its narrative structure Selvon's fiction has been much maligned, both at the time of its first appearance and in later critical studies. Selvon has been seen as a naive autobiographical writer with no sense of form, whose novels, though redeemed by their humour and charm, lack artistic coherence. A. Calder-Marshall discussing A Brighter Sun when it first appeared spoke of its 'meandering form',³⁰ while Edgar Mittelholzer put Selvon in 'the primitive class' and argues that his 'construction is invariably weak.'³¹ V.S. Naipaul reviewing An Island Is A World, wrote that Selvon was not really a novelist, he 'has not the gift of fabricating a story and telling it with conviction.'³² His own experiences, Naipaul writes patronisingly, Selvon can record beautifully. Later, reviewing Turn Again Tiger, Naipaul writes

that Selvon works within the 'undemanding form which suits his talent best: the flimsiest of frames which can, without apparent disorder, contain unrelated episodes and characters'.³³ It is quite likely that Selvon permitted his publishers and critical patrons to think that his work was autobiographical, and the original edition of A Brighter Sun came out with a blurb to that effect. However, Selvon, as indicated above, was born into a Christian, creolised, middle class family, went to Naparima College in San Fernando, served as a wireless operator in the West Indian Royal Naval Volunteer reserve between 1940-45; worked as a journalist for the Trinidad Guardian editing its literary section between 1946-50; emigrated to London where he worked as a civil servant for the Indian High Commission between 1950-53 and has thereafter mainly lived off the fruit of his writings.³⁴ It is scarcely a peasant background. However, the autobiographical issue is something of a red herring in comparison to the question of structure. Here Naipaul, in his honest reservation about his judgement of Selvon's formlessness ('without apparent disorder') comes nearest both to admitting that Selvon's work has a coherence of a kind though he cannot say wherein it lies, and to giving a clue to identifying the nature of Selvon's art.

The clue to recognising the source of Selvon's coherence is in observing that he works preponderantly in the paradigmatic mode of building up parallel (similar or contrasting) relationships of characters and episodes through which his novels' meanings are realised, rather than stressing the syntagmatic or linear construction of his plots, which tend to be episodic.³⁵

A simplified outline of the basic paradigms in A Brighter Sun can be suggested most clearly in diagrammatic form:



At first it appears that Tiger, the novel's central character, is a cultural tabula rasa, who although he comes from a traditional Hindu family, has kept his distance from that world:

He was only sixteen years old and was not in the habit of attending Indian ceremonies in the village.³⁶

When his own arranged marriage comes he wishes 'he knew more about what was going to happen to him', and he makes an embarrassing mess of part of the ceremony. With his new wife Urmilla, Tiger comes to live in Barataria, a new development outside Port of Spain. The settlement is a conglomeration of Trinidadian communities: the concrete bungalows of the middle classes near the main road; in the centre of the settlement the wooden houses of the Blacks and near the backlands Barataria swallows up the old Indian village of mud and thatch huts such as Tiger and Urmilla begin their married life in. Much of Barataria is virgin territory, and the novel is as much about the settlement and the way its population is attempting to put down roots and establish a new Trinidadian style of life as it is about Tiger attempting to achieve his own manhood and independence. But if the land is new, the people who have come to settle there have come from established ethno-cultural backgrounds. When Tiger first arrives, the sounds he hears neatly suggest the apparent co-existence of rural Indian and urban Creole: 'A cow moaned in a field. A radio was playing jazz music.'

Barataria is, in its turn, a symbol of the changes in the wider Trinidadian society: the economic and cultural impact of the American

presence, the moves towards responsible self-government and the increased contact between Trinidadians of African and Indian descent as more Indians moved to the cities and their suburbs. These changes are recorded in the Dos Passos style prefaces to the chapters.

In contrast to Tiger's new life in Barataria are the continuing Indian life of his family in Chaguanas and the former life of his black creole neighbour in Barataria, Joe Martin, in the East Dry River district of Port of Spain. The glimpses of the Indian world show its preoccupation with rigidly marked boundaries, and a life path which is predetermined. The advice Tiger receives from an old Indian, Ramlal, indicates both in linguistic style and in content these restrictions:

...You doam same thing. You gettam house which side Barataria, gettam land, cow - well you go live dat side. Haveam plenty boy chile - girl chile no good. (p.9)

When Tiger's parents visit Barataria for the baby's birth ceremonies they attempt to restore to Tiger a sense of where the proper ethnic boundaries are. When their creole neighbour, Rita, comes in:

The elders frowned and Urmilla's mother pulled her Sari over her head in a significant movement. (p.50)

After the Martin's have left the point is made explicit:

'Is only nigger friend you makeam since you come?' his bap asked. 'Plenty Indian liveam dis side. Is true them is good neighbour but you must look for Indian friend, like you and your wife. Indian must keep together.'

Then Urmilla's mother proudly justifies why she has pinched Henry, Joe and Rita's child:

'Is I who pinch him, that is why he cry,' Urmilla's mother said. 'Nigger boy put he black hand in my beta baby face.' (p.52)

In contrast to the over-determined Indian world is the diffuse, under-determined world of East Dry River where Joe Martin has grown up. Joe's family background, unlike Tiger's which is rigidly ritualised in its relationships, is chaotic. He is the son of a

whore, father unknown, brought up, or rather beaten up, by the girl's aunt, Ma Lambie. In contrast to the excluding racial pride of Tiger's family, there is self-contempt. Ma Lambie curses Joe as, 'yuh nasty nigger, Ah go kill you wid blows.' And whereas worth for the Indian family is measured by ownership of cows, land and boy children, the ambitions of East Dry River, as portrayed in the novel, are to cut a style with the minimum of work. When he arrives in Barataria, Joe Martin is grudgingly being rescued from his former life style of hustling as a sweetman, gambling and liming about the city by his determined and gritty wife, Rita. In many respects Selvon's description of this world is just as censorious as his picture of the rural Indian world. Behind its casual facade there is a life-path in East Dry River which is as seemingly inexorable as that found in the Indian village. Boys will become hustlers and girls whores. The difference is in the Indian and Creole attitudes, respectively, to the 'inescapable' determinations of their lives. The Indian way is to organise life along a predetermined route; practically, by accepting the given means whereby a modest security can be achieved; illusorily, by attempting to predict the outcome of any action, by consulting the pundit, for instance. Having fixed notions about what ought to happen inevitably sets up disappointments. Tiger, for instance, convinces himself that their first child must be a boy. The creole attitude, frequently summed up by Joe as 'What is to is, must is', becomes too often simply an excuse for passivity and irresponsibility. One of Tiger's most important tasks in the novel is to try and work out for himself the relationship between freedom and necessity. For a time Tiger takes Joe as his model of manhood, but as his horizons widen he increasingly diverges from his first mentor.

Another aspect of A Brighter Sun which has been picked out as evidence of its undisciplined formlessness is the role of such

characters as Sookdeo, Tall-boy, Boysee and Bunsee. It is true that none of these has any significant plot function, but when seen as paradigms, as a series of inappropriate personal models for Tiger, their significance becomes readily apparent. Again, if there is a lack of connection in the plot between the lives of these characters, then Selvon, I believe, is simply making the point that the society he portrays is made up of a number of disparate worlds of experience.

In contrast to Tiger, whose character and attitudes towards life are as yet fluid and unformed, characters like Tall-boy, Sookdeo or Boysie are more recognisably social types or even racial stereotypes, used quite deliberately to criticise those who adhere completely and unquestioningly to the norms of an ethnic or social group. Tiger's progress is marked by his movement from the stereotyped responses he makes to Urmilla in his early marriage, when he decides, for instance that:

Men smoked: he would smoke. He would drink rum, curse, swear, bully the life out of her if she did not obey him. (p.14)

to the more personal, not to say idiosyncratic choices he makes as he grows older.

Each of the 'unrelated' characters, whether Indian or Chinese, is, like Tiger, still an outsider in Creole Trinidad, and each has worked out some kind of personal solution to that position. Tall-boy, the Chinese shopkeeper, adapts chameleon-like to his surroundings; he is 'well at home with Trinidadians, even adopting some local habits and manners of speech.' He remains, however, uninvolved in the life around him, combining a single-minded devotion to commercial independence with an intensely private family life. His heart, though, remains in China. Tall-boy's is a solution of a kind, but the truth is that he belongs nowhere properly.

While Tiger's parents live in Chaguanas as if they were still in India, Sookdeo, the old man whom Tiger befriends in Barataria, represents another kind of uncomfortable compromise. He has accepted his lot and, with the aid of liberal anaesthetisings of rum, appears to be content with life in Barataria. Yet Sookdeo is literate and thoroughly aware of the attractions of life outside the Indian community. He has almost certainly been a questioning 'Tiger' in his youth. He warns Tiger:

You want to come a man like me? Go in de city don't stay dis side... Go way from here. You don't know, 'boy. If you stay dis side and get like Sookdeo, everybody laugh at you. (p.129)

Tiger, also, is shown to be alternately content with the rhythms of rural life, and agitated by the thought that life is passing him by. Sookdeo has a further thematic importance. He has always been at ease in Creole company, and felt that 'Creole and Indian does live good.' However, nearing his death he has a dream in which he sees Creoles rushing forward to eat the food at his daughter's wedding feast, and reproaches them;

Who time Indian people have them thing, seeam Creole from all about come. But who time Creole have them thing, no seeam any Indian. Creole, fall back. Fall back, and let them Hindian come beforehand.(p.170)

Although Tiger is unaware that Sookdeo has had this dream, it anticipates Tiger's realization that he must come to terms with his own Indianness, and that in his desire for racial harmony he cannot overlook the disadvantages still suffered by Indians in Trinidad. Initially, Tiger is scarcely aware of how much his behaviour has been moulded by his Indian background. His attitude towards money, to the necessity of producing food and a preference for barter exchange all suggest a peasant mind. Similarly his treatment of Urmilla and his expectations that his first child will be male show Tiger responding in culturally determined ways.

Tiger's awareness of how much of him is 'Indian' comes about mainly through his experiences with Boysie, an urbanised, creolised Indian with a black girl friend. Boysie has rejected the 'slow Indian ways of life he saw around him in the village' and refuses to accept that he has any obligation to live an Indian identity: 'He used to say that all this business about colour and nationality was balls.' (p.88) Tiger is attracted to Boysie because of his freedom, and at first it appears as if Boysie is to be an appropriate model. This turns out to be not the case. It is not just that Boysie's influence encourages Tiger to abandon his obligations to Urmilla and their daughter Chandra, but that Boysie, in his colour blindness, lives a lie. When Tiger visits the city he discovers that Boysie's description of himself as black and society divided into black and white just does not fit his own experiences. He discovers that the whites treat Indians and Blacks as equally invisible, but he also discovers that as a country Indian he is equally invisible to the black shop assistants who tell racist anti-Indian jokes in Tiger's presence, as if he was not there. When this realisation dawns on Tiger his naive attitudes change. He becomes conscious that he is regarded as an intruder, and behaves as if he is one:

And he drifted about the streets of the city ready to explode if any one dared to question his right.(p.224)

Even at the end of the novel when the whole island is meant to be celebrating V.E. day, when Tiger and Boysie go to the city to join in the celebrations they find themselves, would-be creolised Indians, left on the sidelines. They see Joe Martin who is 'dere, beating de ping-pong', and although they shout to him he remains oblivious of their presence.

Tiger recognises that Boysie has lost one identity without gaining another, or gaining no more than a mimic pose. The consequences of this loss are made even clearer in the portrayal

of Bunsee, a minor Indian civil servant who regards Indian ceremonies with 'faint amusement' and is quite prepared to convert to Catholicism in order to marry a well-to-do Portuguese girl, except for the fact that his Hindu parents are too wealthy to offend. Bunsee aspires to whiteness, and when he visits Baratavia with the Americans, he makes a fool of himself by toadying to them. But it is also clear that in separating himself from the villagers Bunsee has come to fear them, particularly their mockery.

Tiger and Urmilla face a parallel temptation to turn their backs on Indian culture and aspire to whiteness. When Rita compliments Urmilla that Indians are more peaceable than Blacks, Urmilla is embarrassed because she knows that Indians fight just as much as black people. She reflects: 'It was the same thing all over. Only white people. If they could only be like white people.' (p35-36) Urmilla's dream is to have a wealthy European house with 'Pictures on the wall. Vases with flowers. A piano shining in the corner. A table with Christmas cards'. (p146) Tiger too is torn between resentment of white privileges and the desire to share their lifestyle; he dreams of being 'Mr Tiger' a big lawyer, 'marrying in the church in the city, not in a bamboo tent!', having a house bigger than the Governor and living right in the middle of the white people's houses.

Even when episodes are recognisably part of the linear plot structure, Selvon's methods are frequently poetic rather than dramatic.

Two metaphors in particular, the contrast between fruitful maturity and force-ripeness, and between writing and being written, are used to explore Tiger's situation in-between Indian and Creole sensibilities. Tiger's fate is to be 'force-ripe'; he has to adopt the accepted signs of manhood without truly being a man, and to

accept the sentimental camaraderie of being an Indian without truly feeling it. By contrast, Urmilla has an Indian acceptance of the inescapable; she chides Tiger for his impatience over the arrival of their child:

And Urmilla said: 'You can't force nature, Tiger. Same way with your cabbage and melongene, same way with me.' (p.42)

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and she herself comes easily to a natural maturity, her pregnancy compared to the gradual ripening of a mango:

The rose mangoes grew red, juicy, and the tree was laden. Urmilla too had grown stronger. Her cheeks were rosy, her breasts high and pointed... One day when a high wind was dropping mangoes in the yard she felt a movement in her stomach...(p.42)

When the birth comes it is presaged by the natural dropping of the fruit:

A wind blew and shook the mango tree; a fruit fell with a thud in the yard.(p.46)

However, when Tiger learns that the baby is a girl, the image of the ripe mango is transformed into a contrasting natural image, a hollow dry, sandbox seed : a transformation wrought by the immature expectations in Tiger's mind:

Tiger left them and walked into the night, his head reeling. So many things exploded like a sandbox seed in his mind, shocking him, pitching him about because he did not know. He felt robbed. Maybe there was something he could have done to make sure a boy would be born... (p.47)

Tiger has neither learned the lesson of his own first sexual experience, that there are forces in his life which are outside his conscious control ('...afterwards he was aware that he of his own accord had taken no part in the thing'^(p.19)) nor the lesson Urmilla has been attempting to teach him, that he must accept the laws of natural necessity. The moral is pointed by Joe Martin's response to the mango which falls as he and Tiger are waiting for the birth:

Joe took it up and washed it with a calabash of water from the barrel. He sucked the mango. (p.46)

Tiger cannot yet accept what falls, and it is only after the event that he begins to appreciate his force-ripe condition:

Tiger thought: to my wife, I man when I sleep with she. To bap, I man if I drink rum. But to me, I no man yet. (p.50)

Later, Selvon puts the 'force-ripe' theme explicitly in Tiger's own comment when he explains to Joe Martin his reasons for wanting to learn to read and write: 'They does call me a force-ripe man. You think I like to remain ignorant?' Tiger can neither accept Urmilla's confidence in predetermined paths nor Joe Martin's casual faith in serendipity.

The other organising metaphor, the contrast between writing and being written, also relates to Tiger's gradual awareness of the difference, firstly, between allowing his life to be externally determined and self-determination, and later, between freedom (the scope for action) and necessity (the limits to choice). At the beginning of the novel Tiger's story is very much written for him; he is an uncomprehending figure in a dream:

For him, everything was a whirling, swift event, in which he was told to do this, and do that, and he obeyed. (p.9)

And following the birth of his daughter he feels like a puppet manipulated from above:

And all the incidents since his marriage came like giant hands out of the night to hold him down. (p.50)

The change from passive to active comes when Tiger persuades Sookdeo to teach him to read and write. However, by this stage, Tiger has learned that his own actions have consequences he cannot evade, and that there are limits to his scope for choice. He tells Urmilla,

'You don't start over things in life, 'he said wisely, 'you just have to go on from where you stop. It not as if you born all over again. Is the same life. (p.230)

When he learns to read he rapidly discovers that literacy gives

him no magic power over the world. He realises disappointedly that when he is able to read the papers for himself, they tell him no more about the world than he knew already. What writing gives him, though, is the power to begin to understand the world for himself. When the American road changes the pace of life in Baratavia, Tiger writes an account of it which he sends to the Trinidad Guardian.

All these themes put Tiger at critical points of relationship to cultural, ethnic and philosophical contradictions. He has to find his route between the certainties of the Indian world and the openness of the Creole world while truly part of neither; he has to choose between the parochial contentment of a secure village life and an unsettling curiosity about the world outside; between peasant attachment to the land and earning wages in the city and between the belief that his life is totally determined and the belief that he is free to do anything he pleases. Tiger is very obviously not Selvon, but perhaps some of Selvon's own concerns are dramatised in Tiger's attempt to make sense of the disparate influences on his life. In a talk on the Caribbean Voices programme in 1950 Selvon said:

I think our tradition is that we have no tradition, and I am proud of it. The insistency that each people in the world should build on a separate tradition, particular to their country, may later have its historical value, but imagine how exciting it is for us in the West Indies to see everyone else bound... to their own cultures, which we, having none, can discriminate at leisure and make selection... to lay our foundation. 38

He goes on to express the hope that the Caribbean world become the cradle of an universal human culture and argues that there is no better place for such an idea because, its 'natives have been generated from all peoples of the world.'

Selvon creates Tiger in the space between this hope and the

realities of a world in which ethnic identification still counts for a good deal. Tiger tries to walk between the two major ethnic identities of the area, tries to improvise his own kind of religious faith (a vague sort of pantheism) because he can find no point of contact with either Christianity or Hinduism. Christianity, according to the missionaries, Tiger thinks, promises milk and honey in the sky while Hinduism seems to him both foreign and restricting. 'I never grow up in too much Indian custom', he says 'All different kinds of people in Trinidad, you have to mix with them all.' (p132) Yet although Tiger's experience, for instance the parable of the three doctors, leads him to distrust ethnic loyalties and arrive at a value system of ethical individualism, Selvon shows that Tiger's conclusions are not quite the last word on the subject. The novel also makes it evident that ethical individualism can rapidly become pure self-interest. Tiger thinks that individual feelings are of ultimate importance ('Is just me, inside of me') but also recognises that despite his temptation to leave the island with Boysie, there are loyalties outside himself, to his family, Baratavia and Trinidad. The honesty of the novel was to recognise that in comparison to ethnic loyalties, the idea of Trinidad was still a vague one. Perhaps, Rita Martin's dictum sums up the furthest Selvon was able to go in advocating an appropriate and realistic personal stand:

"People must live good wid dey neighbour...
You could do what you want to do, oui! (p.151)

By the time of writing his next novel, An Island Is a World (1955) Selvon appears to have become more sceptical about the possibilities of the kind of cultural eclecticism Tiger stands for. It deals with a group of Indians who have lost all vestiges of their ancestral culture and are thoroughly creolised. However, in the process all meaning and emotional depth appears to have gone from their lives.

Johny, the head of the family which provides the linkage among the novel's large cast of characters, is a degenerate Hindu or Muslim (it is not quite clear which), a drunkard who has only his occupation as a jeweller and his male chauvinist regrets, about his lack of a son as vestiges of his Indianness. The sensibilities of his disintegrating family are similarly coarsened. Both his daughters live inauthentic lives, existing at one remove from true feeling. The bored Jennifer is described at one point instructing a suitor to feel her breasts and then announcing that it does nothing for her. Rena is always striking poses for an unseen spectator.

The novel's two main characters, Rufus and Foster (who marry Johny's daughters) are Indians who have even less sense of ethnic identity. Foster says:

I'm an individualist. I don't know anything about India. I've never thought of myself as belonging to any particular race of people. I'm a Trinidadian, whatever that means. 39

He does not even, at least before his experiences in England, see himself as coloured. As a sailor during the war he is willing to wade into random fights, but pointedly refuses to become involved in a black-white fight provoked by the racial prejudice of visiting white sailors: 'I don't waste my energy fighting for stupid causes,' (p71) he says. Foster's brother Rufus does not even feel any sense of identity as a Trinidadian. For him the island is merely a constricting backwater, and he leaves at the earliest opportunity for America, abandoning Rena and their child.

An Island Is A World is a very pessimistic novel; it denies that there is any point in belonging to wider groups, and at the same time suggests that the lack of such attachments results in an individualism which is amoral and irresponsible.

For instance, both brothers have affairs with white girls and both pressure their respective girl-friends to have abortions when they become pregnant.

Moreover, when Foster is in London, his conviction about the virtues of cosmopolitanism is shaken by his experience of a society which derives an apparent strength and security from its traditions, however absurd they seem to an outsider. He writes to his friend Andrews:

Hitherto I have always been a little proud that in Trinidad we never felt very strongly about belonging to the island. (Or so it appeared to me.) Mixing with so many other nationalities, we have a sort of carefree philosophy: this is a place to eat and sleep and work and get some fun out of life, and that's all....
... But sometimes a man feels as if he hasn't got a country, and its a lonely feeling, as if you don't really belong nowhere. (p.131)

He compares the lack of tradition in Trinidad to the Englishman's thralldom to tradition in a way which substantially revises Selvon's own earlier optimistic view:

We have nothing, and we thought having nothing could be an asset in a world where those who have don't seem to get any place.
...All that talk of universal understanding is only good when you have a bottle of Vat 19 near you, and you are old-talking with the boys. (p.133)

The only group who appear to have something, who have ethnic certainty, are the old Indians who campaign to be repatriated to India. Yet, as was outlined in Chapter Nine⁴⁰, their movement is portrayed as a hopeless chimerical dream to repair something which has been irremediably broken. Nevertheless their certainty disturbs Foster and makes him look at himself as an Indian for almost the first time in his life. He is filled with a dread that he has lost that identity and gained nothing in return. Even so he is forced into an unwonted awareness of his racial difference from his black friend, Andrews. The latter is irritated by the Indians' departure since it implicitly criticises his commitment to Trinidadian

nationalism. Foster defends the Indians and tells Andrews to mind his own business.

'Oh, leave them alone,' Foster said, 'they're going back home and that's all there is to it. To one of the oldest countries in the world, one with tradition and civilisation.'

The whole experience makes Foster feel that he has 'sought his common ground, looking for a level where man could meet a man on (p.65) equal grounds' and failed to find it.⁴¹

An Island is a World is an uneven, often badly written novel. It attempts far more than A Brighter Sun but seems immature in comparison. It is almost as if Selvon, wounded by the criticism of his first novel's apparent formlessness, and the patronising praise it had received for having local charm, had set out to write a novel that was deliberately complex in form, proving that the young colonial writer could deal with universal issues on a wide geographical canvas. It is no doubt the most personal of Selvon's novels,⁴² though by no means the novel which best reveals his talents. The three part structure of the novel, the elaborate parallels in plot structure linking events in London, New York and Port of Spain are often crudely executed. Coincidence plays an unnecessarily large part, and here, as elsewhere, Selvon shows a weakness for melodrama when he goes in for elaborate linear plotting. Nevertheless, An Island Is A World clearly adds to Selvon's artistic repertoire, for Turn Again Tiger (1958), his next novel but one, successfully combines the paradigmatic organisation of A Brighter Sun with the attempt at syntagmatic plotting of An Island is a World.

Turn Again Tiger (1958) is, contrary to the view of such critics as Frank Birbalsingh, who sees it as 'a virtual duplication' of A Brighter Sun, a genuine extension of that novel. In particular⁴³

it explores Tiger's concern with the relationship between his inherited ethnic identity and his desire to have the freedom of cultural eclecticism, with subtlety and depth. Whereas An Island Is A World expresses the despair of the person who is between cultures in a way which is symptomatic of the condition, Turn Again. Tiger treats the issue in a mature and artistically coherent manner.

Aesthetically, it is perhaps the most successful of all Selvon's novels. Its verbal texture is rich and varied (though there are some over-written passages), its characterisation is deft, and structurally it is very assured, effectively tying together linear and metaphoric sources of meaning. Perhaps its main flaw is the obtrusive presence of explanation and exotic detail, signs that Selvon was conscious of writing for a metropolitan audience.

Turn Again Tiger's basic structural element is the test. At the beginning, Tiger feels that life in Baratavia has ceased to challenge ('It was easy to grow up, to become a man.⁴⁴') and this allows him to drift along without having to make choices. Even the highway, once the symbol of progress, now seems to him, 'nothing more than a symbol of the sameness of his life.'^(p.4) At this stage Tiger does not understand why he should be contemplating leaving Baratavia to work with his father on the experimental cane estate at Five Rivers. All his rational and material arguments are against going. However, as he looks over the cane, Tiger senses that the decision has a more than practical significance:

All his life spread out before him, and he sought the purpose. All his life had led to this - indecision on the hill, looking down into a dark valley. (p.6)

Later Tiger discovers that the year in Five Rivers is concerned with his emotional growth.

The tests that the year in Five Rivers sets Tiger are all concerned with his Indian identity. They concern his feelings about his father, the historical experience of Indians in Trinidad, and the pain of subordination to the white overlord. Living in Barataria, Tiger has bypassed the necessity of working out a mutually respectful relationship with his father, of working out a conscious relationship to his Indian roots and of confronting his ambiguous feelings about white people. In A Brighter Sun, Tiger had really only begun to work out his values in terms of individuality, but not yet in terms of a community with a shared cultural system. When Tiger looks down on the cane at Five Rivers he reflects:

He hated the cane. Cane had been the destiny of his father, and his father's father. Cane had brought them all from the banks of the Ganges as indentured labourers to toil in the burning sun. And even when those days were over, most of them stayed shackled to the estates. (p.5)

It is clear that Tiger has no desire to sink back to that, but the pattern of the novel suggests that Tiger feels, though realistically Selvon does not have Tiger articulating it, that in order to know himself, he must live through that Indian experience.

Throughout A Brighter Sun Tiger has suspected that his manhood is a force-ripe pose and that being accepted as a drinking partner by his father is not the same as maintaining a consistent manhood in his company. Tiger knows that the relationship must change because Babolal is now obliged to him, and has virtually begged him to come to Five Rivers, because as an illiterate he cannot do his own book-keeping. Tiger is determined that this dependence is acknowledged and is provocatively rude to his father:

'You losing respect,' he said.
Tiger pulled free, 'You talking to a man,' he said.
'Only one way to teach you a lesson.'
'Only one way you know, anyhow.' (p.45)

Tiger regrets his remark and even more that he must defeat Bap in a fight. But it is clear that what Tiger is fighting is not just Babolal but all those figures of authority to whom he has been subservient in the past:

Suddenly it was not his father that he had to fight any more. It was something else. It was something adverse to all he believed, which was the shape of a man, a man swinging a piece of buckled leather... (p.47)

Victory has its cost. Tiger walks away from the house weeping. Selvon puts into Tiger's mouth words which are quite evidently a rationalisation:

The old thoughts - the same thoughts - came to him, but he cleared his mind and said to himself: 'I cried because it look wrong to fight with my own father...' (p.48)

What Tiger is weeping for, I think Selvon is suggesting, is the death of the child in himself and a loss of innocence.

The second of Tiger's tests comes unexpectedly when he discovers, contrary to what Bap has told him, that there is a white manager in charge of the estate, and that his father is simply a driver there. Tiger is dismayed by this reduction in his status and threat to his independence. However, when he goes to discover whether the story is true, and he sets foot in the grounds of the manager's house, all his indignant boldness evaporates. His boyhood memories of the white presence revive. He recalls the manager,

...riding his horse like a general through the cane, stopping to give an order here and an order there, flicking his riding whip against his leather leggings.

He recalls the Indian labourers' grumbling subservience:

The white man was making all the money, and they had all the work to do...The white overseers screwed the young Indian girls in the cane, and nobody could do anything about it. They were short-paid last week, but no-one said anything... (p.60)

Then Tiger sees that the presence of the manager gives him the opportunity to overcome such feelings, in a way that his empty

bravado (portrayed in A Brighter Sun) and his avoidance of contact with Whites in Barataria has failed to provide him. However, when Tiger sees a white woman, the manager's wife, bathing naked in the river, his emotions short-circuit back to his childhood training in deference:

His first reaction was to get away before he was seen - not creep silently, but to run wildly, as in panic. There was danger here, his thoughts were jumbled as he tried to reason it out, flashing across to his years to his childhood, keep off the white man's land, don't go near the overseer's house, turn your head away if you see the white man's wife...

As he passes she, now decently immersed in the river, calls out to him and he runs 'in a kind of one-legged madness':

He stepped blindly on a horsewhip snake sunning itself in his path, and it wrapped itself around his foot with the speed of a taut spring suddenly released. (p.63)

The reference to the horsewhip snake deliberately recalls the incident when Tiger had overcome Bābolal by catching the belt his father had threatened him with. The belt had 'wrapped itself around his arm like a horsewhip snake striking.' In the first incident Tiger asserts himself, in this his manhood is crippled ('one-legged'). This test is a much harder one. The incident destroys all Tiger's new confidence, but from shame and panic his feelings change to hatred, and he lops and slashes at the surrounding bush with his cutlass as if it was the woman, 'her whiteness and her nakedness, her golden hair and her proud pointed breast.' Again, Tiger attempts to rationalise his behaviour, telling himself that his flight,

...had nothing to do with colour or the generation of servility which was behind him. He had fled because she was a woman, a naked woman, and he was a man. (p.65)

Later, when the woman turns out to be the manager's wife, Tiger tries to recover his equilibrium by behaving nonchalantly towards the Robinsons at pay day. Afterwards he proudly tells

his workmates, 'You see how cool I was... You see how I was calm and collected in front of the super. Is so to treat them....' (p.78) But Tiger is just posturing and is eager to impress the Robinsons. 'Just keep talking. And talk good English,' he thinks when he is speaking to Mrs Robinson.

Soon after, Tiger accepts, against his rational judgements, the post of gardener and yard boy at the Robinson's house. Logically the job is a regression and when Mrs Robinson instructs him to call her 'madam' his worst fears are confirmed. In reality, Tiger, though he cannot verbalise what he is doing, is attempting to grow to a real maturity by confronting the experiences which threaten it. Tiger's attraction and aggression towards the white woman come together in the violent sexual confrontation he has with her. What is not really explained is Mrs Robinson's sexual desire for Tiger. What is obvious though, in the way that Selvon describes the episode, is that the sexual meeting with the woman has a significance which goes beyond the surface incidents. Doreen Robinson stands for everything Tiger, and the 'in-between' Caribbean person feels about whiteness and what it stands for - what is desired, what is hated:

What had tortured him had taken the form of her and that was what he had under him...
...all he had to do was fight and conquer, turn the force that was pulling him down against itself...he wouldn't run away again, because he would shed this thing from him and it would go away and leave him in peace for ever. (p.177)

Loving and hating become confused in the mixed images of sexual passion and killing, penis and imagined cutlass penetrating into her white flesh: 'And all the time he thought he was killing her...' Afterwards Tiger performs an act of purification, akin to the tears he had shed after beating his father:

Tiger stripped and went into the water, and he dived and stayed below for as long as he could, motionless, until his ears rang. He shot to the surface and tossed his head back, shaking off the water. His head was warm with the sun, but the rest of his body cold in the water. He dived again and scooped mud and sand from the bottom, and when he came to the surface he rubbed himself. He swam to the head of the pool where the river meandered over clean rocks and stones and he lay flat in the running water, shutting his eyes tight.
(p.179)

By this stage in the novel, Selvon shows Tiger to be becoming more conscious of the hitherto largely unconscious pattern of his actions. When he visits his creole friend, Joe Martin, to use him as a sounding-board for his self-examination, he tells him that he had taken the yard-boy job 'just to show myself that I could do those kind of things, that I ain't have no false ideas about myself' and that he had put himself near Doreen Robinson as 'a trial, as a test against me. I figure out if I could want she so bad, and I could overcome the desire, I would prove myself.' (p.195) The sign of Tiger's increasing maturity is his acceptance of his failure and the paradoxical truth that there can be no separating his relief that he has buried his old fears (he tells Joe, 'Over here some of we still feel white people is God, and that is a hard thing to kill' (p.191)) from his shame that he has in some way violated himself and let down Urmilla.

But if Tiger has buried two ogres, he has yet to resolve his attitudes towards his Indianness. This is approached through Tiger's relationship to the culture of sugar and the communal culture of the village. The third test, the cane-cutting, comes at the end of the novel and signals Tiger's return from a long period of preoccupation with himself to a re-involvement with the community. Again, Tiger deliberately neglects his material interests to pursue his emotional needs. Although he could have performed the physically undemanding task of book-keeping at crop-time, Tiger decides that he must shed sweat as a cane-cutter, and through the

physical rhythms of labour exorcise his feelings about the Indian's historical fate in the Caribbean.

By the end of the novel all three blockages in his life have been removed or restored to manageable proportions. Tiger can feel pleased to see his father confidently handling the cutting operation, he can think of the white woman 'calmly and without emotion,' and the cutting of the cane as a task to be completed before the return to Baratavia. The image Selvon uses touches on a kind of ancestral memory of the purifying, faith-proving ritual of the Madras firewalk. Tiger feels, as he considers the year, 'as if he had walked through fire and come out burnt a little, but still very much alive.' He feels restored through the communal act of labour to the sense of community which has evaded him throughout most of the novel, to feel that, of the villagers, 'Well I was involve in everything what happen to them' (p.219)

However, for the bulk of his year in Five Rivers, Tiger has been estranged from his family and the community. The organising theme Selvon uses to explore Tiger's alienation is his orientation in time. This is treated as having both existential and cultural dimensions, although the relationship between the two remains implicit.

In A Brighter Sun, Tiger had reached the point where his own past and the traditions of his ethnic group mean nothing to him. He feels that 'there wasn't much he could look back on, it was the future he had to be concerned about.'⁴⁵ Then in Turn Again Tiger, there comes a moment when, thinking of the future, 'he could see nothing that urged him forward.' (p.135) He responds by immersing himself wholly in the present, telling himself that in Five Rivers, 'here was life being lived'. He feels that his questing evades immediate realities, that 'he

reached for the top of the mountains while his feet were trapped in the canefields'. He burns his books, which, telling of possibility, only make him miserable and gives away his radio, symbol of contact with a wider world. But the result of trying to live only in the present is that Tiger's feelings become increasingly solipsistic; his own anomy invades his view of society, so that he thinks, 'Each man was occupied in a little world of his own, unconcerned with the rest.' But living without a past or a future begins to destroy Tiger's sense of the present. All activity becomes equally irrelevant, whether it is picking quarrels with Urmilla or playing staring games with grains of rice, as Selvon describes in Chapter Six. At the mid-point of his year in Five Rivers, Tiger's protest against the impositions of family pattern, village culture and social system remains immature. It is only in retrospect that Tiger realises the significance of his 'tests'. They have made him reconsider those aspects of the past which have shaped him, helped him re-establish contact with them and restored to his life a unity in time. The cultural significance of this restoration of unity in time rests on the fact that for Tiger Indianness has always represented the past, the Creole cultural system the present ('What is to is must is') while his attraction to the culture of the West (his books, the radio, the desire for an European style of life) the future. The restoration of unity in time signifies, on the cultural plane, Tiger's developing capacity to become creatively eclectic.

As outlined above, the narrative structure of Turn Again Tiger is far more linear than that of A Brighter Sun; even so Selvon creates a supporting cast of characters and subordinate incidents which have important paradigmatic functions. Their function is essentially reinforcement. For instance, when Tiger

arrives in Five Rivers he latches onto a misanthropic old Indian, Soylo, whose solitariness and hatred of sugar cane ('I was running from cane when I came to this valley') parallels Tiger's own. Soylo's overcoming of his bitterness to take part in the harvest is a lesson to the younger man about how the past can blight the present unless its experiences are squarely faced or even relived. Soylo's re-involvement with the community also presages Tiger's own, and his story (the death of his son in a cane fire) restores to Tiger a feeling for others which he has lost in his self-absorption. The advice Tiger gives the old man is in reality for them both:

A man can't live like that, speculating all the time...You can't go on saying if this didn't happen so-and-so wouldn't of happened....(p.203)

Tiger's self-absorption and the inertia it causes are paralleled in More Lazy, the Negro idler who spends his time sleeping and dreaming outside the rumshop. Tiger recognises their kinship and is the only villager who does not want to drive him out from Five Rivers. More Lazy's fantastic daydreams attract Tiger as a contrast to the ambition and material struggle he wearies of. He envies More Lazy's innocence of existence. He has not met anyone less concerned with the past or the future:

You not conscious of how you are. You not bothered about anything, you just naturally that way.(p.139)

Selvon also relates More Lazy's dream of rescuing a white woman from a giant and then making love to her, to Tiger's ambivalent feelings about Doreen Robinson. More Lazy's boast, 'I treat she rough, man. I treat she tough' (p.127) clearly parallels Tiger's mixed feelings: his desire to please, to possess and to hurt. Finally, More Lazy, left alone in the village when everyone else has left for the fields, can bear his solitude no longer

and, like Tiger, joins the labourers at crop time. There is, however, an ironic note when More Lazy, tired after his day's labour says, 'I sure I sleeping sound tonight and I ain't going to have any dreams...' (p.219) Selvon perhaps wishes us to register the implication that activity in the world entails the loss of More Lazy's rich inner life.

Finally, though the novel expresses much admiration for the stoicism of the villagers, Tiger's and Urmilla's experience inevitably leads them away from the limitations of rural Indian values and customs. The couple's return to Barataria is an affirmation of their commitment to a creole life-style - the nuclear family, urban wage-earning and involvement in a multi-ethnic community. Nevertheless, their year in Five Rivers has restored to Tiger a way of seeing life whole. He has lived as an Indian and takes that experience of community and identity back to Barataria, and in restoring his contact with the past, he has brought his orientation in time to a proper balance. Once more the future becomes meaningful. In the final sentence of the novel it is the future that Tiger sees coming towards him: 'Urmilla and Chandra, who were coming up the trail from the village to look for him.' Urmilla is carrying their next child.

Selvon's next novel, I Hear Thunder (1963), perhaps his most pessimistic, returns to the urban milieu of An Island Is A World, with a similar focus on characters who have no particular ethnic identity. Like Turn Again Tiger it is structured around the tests which the main character sets himself, but fails. As I have argued elsewhere, Trinidad is seen as a moral wasteland in which the new middle class recklessly pursues its pleasures.

The main character is an Indian, Adrian, who like Foster in An Island Is A World, is 'completely westernised and only kept up a show of being faithful to the customs and habits which he had shed while growing up in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the island.'⁴⁶ Although he is thoroughly creolised, Adrian is dissatisfied with the frivolous amorality of the life-style he has adopted.:

...to go to work, to parties, to fêtes to play
Carnival, to screw as many girls as possible...(p.10)

These values are set against those of Seeta and Motilal, the parents of Adrian's girlfriend, Polly. Seeta is described as living 'as though she were still on the banks of the Ganges, faithful to every sign and symbol that registered her nationality.' Symbolically, Seeta and Motilal live up a lane which is a dead end, and it seems very clear than Adrian expresses Selvon's view when he thinks:

But there was hope for Birdie, Polly's little brother. When he grew up he would see as Polly did that the future lay in forsaking his parents' memory of a distant country and a way of life that had no place in the West Indies. (p.13)

However, the picture of Seeta which first introduces her to the reader, showing her deftly and absorbedly grinding curry powders, suggests a concentration and stability which is missing from the irresponsible malaise which afflicts the younger generation. Again, when Motilal sees Polly's unintended pregnancy as a consequence of her abandonment of the cultural values of the traditional Hindu family, there is little in the novel which suggests a counter-view. He says,

She too creolised for my liking. If you did bring she up Indian, that never happen.

Seeta's refusal to accept the blame further underlines the connection between cultural practices and moral values:

She don't want to go to we ceremony and thing. When shedid small I try to teach she Hindi, but she wouldn't learn. (p.145)

On the other hand, Selvon portrays Indian culture as unattractively heartless in its racial attitudes. For instance, when Motilal learns that Polly's child has a white father he says, 'She have to throw it away.' (p146) Thus, on the one hand, Selvon's fiction seems to suggest that the Trinidadian and the West Indian must strip himself/herself of all restrictive ethnic and cultural loyalties before any new society can grow, but on the other hand intimates the fear that in stripping people of their old cultural identities, nothing is left but the urge to individual gratification. Without a sense of being part of a larger human collective, individual preoccupations take on an undue significance. That process is portrayed as virtually inevitable.

It is true that Selvon introduces the character of Ramdeen, an old Indian man, who appears to have discovered the secret of contentment. Whereas Adrian torments himself with the gap between his ideals and ambitions and with his lack of stable identity, Ramdeen is a man who can give 'life a kick in the backside just to show who was master' (p.157) and is so totally unconcerned with his identity that:

He did not even have a mirror in the house. If someone had asked Ramdeen to describe himself, he would not know what to say. (p.156)

Yet Ramdeen is at best a holy fool, in reality a man whose innocence is no more than a kind of superannuated childishness. There is no way that a younger, more educated generation can be like him.

Here the 'douglas' despair of being between cultures is seen as being part of a more general despair common to a

generation of Caribbean writers who via education have become alienated from the culture of their origins, who see that culture disintegrating and being replaced by something which is shallower and less worthwhile.

The other expression of the 'douglia sensibility' in this novel, and the two which follow it, is an increasing preoccupation with Indian-European relationships. The treatment of the issue is distinctly ambivalent. On the one hand, Selvon underlines the ugliness of chauvinistic racial attitudes and, on the other, suggest the irresponsibility of boundary crossing. There is Motilal's virulent disgust that his daughter might have a half-white child:

'I don't want no white man mixing the blood at all... one thing you have to make clear is no white shit in this family'. (p.85)

But there is also the point that Randolph's affair with Polly is motivated by no more than his desire to add an Indian scalp to his list of conquests and her irritation with Adrian's attempt to remain celibate. Adrian himself has characteristically mixed racial feelings. In the presence of Joyce, Mark's white wife, he experiences both uneasiness and an overmastering desire which overcomes his determination to abstain from casual sexual relationships. Later, when he has learned of Randolph's affair with Polly, Adrian sets himself the task of accepting Polly back without revealing his sense of hurt and jealousy. One may only guess at the meaning of the episode for Selvon, but it is tempting to see the episode as symbolic, representing an acceptance of the white grandfather who was part of Selvon's own racial inheritance.

The themes of the Indian-White relationship and the connection between dislocated moral values and uncertain ethnic identity are further developed in Selvon's next novel, The Plains of Caroni.

The main male character, Romesh, is portrayed in such a way that his lack of ethnic identity and his moral infirmities are seen as mutually interacting. He is, as he is accused by his brother, 'a white Indian'. He is a graduate working as a chemist for a sugar company, and though conscious of some of the disabilities of being an Indian in Trinidad, he has no feelings about his culture or the past which is represented by his uncle, in reality his father, Balgobin. When Romesh learns this, he has the opportunity to recognise a heritage of which it would be possible to be proud; instead he avoids any involvement 'with this sick man who lived in the past...He could feel no love, no hate, not even remorse.'⁴⁷ He cannot even bring himself to attend his father's cremation. Nor has he any feeling of ethnic loyalty. When acts of sabotage occur in Wilderness, Romesh willingly becomes the company spy, and is offended when his English manager wonders whether he might have mixed loyalties. On the other hand, Romesh has no corresponding sense of attachment to the wider society. At student parties he is very much an outsider, particularly when his peers are engaged in animated arguments about black power. Symptomatically, he drifts into a relationship with a white student, Petra, even though he is aware that his mother is attempting to engineer the relationship, to exploit Petra's whiteness as a social and economic asset. In turn Petra gives Romesh a calculated examination to determine whether he will meet her social requirements. Whereas in earlier novels the conjunction of sex and the Indian-White relationship is charged with tension, in this novel there is nothing at stake. At one point Selvon describes Petra as 'like a breathing holiday advertisement' (p.51); Romesh has found an

appropriately plastic mate. Virtually all that is portrayed as Indian in Romesh is his weakness, particularly his subservience to his mother, which he tries to excuse as a cultural disability or even as a genetic inheritance. He tells Petra,

'I've always been brought up to have an unreasonable respect for my parents.... there are still inherent qualities of character which will take time to disappear. (p.105)

Petra reinforces this equation when she tells him: 'I refuse to believe you're so weak willed and Indianised.'

The link between the decay of Indianness and the decay of moral sensibility is further portrayed in the character of Harrilal, Romesh's supposed father. In the household traditional patriarchy is dead: 'Seeta's superior intelligence had cowed him into submission.' Harrilal, like Johnny in An Island Is A World, takes refuge in alcohol and shows just how far his sense of family loyalty has degenerated when he prepares to give up his brother, Balgobin, to the police and blame Romesh for divulging the information. All that remains of Indianness in Harrilal is a sentimental attachment to custom and a paranoid concern with racial purity.

The only Indian character who is uncorrupted by contact with the wider culture is Balgobin, but he is a relic, as remote from contemporary Trinidad as Don Quixote (between whom ^{and} Balgobin Selvon creates deliberate parallels) is from the unchivalrous Spain he wanders through.

Balgobin has, though, a kind of integrity which is wholly bound up with the plantation world which has shaped his life; his very being is steeped in his occupation:

His whole body oozed odour. Not the smell of sweat and dirt - these were overwhelmed by the sweet smell of molasses, and sugar cane and rum. By smell alone he was part of a sugar plantation. (p.20)

Balgobin understands very well that the company's modernising, welfare policies not only threaten the workers' livelihood, but a whole way of life. He looks back longingly to a simple communal world, with a common, unquestioned way of life, reinforced by struggle:

'You remember when it had only barracks for the people to live in?...And you remember that big strike in nineteen...when we march from San Fernando to Port of Spain.' (p.82)

But it was also a closed world which treated individual feelings harshly, as the hidden fact of Balgobin's and Seeta's brief affair is intended to show, a world in which there was 'no loophole in the wall of circumstance encircling them.' (p.123) Moreover, when Selvon describes Balgobin's attack on the new harvesting machine, pathos is mixed with a clear indication of just how deranged is his attempt to protect a world which is not merely doomed but already dead and never worth fighting for. When Balgobin goes out to attack the machine he both thinks and acts like a madman, imagining that it contains the eighty-eight men it is said it would replace. In focusing on the individual sentimentality of Balgobin's deranged attack, it must be said that Selvon trivialises the real issues of the impact of technological change on the lives and culture of a community, and is too indulgent to the point of view of Tate & Lyle who sponsored his return visit to Trinidad in 1968.⁴⁸

If Selvon makes only a sentimental and denigratory response to the decay of the traditional, he is no less pessimistic

about the fate of those who try to live between cultures. This is undoubtedly an aspect of Selvon's cultural perspective which has changed. In A Brighter Sun, Tiger's attempt to bridge his Indian past and his creole future is portrayed as a positive and creative movement. In The Plains of Caroni, Seeta attempts to live in both the Indian village and the creole city at the cost of a kind of schizophrenia, a moral monstrosity. 'Sita, the chaste wife of Ram, has become the Seeta who has 'accepted having herself fucked for Romesh to attain his ambition - a sure foothold up the Trinladder.' (p.83) She appears to have an admirable ability to move between the two worlds:

...It was possible for some individuals, like Seeta, to have a village face and a city face...which fooled people into believing that they had her typed, when at will she was able to transform herself into somebody else. (p.61)

However, the energy and ambition are simply a cover for an emotional death, strangled by her arranged marriage in the Hindu past and suffocated by the pressures to succeed in the creole present. When her past catches her up all the compromises between the old world and the new are sundered:

...It was as if she stood completely naked inside and out, shorn of every pretension.

She could not live with this new self, too long she had practiced another face and manner and attitude to show the world. (p.130-131)

The theme of confusion of identity becomes an increasingly important element in Selvon's fiction from this point on. In The Plains of Caroni no-one truly knows who he or she is and a kind of insanity pervades all their lives. Here is the darker side of the 'dougla sensibility,' not the optimism of cultural eclecticism, but despair that for the person of mixed ethnic background, or mixed cultural influence, there is only confusion and loss of identity.

In part Selvon responds to actual changes in Trinidadian society, but I believe that the novel also reveals changes in his attitudes. On his visit to Trinidad in 1969 he saw that the nationalist excitement of the early 1950's had become the cynical pursuit of private affluence by the new ruling elite. When he looked at Indian culture and saw the crude secularisation of religious ceremonies it must have confirmed all his previously held feelings about the irrelevance of Indian culture to Trinidadian society and its decay as a source of nourishment for Indian lives. Yet in none of his novels does Selvon 'sound' more Indian, particularly in his sour criticisms of the 'carnival mentality' of Trinidadian society. It is as if after living twenty years in a rapidly changing British society, (in many ways more racist, where the children of the Caribbean immigrants of Selvon's generation had become 'Blacks' and where Selvon's own external appearance would lead him to be mistaken for an immigrant from India or Pakistan⁴⁹). Selvon himself had begun to feel again the problems of identity in a more personal way.

It is perhaps not surprising that Selvon's next Caribbean novel is set at some indeterminate time in the past in a milieu - a cocoa plantation - which is far removed from all the changes which had made Trinidad so distasteful to him. Those Who Eat The Cascadura (1972) is not, however, quite the evasion of reality which a casual reading might take it to be. The basic narrative must hold some fascination for Selvon, since it is a story which he first published as 'Johnson and the Cascadura' (Trinidad Guardian, 17 Oct. 1948); revised slightly for broadcast under the same title in the Caribbean Voices radio programme in 1950⁵⁰; revised quite substantially for publication in Ways of Sunlight (1957); dramatised as a radio play in 1971⁵¹ and had

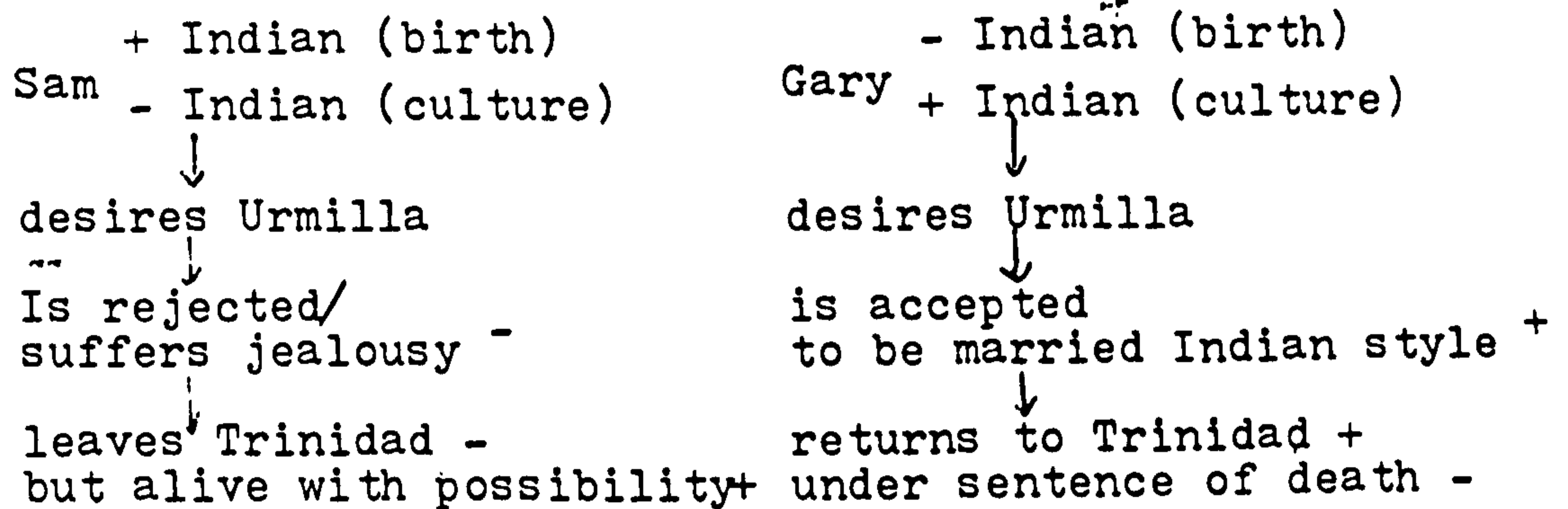
published as a novel in 1972. It is more than a case of a canny professional writer re-using his material; the changes in successive versions indicate the immense significance of some aspects of this fable for Selvon. The two key themes are time and, once again, the state of cultural inbetweenness. However, whereas in A Brighter Sun and Turn Again Tiger the two themes are linked, in the various versions of the story which becomes Those Who Eat the Cascadura, they are not.

The first two versions of the story are concerned with the theme of time, which is still present in the version in Ways of Sunlight, but less in the foreground. In its place is the theme of inbetweenness, set in the context of White-Indian relationships. The neutral 'I' narrator of the first two versions becomes Sam, an Indian overseer on Franklyn's estate, who both through his position and his education is placed in between the village and the estate, between European and Indian. As Franklyn says, 'Listen, Sam you're an Indian yourself, but somehow you're different....' However, when Sam sees the involvement of Franklyn's English guest, Gary Johnson, with Urmilla, an independent-minded Indian girl whom Sam is also attracted to, he has to admit, 'I was so jealous I bit my lip until it bled.' His pride in his lack of race feeling is destroyed:

I had boasted to myself a broad mind and a wide philosophy which embraced the whole world. Now I was thinking in terms of colour, of black and white. 52

In this version it is Urmilla who is aware of the legend of the cascadura and who, with Sam's aid, persuades Johnson to eat the fish. He leaves at the end of his holiday but is, of course, destined to return with a disease which is 'mysteriously shortening his life.' Before his death he and Urmilla plan to

be married 'according to Indian rite.' Sam resolves to speed up his long term plans to leave the island. The play with fate is still there embedded in the legend, but it is not hard to see that the underlying motif is the contrast between Sam's and Gary's respective fates in relationship to their attitudes towards Indian culture:



In the contrasts one sees a young Selvon working out ambivalent feelings towards Indian cultural identification.

The radio play, Those Who Eat The Cascadura (1971), returns to the emphasis on time and loses the theme of inbetweenness, but the novel of the same title, published in 1972, brings both themes into equal prominence. The theme of inbetweenness in the novel is focussed principally on the character of Prekash, who plays a similar role to Sam in the Ways of Sunlight version but is a far less sympathetic character. He is not a person like Sam or Tiger who is in the process of becoming, but an unstable nexus of conflicting feelings about his racial identity. On the one hand, Prekash is anxious to live in the reflected glory of his employer's whiteness, demanding respect from the labourers while displaying an unwelcome servility towards Franklyn. He even mimics the physical signs of Franklyn's authority:

...Prekash had never had a white man as a teacher, but he knew that all the things he was learning taught him to behave as the white man... 53

On the other hand in the company of the villagers Prekash's feelings of hatred towards the whites comes to the surface. Learning of the expected arrival of Johnson he complains:

'White man!' His voice broke into a grunt of scorn and irony with the last two words. White man. He could not make a connection, although the union was suggested. (p.23)

Again, while on the one hand Prekash is quick to display his contempt for the backwardness of the villagers, particularly of the world of folk-lore represented by Manko, he is on the other hand not slow to rush to Sarojini's father, Ramdeen, with crudely chauvinist arguments as to why Ramdeen must force his daughter away from Johnson into marriage with him:

All of we is Indian together...You can't see how bad it reflect on the whole Indian generation for this girl to fling sheself like that at a white man? (p.97)

Indeed, so great is Prekash's jealousy that he tries unsuccessfully to rape Sarojini during the hurricane that destroys the estate. The shift in characterisation from Sam to Prekash is a significant one, indicating that Selvon has now come to almost completely opposite conclusions about the possibilities of being between cultures. In much the same way Selvon's treatment of the theme of time has sharply altered from that of his two earlier 'Tiger' novels. In Turn Again Tiger he had explored the possibility of achieving an equal orientation to past, present and future as the basis for both personal wholeness and the reconciliation of the cultural elements each phase of time stands for. In Those Who Eat The Cascadura the emphasis has become more deterministic, following Manko's sermon that 'After the dance and the song, it was time for retribution'.(p.159)

What had earlier been a message of hope has become a simpler, sterner and more pessimistic view of the scope of human action.

Where ambivalence remains is in the treatment of the Indian-White relationship; the novel contains two sharply contrasting visions of its nature. There is the long standing and degrading relationship that Franklyn has with Kamalla, Sarojini's rival, in which he nightly goes through an act of ritualised rape, 'slinking like an animal in the dark' to her hut, using her like the plantation owner of slavery or indenture days as an object of gratification. Kamalla is not permitted to respond freely in any way and is described as performing 'like an animal trained to the crack of a whip.' (p122)

There is also the unrealistic, doomed but momentarily genuine relationship of Sarojini and Johnson. It is perhaps to stress how active a part Sarojini has (in contrast to Kamalla's undignified passivity) that Selvon should write so graphically how Sarojini ferociously attacks Johnson 'like a Tiger in a net', biting and scratching him almost as if she desires to kill him. There is also a fairly obvious parallel between this passage and Tiger's attack/lovemaking with Doreen Robinson in Turn Again Tiger, and again, the act is similarly ambiguous in its significance. It is also interesting to speculate whether Selvon intended that there should be seen to be a connection between Sarojini's restlessness, her rejection of Indian ways and the possibility that she is part European. It is hinted that Franklyn may be her father. It is tempting, but probably impertinent to read into these contrasting treatments of the White-Indian relationship an ambivalence in Selvon's attitudes to his own mixed Indian-White ancestry.

At one point in Those Who Eat The Cascadura Manko tells Sarojini, who is protesting her Indian difference from being Black:

'All that don't make no difference. Black and white will mix until black is white.' The last three words, he spoke in the Trinidad acceptance of them, meaning everything would equate. (p.23)

That prophecy is, no doubt, Selvon's hope. Black, White or Indian: it will make no difference. In the meantime, the whole meaning of Those Who Eat The Cascadura suggests that that equation is still far from balanced. It is the interaction of this honest but pessimistic recognition with the continuing hope that Manko's prediction must one day be realised that make Selvon's novels a rich contribution to the exploration of a very central Caribbean experience. This is not simply the experience of those born of mixed ethnic backgrounds, but the more general experience of all those in the region who are open to the diverse cultural currents flowing within it.

Chapter FourteenThe Naipauls and the Blacks

At the 1976 Symposium on East Indians in the Caribbean, an Indian chauvinist group, Mukdar, circulated a paper called 'V.S. Naipaul and the Blacks' as an attempt to co-opt Naipaul in support of their own jaundiced view of Afro-Caribbean culture. An English critic described the paper as 'merely a Grub-Street pamphlet, trying to incite a racist response to literature' and questioned the wisdom of giving it further attention in her article.² It is true that the Mukdar paper fails to display much 'sensitivity to language', but the implication that Naipaul's novels exist primarily for stylistic appreciation is surely as questionable. At the A.C.L.A.L.S. Conference in Jamaica in 1971, a participant reportedly offered to shoot V.S. Naipaul so incensed was he by the writer's views.³

It would be wrong to sweep these responses under the carpet. What has been seen in Naipaul's work is part of its reality, and it is the critic's job to try to account for such discrepant readings both by examining the context in which Naipaul's work was produced and read and by considering how the texts themselves could have provoked such responses.

As Chapter Ten indicates, V.S. and Shiva Naipaul are not the only Indian authors to have written about the Afro-Caribbean world, but this chapter concentrates on their work because it presents a consistently critical view. Chapter Fifteen, by contrast, is devoted to the rather smaller quantity of Indo-Caribbean writing which has probed Indian racial attitudes, explored the extent to which Indians and Blacks share parallel historical experiences and a common future, and urged the need for racial understanding.

The chapter as a whole is written within an historical framework. But because V.S. Naipaul's work has displayed an inner logic of its

own, only tangentially related to actual events in the Caribbean, the material is explored through four major themes: the metamorphosis of the Negro into the Caribbean Black; the slave past; the image of Africa and Africa in the Caribbean; and the Indian response to Black Power. However, though both Naipauls have spent most of their adult lives away from the Caribbean, the chapter shows, I think, that their perspectives are far more Indo-Trinidadian than many of their metropolitan admirers would care to admit.

Although the chapter concentrates on the post 1940s period of increased Indo-African contact, there is a brief examination of the extent to which Indian attitudes may have historical and cultural roots which pre-date that period.

V.S. Naipaul has argued that antipathies between Indians and Afro-Caribbeans are the product of their mimicry of European values:

Like monkeys pleading for evolution, each claiming to be whiter than the other, Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged white audience to see how much they despise one another.⁴

There is some truth in the argument. One view that Indians took from European apologists for indenture was the stereotype of themselves as the industrious saviours of the colony and of the Blacks as idlers who had abandoned it. Bronkhurst reports (or invents) the comment of an old Indian labourer to a black Creole:

Yes, you rascal neegah man: me come from India dis forty-sikus year; 'sposin' me and me matty no come dis side fo' work, you rascal neegah been a starve one time.⁵

In the 1970s the young Indian militants in Trinidad were claiming that Indians fed Trinidad, grew the export crops, ran the transport system, did most of the building, 'Nearly everything for the country but blow its nose and change its diapers...'.⁶

However, Naipaul's diagnosis evades the extent to which Indian antipathies towards Afro-Caribbeans have their roots in Indian

culture itself, or have been provoked by their actual social relations. Several nineteenth-century observers noted, for instance, that Indians put the Blacks in their own caste system. Bronkhurst noted:

The black caste - kali or karoon jat - the negroes, are, in the estimation of the Indian coolies, people of the lowest or most degraded caste, not fit to be associated with.⁷

The Calcutta based Protector of Emigrants reported that returning Indians had spoken of the Negroes,

...with the greatest disgust, saying that they are a coarse and woolly headed race, more like monkeys than other human beings, and that they never associated with them in any way.⁸

With the exception of the first period of indenture in Guyana (1838-1843) when the Indians were mainly tribal people outside the caste system, there are scarcely any records of intermarriage between Indians and Negroes despite the acute imbalance of the sexes amongst the Indians. What C.F. Andrews reported of Guyana in 1929 remained true for at least another twenty years. The Indian:

holds himself completely aloof, clinging to his own caste ideas...able to live side by side with the Negroes...while for all practical purposes almost ignoring their presence.⁹

However, Andrews recognised that the 'habit of friendly tolerance' rested on a 'fragile and slender economic basis' and feared the possibility of 'a racial clash between East Indians and Africans of a very painful nature.' Even when there has been extensive cultural loss and some racial mixing, as in the Indian community in Jamaica, there appears to remain a sense of racial superiority to their Afro-Jamaican neighbours, though they share a virtually identical style of life.¹⁰ Even today racial endogamy remains the norm for most Indians in Trinidad and Guyana, and attitude measures carried out by J.B. Landis¹¹ (1973), Iris Sukdeo¹² (1969) and Selwyn Ryan¹³ (1979) all confirm that a majority are firmly opposed to intermarriage with Blacks.

One finds physical descriptions of Blacks in the work of Indian writers which seem to express this kind of racial feeling. In V.S.

Naipaul's work there is a distinct 'Indianness' of visual perception. In The Middle Passage there are the 'immigrant-type West Indians' whose gaucheries of appearance catch his eye: the fat black ladies whose 'powder on their faces had dissolved in patches' or the features of a mentally ill man whose 'thick lips had bunched into a circular swollen protuberance.'¹⁴ In The Mimic Men, physical revulsion contributes to Singh's incapacity to become fully involved with Browne's Negro political movement. Singh recalls a visit to Browne's house and:

...the cartoon unreality I had found in the relationship between Browne's sister and her boyfriend, ugliness coming to ugliness in mock humanity...¹⁵

Naipaul's first African novella, In A Free State, goes even further in its accumulation of details of repugnance from African physical appearance. There are constant references to the impenetrability and apparent idiocy of African faces: 'featureless', 'blank faced' and 'faceless' are typical; there are similar concentrations on African derangement of dress, on dirt and smell. In Guerrillas there are the 'moronic-looking' black boys, like Bryant, 'deliberately ugly with his pigtails like serpents'; there is the cultist on the beach with his 'broad forehead, his heavy, ill-formed lips and his sagging jaw...'¹⁶ Such details are no doubt trivial elements in the novels they come from, but they are a part of a much wider set of Indian reservations about involvement with the Black Creoles and their world.

However, if there are persistent underlying ways of seeing, there are also marked changes in the image of the Caribbean Black in the Naipauls' writings. For instance, in an ill-informed article on the rise of the Rastafarian movement, Shiva Naipaul announces that:

A new Jamaican, a new Caribbean man, had been born. He was not at all familiar to me. Gone was the genial, straw-hatted calypso type...In his place had come the ganga-fed troubadours who sang about shooting sheriffs in self-defence.

...The Caribbean black had undergone a sea change. He was beginning to acquire a style and mystique peculiarly his own. 17

There have, indeed, been actual changes in the political and cultural orientation of Blacks in the Caribbean, but it is only possible to understand the change in Shiva Naipaul's stereotypes in terms of the relationships between Indians and Blacks.

The crucial factor was the rise to power of the People's National Movement (P.N.M.) led by Dr. Eric Williams. From the start the P.N.M. had two faces: that of a party of intellectual strength, integrity and modernising nationalism, and that of a Negro-party with Dr. Williams as the redeemer come to release his people. Despite Williams's attempts to give the P.N.M. a multi-racial image by including some Christian Indians and Muslims in the leadership, most Indians saw the P.N.M. as the People's Negro Movement and were much more sensitive to its racial messianism than its reformist nationalism. At the time of the 1956 elections there were probably no more than three hundred Indian members of the P.N.M. The vast majority of Hindus and rural Indians supported People's Democratic Party led by Bhadase Maraj. Hindus in particular were antagonised by Williams's opposition to the recognition of Hindi as a language of instruction in the Maha Sabha schools and his pledge to bring the denominational schools under state control.

The 1956 elections were hard fought because constitutional changes gave the victors virtual internal self-government. The P.D.P. leaders discovered that confined to Hindu support they would remain a small opposition group; against the P.N.M.'s 13 seats they had won only 5. After the elections the P.D.P. tried to broaden their political base by bringing in white politicians and individuals from other discarded political groups. In the

process they moved to the right and bought their share of the contempt Williams felt for formerly influential white politicians. From the time of the 1958 Federal elections when the P.D.P. had become the Democratic Labour Party (D.L.P.) Trinidadian politics entered a sterile pattern of intolerant government and irresponsible opposition. The Indians felt excluded and threatened, a feeling accentuated by Williams's response to the results of the Federal elections of 1958 which, as the result of better organisation and some P.N.M. complacency, the D.L.P. won by six seats to four. Williams attacked the Indians as a 'recalcitrant and hostile minority alarming many and permitting Indian chauvinists to play on these fears. In this context, Indian opposition to the pace of constitutional change can readily be understood. Many were fearful that full self-government and independence would leave them subject to aggressive Black domination.

The elections of 1961 were marked by inter-ethnic bitterness not seen before or since in Trinidad. Fears had been provoked by the P.N.M.'s reforms of the electoral system, many intrinsically reasonable, but introduced with crass insensitivity. The introduction of voting machines in particular convinced many Indians that the elections would be rigged. Once again, both parties fielded multi-ethnic slates, but campaigned on a racial basis. Black trade unions demonstrated against the D.L.P., with Government support, for proposing the kind of anti-strike legislation the P.N.M. was soon to introduce itself. There was little ideological difference between the parties; what divided them were mainly ethnic interests. For instance, the P.N.M. stressed industrial development as its goal; the D.L.P. urged the cause of agriculture. However, it was the conduct of the campaign which most angered Indians. P.N.M. supporters harrassed the D.L.P.'s meetings so violently that the D.L.P. was unable to campaign outside the Indian

areas, Indians were also alarmed by the apparent racial messianism of some of Dr. Williams's campaigning and the emphasis he put on Black-White issues. The new D.L.P. leader, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, became so frustrated by the violence that on several occasions his public speeches became hysterical and inflammatory. He called on his followers to smash the voting machines and just before the elections told Indians to 'Arm yourselves with weapons in order to take over this country.'²

After the 1961 elections (which the P.N.M. won by 20 seats to 10), the Indian opposition were further alarmed when following the collapse of Federation the P.N.M. offered neighbouring Eastern Caribbean islands the opportunity to join Trinidad in a unitary state. The Indian opposition saw this as a ruse to hold onto a Black electoral majority.²²

The views of one section of the Hindu elite in this crisis can be gauged from a series of pamphlets by a leading member of the D.L.P. and the Indian Association, H.P.Singh. In Hour of Decision (1962) he attacked discrimination against Indians in housing, civil service appointments and the awarding of scholarships, the hooliganism Indians had suffered during the election and the racial partiality of the mainly Black police force. He called for the formation of an Indian party and for either proportional representation and power-sharing or the partition of Trinidad into Negro and Indian states. Another Congo? warned that:

...the people of this country are sitting on a depraved and vicious volcano which may erupt at any time, bringing in its wake, destruction and dishonour, rape and infamy.²³

As Indian attempts to influence the Independence constitution were rebuffed and news of the racial violence in Guyana reached Trinidad, Singh's tone became increasingly strident. In his paper The Observer he linked attacks on Indians by Africans in Durban and East Africa with the events in Guyana, publishing lurid descriptions of the

sexual barbarities perpetrated by Blacks on Indians at Wismar:

Wismar will remain as a lasting monument to the Eternal Disgrace of the West-Indian Negro...

But what showed was that those people, even though culture has been taught to them through all these years, belong to the jungle...¹⁴

There are some interesting parallels between Singh's views in his pamphlet The Indian Enigma (1965) and some of the issues explored in V.S. Naipaul's work, particularly The Mimic Men. This is not surprising; Naipaul comes from the same conservative and caste-conscious background as the leadership of the D.L.P.²⁵ Indeed, two of its then leading members, Simboonath and Rudranath Capildeo (models for the little gods) are Naipaul's cousins. In the pamphlet, Singh argues, for instance, that Blacks and Europeans have diverted their quarrel over slavery onto the Indians and that the Caribbean Negro appears to have the urge to disappear racially:

Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. James, that if the Negro continues with this propensity to miscegenation, within a short period the race would become extinct.²⁶

Now whilst by no means all the D.L.P. leadership would have agreed in public with Singh's views, and certainly few supported his call for parity or partition, Yogendra Malik's study of the D.L.P. in East Indians in Trinidad suggests that in private many agreed with him.

Although the political crisis was eventually defused when D.L.P. leaders accepted that there was little that they could do to halt Trinidad's progress to independence under the P.N.M., there is little evidence that Indians felt any less discontented.²⁷ They had become more conscious of their grievances, and were no longer prepared to accept a new discrimination. They resented the Black assumption that Trinidadian culture meant Afro-creole culture; they were unwilling to become involved in the Blacks' apparent preoccupation and conflict with whiteness; they were above all dismayed by black assertiveness, linked as it often was with hostility towards Indians.

Many of these concerns can be found in the work of V.S. Naipaul, Shiva Naipaul and Dennis Mahabir. Linking them appears to be the belief that black politics was essentially the mass expression of individual psychological needs; political disorder and psychic disorder are seen as virtually indistinguishable. In the work of V.S. Naipaul, for instance, there is a shift from portraying certain eccentricities in his black characters as flourishing outgrowths of a laissez-faire society, to seeing such eccentricities as deformations of the Negro psyche. There is an immense distance between the portrayal of characters such as Titus Hoyte I.A. or Man-Man in Miguel Street, (1959), and the portrayal of Browne and Eden in The Mimic Men, (1967) yet only eight years separates the publication of the two novels. The difference was not merely the result of observing actual changes in Black political consciousness, it reflected a growth of Indian alarm and Indian resentment.

In general in Miguel Street (1959) V.S. Naipaul mixes naturalistic and folkloristic elements in his portrayal of the characters, (several, such as Man-Man and B. Wordsworth, being based on actual Trinidadian eccentrics) but it is also possible to see in some of them embryonic sketches of his developed concept of the black psyche. For instance, in 'Titus Hoyte I.A.', Naipaul echoes Trollope's stereotype of the Negro as a person 'who burns to be regarded as a scholar, puzzles himself with fine words...'. Titus Hoyte instructs the narrator, then eight years old, to write to the newspaper telling how, lost in his 'peregrination in this metropolis' he was rescued by a Mr. Titus Hoyte.²⁴ 'Man-Man',³⁰ the story of Miguel Street's harmless lunatic who turns preacher and arranges his own crucifixion, presents a character who clearly looks forward to Preacher in The Suffrage of Elvira and even perhaps Jimmy Ahmed in Guerrillas. In Preacher the embryonic stereotype of the black millenarian fantasist is developed a stage further. He shows his lack of

contact with reality by refusing to give bribes, and as his campaign becomes increasingly hopeless, his behaviour becomes disturbed and bizarre. He has a 'bloodshot faraway look' in his eyes and at one point confronts an Indian supporter of Harbans and, holding a bible in one hand and a stone in the other, invites the Indian to stone him unless he swears on the bible that he will vote for him.³¹

In A House for Mr Biswas (1961) the negro characters are mostly drawn from an earlier mythology, such as Theophile, the spectacularly clumsy carpenter or Edgar, the labourer who helps build Mr Biswas's first house, 'a muscular, full-blooded negro' who has to be restrained from digging holes, 'other wise, he dig right through till he came out the other side'³². However, there is one incident in the novel which indicates that Naipaul's treatment of black characters was shifting from a folkloristic approach to one which sought historical antecedents. The incident occurs when Shama, serving in the shop at Hanuman House, inadvertently insults a 'fat negro woman' by giving her a pair of black cotton stockings instead of the 'flesh-coloured stockings which were then enjoying a vogue in rural Trinidad'³³. The woman is incensed, imagining a racial slight. Naipaul had been reading Trollope's The West Indies and The Spanish Main (1859); in an essay 'The Little More'³⁴ (1961) he mentions his delight in Trollope's 'unapologetic display of outrageous prejudices' and in The Middle Passage (1961) he quotes from it frequently and imitates Trollope's tone of voice. At any rate there are resemblances between the scene in the novel and an episode in Trollope's chapter, 'Black Men', which recounts with condescending amusement the absurd mimicry of white manners by a barefoot negro labourer who demands a piece of carpet to keep his feet from the floor in a shoe shop.³⁵

However, the change in Naipaul's approach to the black

personality is most marked in The Middle Passage; in it he reports his discovery of the Negro's belated urge to assert himself. Beyond the very sharp analyses of neo-colonialism in the Caribbean lies a series of singularly unflattering stereotypes of the West-Indian Negro which frequently look backwards to the writings of the negrophobic Victorians. Naipaul sees childishness in the Black Trinidadian's taste for children's programmes and Westerns and the noisy audience participation at the cinema. He sees self-contempt in Black acceptance of white values ('The West Indian accepted his blackness as his guilt...He never seriously doubted the prejudices of the culture to which he aspired.') and notes: 'Until the other day African tribesmen on the screen excited derisive West Indian laughter'.³⁶ In the gap between actuality and desire Naipaul sees the growth of pathological fantasies, exemplified by the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica which has withdrawn into a 'private world of farcical fantasy'.³⁷ Behind the deformations of Negro culture Naipaul sees the malign effects of slavery:

There is slavery in the food...Slavery in the absence of family life, in the laughter in the cinema at films of German concentration camps, in the fondness for terms of racial abuse, in the physical brutality of strong to weak...³⁸

Naipaul's response to the 'new' rise of black self-assertion (he seems unaware of the black radicalism of the 1930s), like that of a good many Indo-Trinidadians, is ambivalent. There is tension between pity for what is seen as the black's lack of a positive self-image and a fear of the consequences of that 'overdue assertion of dignity.' There is the heroic image of 'the Negro's rejection of the guilt he has borne so long; the last delayed Spartacan revolt... the closing of accounts this side of the middle passage', and there is the fear of disorder, of a descent into Haitian darkness. Witnessing a protest demonstration against the killing of Lumumba, Naipaul quotes approvingly the white

Jamaican writer, John Hearne, on the 'sentimental camaraderie of skin which provides the cheap thrill of being 'African', and observes himself that it 'represented all that was barren in Negro racialism'.³⁸

V.S. Naipaul's first fictional response to this perception of change in the black persona comes in 'A Flag on the Island', a broad satire on the instability of black identity, the malign effects of the black writer's involvement with the white world and the white liberal's desire to be the object of black hatred. The story is about the apparent metamorphoses of several black characters, such as the talentless writer of stories about English high society,³⁹ Mr. H.J. Blackwhite, who becomes the equally talentless H.J.B. White, militant hater of whites and author of novels about interracial sex. The former Mr. Blackwhite had split his cultural loyalties, hanging up a portrait of Sellassie to remind him that 'he too had a place to go back to', but as a teacher instructing his class to sing, 'Flow gently, sweet Afton.'⁴⁰ The new H.J.B. White organises pseudo-folkish floorshows for the tourists which enact the brutalities of slavery, milks various American and British cultural foundations who want to pay him to tell them how oppressed the black man is, and promotes an absurd three man painting team who are trying to recover 'the tribal consciousness'.⁴¹ White proposes, as a revolutionary concept, to write a novel about a black man falling in love with a black woman. His problem is that he doesn't know how to treat the story. This is very much an Indo-Trinidadian's eye view, the view of one who takes his ethnic identity very much for granted. His old friend, Frank, tells him:

Once you were all white, and that wasn't true. Now you are trying to be all black and that isn't true either. You are really a shade of grey, Blackwhite.⁴²

Another interesting anticipation of an important theme in Naipaul's later fiction is the portrayal of Gary Priestland, now a cool television personality, but, formerly a street-corner preacher. At the end of the story a hurricane sweeps the island and in the panic Priestland becomes Priest once more, full of 'religious exaltation' at the thought that the island will be smashed up and they can start all over again. After the hurricane subsides Priest resumes his alter ego. One sees, in addition to Naipaul's fascination with the figure of the redemptionist black preacher, a foretaste of the theme of black nihilism, the desire to return to the beginning again, which is an element in Guerrillas (1975) and central to A Bend in the River (1979).

However, it is in The Mimic Men that V.S. Naipaul first elaborates his vision of Negro psychic distress. The novel is discussed in Chapter Seventeen as the portrayal of the construction of an ethnically oriented point of view in a plural society, and it must be recognised that since Naipaul frequently stresses the fallibility of his narrator's perceptions, Naipaul's own point of view in the novel must be seen as problematic. Nevertheless, Singh's account of his schoolfriend and political partner, Browne, frequently echoes opinions about the nature of the Negro psyche which Naipaul elsewhere presents in his own voice.

Again, the novel portrays an apparent transformation; but it is only apparent because the same dynamic is seen to underlie both phases. The first phase Singh glimpses in Browne's household, that 'prison of the spirit' in which a desire for racial pride struggles with self-contempt. Browne's father, an 'old-time' Negro, has passed on to his son the tradition of being called by a slave name, and has encouraged him to dress up as a clown and sing coon songs ('I'm a happy little nigger'⁴³). He has pictures of black heroes on his walls, but also a photograph of his family taken 'before a painted backdrop of a ruined Greek temple'^(p. 49) recalling the phrase in

The Middle Passage about the Black pretence that they were heirs of the 'Christian-Hellenic tradition'. In his adolescence Browne is tormented by this childhood. Singh overhears him calling his father a 'black jackass' and learns that whereas his own secret reading is of a proud Aryan past, Browne torments himself by reading endless accounts of slavery, accumulating facts out of which he can create no pattern.⁴⁴ In Eden, their fellow class-mate, Singh sees the purest example of black self-contempt. Eden's deepest wish is 'for the Negro race to be abolished' but he also nurtures the 'intermediate dream' in which in a remote land, 'he, the solitary Negro among an alien pretty people, ruled as a sort of sexual king.'^(p. 151) Eden anticipates the character of Jimmy Ahmed in Guerrillas who repeatedly dreams of offering tender comfort to a white girl who has been raped.

As a young man Browne is apparently transformed into a racial militant, who asserts black pride; Singh sees in him only the same racial wound, expressed, for instance in Browne's novel about slavery whose plot reveals a determination to wallow in humiliation:

...the slave leads a revolt which is betrayed and brutally crushed; he escapes to the forest, reflects, arrives at self-disgust, and returns willingly to slavery and death.^(p. 156)

Browne is also the author of a 'venomous little pamphlet' rebutting racist views about the Negro skull, but privately confides to Singh that he could not support the admission of Negroes to the banks: 'If I thought black people were handling my few cents I wouldn't sleep too well.'^(p. 156) It is this self-doubt which drives Browne to seek 'alien witness' in the company of those, like Singh, who are not of his race:

He wanted me to share distress. But irritatingly stopped at distress...distress was part of his reality, was nothing more, and could lead to nothing...How could anyone, wishing only to abolish himself, go beyond a statement of distress?^(p. 151)

The observation is Singh's and refers to a particular character in a novel. It is not necessarily Naipaul's, though one may note that it is consistent with the treatment of Jimmy Ahmed in Guerrillas.

When Browne becomes a political leader his movement, motivated only by 'the negative frenzy of deep violation', has all the characteristics, en masse, of the same psychopathology. The wilder wings of the party are gripped by mixed hatred and desire for whiteness. They promise their followers both that they will bring about intermarriage with the whites and that they will 'kick the whites into the sea...' In Singh's view they are gripped by 'the frenzy of the street-corner preacher who thrills his hearers with a vision of the unattainable rich world going up in a ball of fire.'^(p 199) He comes to feel that Browne's and his followers' sense of violation admits no cure, and can lead only to a nihilistic vision of 'the world going up in a flame; it was the only expiation.' It is the theme first presented in 'A Flag on the Island' and repeated in Guerrillas and A Bend in The River.

Of course, as I have argued in Chapter Seventeen, The Mimic Men is about far more than this; Naipaul portrays Singh, for instance as equally uncertain of his own identity and incapable of seeing other than through his own ethnic biases. Nevertheless, the extent to which The Mimic Men expresses an historically specific concept of 'Negro character' can be seen in the way its concerns are echoed in two roughly contemporary though inferior works of psycho-political fiction, Shiva Naipaul's long short story, 'The Political Education of Clarissa Forbes,' (1970), and Dennis Mahabir's novel, The Cutlass Is Not For Killing (1971).

The former is a satirical portrayal of the transformation of Clarissa Forbes from reluctant Negro into militant black. Though its tone is light-hearted, without the apocalyptic fears expressed in The Mimic Men, the idea of 'negro personality' it uses is

essentially the same. The story looks mockingly at the confusions suffered by the Forbes family as their inbuilt sense of worthlessness meets the new call for black pride made by the leaders of the first black government in Trinidad.

In particular, Clarissa Forbes suffers from all the torments of racial self-contempt. She despises her fellow blacks, 'these foolish people', and yearns for whiteness, extolling the values and fashions learned from the cheap English magazines she reads. However, as Naipaul snobbishly informs us, it is the culture of grey-hound racing, bingo halls and Torremolinos that she imitates for want of knowing better. In time Mr. Forbes perceives the irony of being asked by his daughter to imitate the very people whom the P.M. has taught him were responsible for his past sufferings, yet he also feels that to imitate would be presumptuous: 'We know we place,'⁴⁶ he tells her.

Clarissa's political education begins when she is sent out to work. The indignities she suffers from a light-skinned creole family are one thing; having to work as a maid for a wealthy Indian family mortifies her, especially when Mrs Gokhool parades her own mimic Indo-Saxon snobbery. Clarissa begins to see the merits of her father's point of view, and though still yearning for the good things of white life, nurtures millenarian dreams of racial redemption:

She had divided the world into two quite separate spheres: a present full of injustice, a future laden with promise... when...wounds would be healed. (p.103)

Her political education is completed when her long-suffering father has had enough and packs her off to England. He tells her:

Is your damn colonialist mentality that taking advantage of you. Yes, that's what it is. Your colonialist mentality! It was a phrase the Prime Minister had employed recently against a renegade Minister who had embezzled large sums of money and fled to Switzerland....
Tell me first what all this Riviera business got to do with a little nigger girl like you, eh? (p.115)

After a period of misery in London, Clarissa returns home, joins the Party and becomes as violent a hater of white culture as she has been a lover of it before. She carefully rewrites her past; her pathetic tribulations in London become her 'international experience.' There are some palpable hits, and perhaps some understanding of the general colonial predicament, but the story as a whole is unpleasantly smug. It expresses supercilious amusement both at black racial uncertainty and at efforts by blacks to create a new racial pride.

Dennis Mahabir's, unevenly written novel, The Cutlass Is Not For Killing, relates even more explicitly to the racial alarms of the 1960s in Trinidad, specifically reflecting the changing political consciousness of the Christian Indian elite. In the first part of the novel, which stolidly documents the rise of the Karmarkar clan, (whose history parallels the Mahabirs' own) the tone is detached and analytical, even-handedly exposing both Indian chauvinism and 'the vampire of anti-Indianism.' However, by the middle of the novel, which deals with the involvement of two of the Karmarkar brothers, Errol and Hartley, with the Negro nationalist party of St. Clair McVorrán, the novel loses its detachment and becomes decidedly Indo-centric. There are familiar complaints about the licentiousness of carnival, and the black male's obsession with white women and of getting on 'even terms with the whiteman whose whips once lashed his grandfather the slave.'⁴⁷ In the last part of the novel Mahabir suddenly eschews documentary realism and writes in a vein of melodramatic fantasy, projecting Indian fears of the consequences of black assertion. This section focusses on the figure of McVorrán, a racial chauvinist with a 'debilitating' preoccupation with the wrongs of the slave past, but with a white wife of his own and a taste for the white wives of other party leaders, including Hartley's. This is a taste shared by other

party leaders which gives political life an 'ugly pathological flavour as if Trinidadian society were being assailed by diseased and vicious children.' ^(p122) After winning the elections McVorrán's party start to seize the spoils which they feel are owed to them because of past racial sufferings, and the party leaders start aping the life-styles of the hated whites

As political pressures mount McVorrán takes to visiting an obeah woman who warns him that a sacrifice is necessary to ensure his safety. Shortly after, the dismembered body of Hartley's wife is found. Hartley is framed for the murder because he has at last begun to speak out against the corruption, and he is found guilty on the basis of the stereotype that Indians chop their unfaithful wives with their cutlasses. The novel ends with Hartley going to the scaffold as the idealistic scapegoat for his trust in McVorrán.

As I have argued in Chapter Ten, the novel presents pseudo-psychological speculations about the psychopathology of a Negro personality type. McVorrán's moral infirmities are carefully related to supposed aspects of Negro cultural life. Psychopaths lack home training, we are told, and Negro fathers are never at home: 'this accounted for so much disorder in the home life of Trinidadian Negroes.' McVorrán cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy, and this too is related to Negro home life. His social development has been arrested and as a result McVorrán continues the amoral ways of childhood into adulthood. As a result, 'McVorrán, like so many of his people, got his wires crossed and was prompted to anti-social activity.' (p119)

The racism of the latter part of The Cutlass Is Not For Killing is as an abrupt a change from the anti-racialism of the first part of the book, as the abrupt transition of fictional modes. It is as if the different phases of the novel had been written under the direct influence of the mood of their specific historical moments.

Thus the bitterness of the novel's end reflects the betrayal people like Mahabir felt in their involvement with the P.N.M. and in particular their trust in Eric Williams himself. Dennis Mahabir had been a supporter of the P.N.M. from its beginnings and was the first P.N.M. Mayor of Port of Spain.⁴⁶ His brother, Winston Mahabir, was the Minister of Health in the first P.N.M. Government. In his autobiography, In and Out of Politics he describes just how bitterly Indian supporters of the P.N.M. had felt let down by Williams's racialist attack on the Indian community in response to the P.N.M.'s 1958 defeat by the D.L.P. Those 'savagely contemptuous references to the Indian illiterates of the country areas' shocked Winston Mahabir and other Indian supporters of the P.N.M. He records, 'We felt guilty of the lies we had preached to the Indians about the genuineness of Williams and our Party.... From that night onwards I never felt really comfortable with Eric Williams... I felt used, compromised, betrayed.'⁴⁷ Inevitably there was a tendency amongst people like the Mahabirs to feel that something had changed drastically rather than that they had been wrong all along as their Indian opponents had argued. It is this feeling which The Cutlass is Not For Killing, in the naivety of its fictional structure, reflects.

During the 1960s there were widespread attempts throughout the Caribbean to re-assess the meaning of the past, in particular the legacies of slavery. It was not a new concern; there is a long tradition of both intellectual and popular Afro-Caribbean concern with the slave past.⁵⁰

What was different about the work of the historians of the 1960s and onwards was its volume, its Caribbean context and the concern with contemporary issues, in particular the shaping effects of slavery on social structure and culture. Special emphasis was given to slave resistance and rebellion, to the success of slaves

in keeping alive elements of their African heritage, and to their role in creating the creole culture of the islands. In short such studies represented a very proper attempt to restore to the slave the volitional humanity which earlier metropolitan concepts of the slave as a dehumanised victim had deprived him of.⁵¹

Such scholarly studies had their parallels in the symbolism of both radical black movements and some Caribbean governments seeking to legitimise themselves. For instance, in the Trinidad carnival prior to the 1970 revolt, at least one group appeared yoked in slave-fashion to protest against the continuing oppression of the black poor;⁵² and in Guyana, the fraudulent regime of Forbes Burnham bolstered its radical black image by adopting Cuffy, one of the leaders of the 1763 Berbice revolt as the national hero.

Indian responses to the Black concern with the slave past have been mixed. Whilst radicals have stressed the parallels between slavery and indenture, others have stressed the contrasts. For instance, in 1913, F.E.M.Hosein had argued for the superiority of Indian culture on the grounds that it had survived indenture whilst slavery had destroyed the African culture of the slave leaving him a cultureless mimic man.⁵³ Some Indian historiographical treatments of slavery have been reactionary and Euro-centric. For instance Dwarka Nath's A History of Indians in Guyana (1970) writes of 'Britain's benevolence in granting freedom to the slaves....'⁵⁴ and he follows the planter view of the refusal of the manumitted blacks to work on the plantations as an idle and irresponsible abandonment of the colony.

A conventional view of the total degradation of the slave underlies the reluctance of V.S.Naipaul's narrator in The Mimic Men, R.K.Singh, to share his friend Browne's compulsive need to explore slave history. Singh is sickened by Browne's distress,

and the habit of protest it spawns and admits to feeling contempt for those who have the mark of slavery on them. Naipaul portrays Singh's absence of sympathy as a deficiency, but I believe the novel also reflects Naipaul's honest Indian reservation about the desirability of constantly returning to the slave past, like a wound that refuses to heal.

After The Mimic Men, Naipaul wrote The Loss of Eldorado (1969), the second part of which deals with the way slavery corrupted the ideals of Empire during Picton's brutal governorship. Again, the treatment of slavery is shaped by radically different concerns from those which have shaped the work of most Afro-Caribbean historians; Naipaul looks for an historical grounding for his thesis that the Caribbean is permanently deformed by its history:

This was what stalled and perverted every stated metropolitan principle...of revolution, intellectual advance, law, social drive, justice and freedom: race, the taint of slavery: it helped make the colonial society simple.⁵⁵

In many ways Naipaul's treatment of the slave period is curiously old-fashioned. Though he acknowledges C.L.R. James's The Black Jacobins in a footnote, his bibliography notably lacks modern studies. This might have been an admirable determination to rely only on primary sources were it not for the fact that Naipaul's view of history seems nourished by such nineteenth century negro-phobes as Froude and Trollope on the one hand, or the anti-slavery humanitarians on the other. The period is either one of revolting cruelties with the slaves as dumb victims or one which, following the negro-phobes, illustrates the incapacity of the slave for rational behaviour. Missing from Naipaul's work is James's recognition that it was the slaves who possessed the technical skills which ran the plantations, or Brathwaite's awareness that the slaves possessed a culture which sustained the small portion of their lives which they controlled, or that the urge for liberty

never died. Naipaul refers briskly to the Haitian revolution, but denies the evidence that black slave societies could produce a Toussaint by describing him as an historical accident, 'a man of sudden genius,' and then loses the historical importance of the revolution in the accumulated detail of Trinidadian slave fantasy. Nevertheless he communicates the horrors of slavery very tellingly; rarely has Naipaul pared his style to such effect as when he recounts the casual brutalities of the slave-owners and their servants. Comment is recognised as superfluous:

A French surgeon and planter called Lebis committed the cliché of abolitionist propaganda. One morning he whipped one of his Negroes to death 'before breakfast, and said he hadn't broken any law. He appeared to be right..... All that Governor Hislop and his judge could do was to fine Lebis 150 dollars for 'treating his slave unskillfully in his capacity of surgeon'. (p. 291)

Like Brathwaite, Naipaul recognises the existence of a slave life separate from that of the masters, but focuses distortingly on just two aspects of it: the image of 'African darkness' which the whites saw in the survival of sorcery, the mass poisonings and the dirt-eating; and the evidence for Negro proneness to fantasy which he finds in the attempted Trinidadian slave revolt of 1808. The details of the conspiracy are taken from the Minutes of the Cabildo, and Naipaul's account differs little in detail from that in L.M. Fraser's nineteenth-century History of Trinidad (1891). Where it differs is in interpretation. Fraser saw the elaborate structure of the slave Bands as the ingenious device of the leaders to divert attention from their true aims, the killing of the whites and the capture of the island. They were well aware of the success of the St. Domingo revolution as their songs illustrated. Fraser notes that the followers of the bands, for reasons of security, were kept in ignorance of their ulterior purpose, being only involved in the dancing and social activities. The Trinidadian historian Carlton Ottley suggests that for the majority of their followers these bands were probably an attempt to create a form

of social organisation which replicated that of the African chiefdom, though its outward naming was European.⁵⁴ Naipaul sees in the bands and the conspiracy only mimicry and Negro fantasy, but it is also possible to see, as Fraser's account suggests, that the 'mimicry' was in fact deliberate parody, as for instance in the parody of the Christian sacrament used by the leaders to bind the inner initiates to the true aims of the bands:

Pain nous ka mange
 Cest viande beke
 Di vin nous ka boue
 Cest sang beke. 60

In that rhyme one can hardly see slaves yearning to be white. Naipaul sees only 'a whole underground life of fantasy', 'this Negro fantasy life...' a 'mimicry in the Negro-yards of white entertainment...' and that 'Negro insurrection...was usually only an aspect of Negro fantasy.'^(p. 251) This way of looking at the events is made even clearer in Naipaul's summary of the episode in a later article 'Power' in which he relates this 'touch of lunacy' to the abandonment of reason in carnival and thence to the 1970 Black Power revolt:

The slave in Trinidad worked by day and lived by night. Then the world of white planters fell away; and in its place was a securer secret world of fantasy, of Negro 'kingdoms', 'regiments,' 'bands! The people who were slaves by day saw themselves as kings, queens, dauphins, princesses. There were pretty uniforms, flags and painted wooden swords...At night the Negroes played at being people, mimicking the rites of the upper world. 61

The Loss of Eldorado tells several intriguing stories, but accurate as Naipaul's documentation may be (which gives the book the virtue of allowing the reader to see an alternative meaning in the story he tells), it is history whose shaping fictions often have their origin outside the material, in Naipaul's colonial response to Trinidad as a place without a society, history and culture save that which had been imposed on it by Europe. He recognises that: 'The absurdity of the slave, in the eyes of the free must have helped to make the society tolerable', but cannot escape from his own

dictum that 'to be a victim is to be absurd'.^(p.327) Naipaul's view of the past is, of course, as much shaped by philosophical as by any ethnic considerations, a point made clear in Chapter Fifteen when one looks at the contrasting way some Indo-Guyanese writers have written about the slave past.

Closely allied with the evocation of slave resistance have been the Afro-Caribbean attempts to recover a sense of contact with Africa. At a political level this attempt has a long tradition. Black West Indians from the time of Edward Blyden in the second half of the nineteenth century,⁶² Sylvester Williams at the beginning of the twentieth,⁶³ George Padmore and C.L.R. James in the Pan-Africanist movement of the 1940s to 1950s,⁶⁴ have played direct roles in the African anti-colonial struggle. From the late 1950s onwards a significant number of Afro-Caribbean writers and scholars such as Denis Williams, Ronald Dathorne, Neville Dawes, Barry Reckord, George Lamming, Vic Reid, E.R. Braithwaite, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Walter Rodney visited, or worked in, Africa.⁶⁵ The experience of return was inevitably interpreted in different ways. For Williams and Dathorne, the visit emphasised the distance which separated Africans and West Indians; for others, such as Brathwaite, the return showed how much African culture had 'crossed, survived and creatively adapted itself to its new environment'.⁶⁶

The idea of Africa has had different levels of significance for Blacks in the Caribbean. These include what Brathwaite has called the 'rhetorical' image of Africa, a symbolic Africa of the mind;⁶⁷ the scholarly recognition that closer knowledge of Africa was necessary to understand the historical basis of Caribbean culture; and the attempt to recover and cherish African survivals in the Caribbean as an authentic popular resource in the struggle against European and North American cultural domination. Each of

these concerns has had to contend with the weight of inherited colonial prejudice. Manifestations of Africa in the Caribbean have tended to be regarded either as primitive and uncivilised or as folkloric oddities without contemporary relevance. The struggle to 'Africanise' the Caribbean has therefore taken place on two fronts. First, it has argued the intrinsic qualities of African culture, emphasising the 'high' culture of, say, the former West African kingdoms, the organic wholeness of traditional village culture and the radical example set by African statesmen such as Nyrere who was seen to be developing a modern decolonised society on the basis of traditional values. Secondly, it has also attempted to change the valuation of African survivals in the Caribbean, to make esteemed and central what has been peripheral and despised.

It is probably true to suggest that where Indians in Trinidad and Guyana have articulated any interest at all, they have been much more concerned with the second of these processes, tending to see it as part of a wider movement by Blacks to consolidate their cultural domination. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the persistence of certain Indian attitudes towards Africa itself which derive from European prejudices. For instance, F.E.M.Hosein wrote in 1913 explaining that:

The Indian was full of his racial prejudice. The time was not when he was not civilised. He had heard of the great races of the earth. But among the great sons of the Earth, Africa was not mentioned...From him the son of India had nothing to learn-unless, perhaps, something to ridicule.⁷¹

In a later Indian journal such as The Observer there is ambivalence: articles supporting the African anti-colonial struggle and articles which stress the barbarism of Africans particularly on those occasions when one of the Asian minorities was at the receiving end of African violence.⁷²

Of Indo-Caribbean imaginative writers, only V.S. and Shiva Naipaul have written about Africa. Both Naipaul's have made visits to Africa, and V.S. Naipaul lived in Uganda for six months. However, unlike say Brathwaite who immersed himself in African life and culture at village level in Ghana, V.S. Naipaul's approach to Africa has tended to be via the expatriate communities. In 1966 he evidently spent six miserable and alienated months as a guest lecturer at Makerere University. His friend, Paul Theroux, describes him as determinedly playing the role of querulous outsider, deliberately mispronouncing African names, seeing only inferiority wherever he went and declaring, like a good Indo-Trinidadian, that 'Africans were wasteful and unresourceful.' The visit was further soured by Naipaul's awareness of what was happening to the Asians of East Africa, and his certainty that they would soon be expelled.⁷³

Not surprisingly, V.S. Naipaul's African fiction and journalism (and the journalism of Shiva Naipaul) is very different from the writings about Africa of black Caribbean writers such as Vic Reid (The Leopard, 1958), Denis Williams (Other Leopards, 1963) Ronald Dathorne (The Scholar Man) or Edward Brathwaite (Masks, 1968). None of these writers idealises Africa. Brathwaite's Masks, for instance, acknowledges an African past in which achievement, corruption and decline, grandeur, human community and cruelty are equally to be found. In contrast, it is my view that Naipaul's portrayal of Africa is, with the exception of 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' (1984), not only almost wholly negative, dismissive of the idea of past African 'glories' and present possibilities, but limitingly racist in his treatment of the African person.

It is not my intention at this point to discuss V.S. and Shiva Naipaul's African travel writing or V.S. Naipaul's two African novels, In A Free State (1971) and A Bend in The River (1979) in any detail

or in terms of their larger Third World political or philosophical themes. My purpose is to focus on those elements of this writing which seem to have some relevance to their concern with the Black West Indian. There are three themes in particular to which I wish to draw attention. The first concerns V.S. Naipaul's image of the African past and its relationship to his scepticism about whether the Afro-Caribbean has anything to look back on with pride; the second concerns the relationship of his characterisation of African culture to his reservations about attempts to promote an African consciousness in the Caribbean; the third concerns both Naipauls' equivocal toying with racist concepts of the 'African personality' and the relationship of these concepts to their portrayals of the Black person in the Caribbean.

There are several reservations about this approach which must be admitted. Firstly, the African-Caribbean connection is rarely explicit, so that there is little incontrovertible evidence that it is part of either Naipaul's intention. Secondly, it must be recognised that African history, culture or 'personality' are not the main themes of V.S. Naipaul's 'African' novels, and my criticism of what I believe are the limitations of his treatment of these topics is not intended to detract from the achievements of the novels: an unremittingly honest portrayal of the deformations of some contemporary neo-colonial societies by corruption, brutality and incompetence;⁷⁴ the communication of an intense but wholly unsentimental pity for the condition of people torn from old securities by the colonialist experience; and his tribute, particularly in A Bend In The River, to human persistence. Thirdly, as in The Mimic Men, Naipaul's vision is rarely simple or directly expressed; sometimes the most negative ideas about Africa are expressed by manifestly racist characters and sometimes even more evidently Naipaulian ideas are expressed in contexts which imply some reservation.

Nevertheless, it is my conviction, reading these novels within the context of V.S. Naipaul's whole output and within the social context of their writing, that he expresses in them a distinctively Indo-Trinidadian point of view, exacerbated by his disquiet about what was happening to the Asian minorities in Africa, during this period (c.1966-1978) and by his contemporary response to political and cultural developments in the Caribbean.

For instance, in In A Free State, although there is much in the novel which expresses outrage at what colonialism and the dislocations of social change had done to newly urbanised Africans, Naipaul's portrayal of African confusion and discomfort rests on a conception of Africans as people who do not deserve, because they have not laboured for it, and cannot use, because they lack the capacity, the gifts of modernity. The capital of the state is 'an English-Indian creation in the African wilderness. It owed nothing to African skill.'⁷⁵ The African is a man 'flushed out from the bush, to whom, in the city with independence, civilisation appeared to have been granted complete.'^(p 112) This is no tragic vision of African displacement from some whole, rich and secure village culture into the insecurities of an invasive Western culture. For although Naipaul does not describe the traditional African world directly, he implies that it is primitive, uncreative and ahistorical. He refers to the 'immemorial life of the forest'^(p 213) and the glimpses of the forest life, such as the running, naked boys, chalked white, who are briefly seen as apparitions at the roadside, suggests a strange, outlandish world. Where any kind of history is suggested it is of slavery, such as when prisoners from the King's tribe are seen 'roped up in the traditional forest way, neck to neck...as though for delivering to the slave-merchant.'^(p 135) Naipaul seems unaware that before European colonisation this was an area, under the

Buganda and Ankole kingships, - of complex administrative and political units.^{76.}

Rather, Naipaul's vision is that of someone acutely conscious of the coming displacement of the East African Asians from an economy they had done much to create by Africans who were, in his view, incapable of managing what they had seized. It is from an Indian point of view that we are once again shown the complicity of European and African in their mutual corruption and their shared hatred for the Indian outsider. The Indians are hated by the Africans for their achievement and ruthlessly exploited as a vulnerable minority. The Europeans are portrayed as hating the Indians as upstart competitors or, like Bobby, eager to make them scapegoats for the condition of the Africans under colonialism.

However, in In A Free State, Naipaul also seems to suggest some more fundamental African mental and personal incapacity. Some of the least flattering stereotypes are put in racist settler mouths, but there are frequently incidents in the novel which appear to support the ideas of African stupidity, lack of creativity, incompetence, mimicry, alternate bullying and fawning, a weak sense of self and atavistic tendencies. There are the mimic politicians in the suits they haven't paid for, the Zulu exile's fantasies of the white women he has slept with, the soldiers who are nervous and obedient when Bobby announces himself as a Government official, but beat him up as soon as they see his fear. There is the way the colonel maintains his control over Peter, his houseboy, by his ability to destroy the African's unstable sense of himself, suggested in his 'disjointedness' and the smile that was 'only one part of his training, and...separate from the other parts.'^(p 103) There is the atavistic behaviour of a group of running African soldiers led by their Israeli trainer:

The Israeli was using his body, exercising, demonstrating fitness. The Africans, their eyes half-closed, had fallen into a trance-like dance of the forest. (p. 131)

One is not far here from the views of such imperialist, racist writers as G.A.Henty who wrote that Africans are:

...just like children...They are always either laughing or quarrelling. They are good-natured and passionate, indolent, but will work hard for a time; clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond....They are absolutely, without originality, absolutely without inventive power. Living among white men their imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilisation. Left alone to their own devices they retrograde into a state little above their native savagery.⁷⁷

In many respects A Bend In The River (1979), is a more mature and balanced novel than In A Free State, and in Salim, Naipaul creates one of his most sympathetically tolerant narrators. Nevertheless, if through Salim, Naipaul appears to be trying on a different perspective, the 'conclusions', tentative as they are, which the novel reaches about Africa, do not seem very different from those of In A Free State. Indeed, it is Salim's very reasonableness which makes his responses to the African world so plausible. Had the narrator been Mahesh, with his narrow racial prejudices, then the narrative voice, as in The Mimic Men, would have been quite obviously unreliable. As it is, it is possible to be lulled into letting Salim's more tendentious generalisations ('...as with most Africans...') slip by.

At one level the setting of A Bend In The River closely resembles the Zaire which Naipaul describes journalistically in 'A New King For the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa.'⁷⁹ At another level, Naipaul's kingdom is primarily an Africa of the mind. As an area from which many slaves came, it has Caribbean resonances. For instance, Metty's contempt, as a man from the slave culture of the coast, for the African 'kaffars' of the interior, parallels the reported contempt of creole slaves for the African-born in the Caribbean. In 'A New King For The Congo', the resonances are even more explicit. Naipaul seems almost to suggest some African capacity for atavistic fantasy and mischievously links the rational

desire of Caribbean blacks to recover an awareness of their past with the misconceived support a handful of Afro-Caribbean commentators gave Amin's bestial regime:

...the dream of an ancestral past restored is allied to a future of magical power. The confusion is not new, and is not peculiar to Zaire. Fantasies like this animated some slave revolts in the West Indies; and today, in Jamaica, at the university; there are people who feel that Negro redemption and Negro power can only come about through a return to African ways....and there are people who, sufficiently far away from the slaughter ground of Uganda, find in Amin's African nihilism a proof of African power.⁷⁹

What most marks the Africa of the novel as a place of the imagination is Naipaul's Conradian metaphysic of geophysical influence. The Africa of the novel is a place where man has not yet mastered nature. Every attempt by outsiders to establish a civilisation there returns to bush. Within the not yet humanised bush, Africans still seem subject to natural laws which diminish their humanity. A formerly ruling tribe is overthrown by those it has traditionally persecuted:

A famous tribe, now helpless among their traditional prey; it was as though some old law of the forest, something that came from Nature itself, had been overturned.⁸⁰

Only the fittest survive. Salim sees an African uprising against the former slave-holding Arabs of the coast as obeying an evolutionary law: 'People who had grown feeble had been physically destroyed.'^(p. 36)

However, Naipaul's portrayal of the villages of the bush is by no means consistent. At times he grants the villages a certain solidity and wholeness, though a primitive unchanging one. It is a 'true safe world' where:

Every man knew that he was watched from above by his ancestors, living forever in a higher sphere, their passage on earth not forgotten, but essentially preserved, part of the presence of the forest. (p. 15)

However, the solidity of the villages comes to seem less real to Salim the more he becomes acquainted with the region. He associates them with the tribal masks in Father Huisman's collection, exotic

'extravagant objects', remnants of a vanishing world, or sees them as 'secret worlds', like the fantasy gardens of children's fiction, womb-like refuges the Africans flee to when once again they have destroyed the 'civilised order'.

There is a similar inconsistency in Salim's conception of the 'African personality'. On the one hand he is inclined to feel that the African mind is a blank tablet. For example, at first, Salim feels that his protégé, Ferdinand's personality is so fluid that 'there was nothing there'. He observes Ferdinand trying on one character after another, and reflects on this process in cultural terms:

We were so clogged by what centuries had deposited in our minds and hearts. Ferdinand, starting from nothing, had with one step made himself free, and was ready to race ahead of us. (p117)

Salim's view of there being 'nothing there' is reinforced by his observation of Africans playing a particular role in the presence of the European or Indian who has taught it:

Yet as soon as he was left alone he became a different person. He went vacant. Not rude, just vacant. I noticed this alteration in the African staff in other places as well. It makes you feel that while they did their jobs in various glossy settings they were only acting for the people who employed them; and that they had the gift - when they were left alone and had no one to act for - of separating themselves in spirit from their setting, their job, their uniform (p109)

However, later, when he meets Ferdinand at the new Polytechnic, Salim realizes that the African mind has never been empty, that it has always been involved with the spirit world of the ancestors, to which, Ferdinand fears, western education will deny him access.

It is this fear of dislocation which drives the forest people to an atavistic frenzy, the 'African rage' against all that was 'not of the forest and Africa'.^(p 84) It is a rage provoked by generations of violation by Arabs, Europeans, slave-hunting tribes and now, by the new presidency. When the people become confused and frightened by the President's attempt to change their lives, they want to 'go

back again to the beginning'. Metty reports to Salim the rumours of the rebels' plans:

At first they were only going to kill government people. Now the Liberation Army say that isn't enough...They're going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie...They're going to kill all the masters and all the servants. When they've finished nobody will know there was a place like here. They're going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way, to go back to the beginning before it is too late. The killing will last for days. They say it is better to kill for days than to die forever. (p 143)

The rebels despair, however, because they know that the town's attraction is like an addictive drug in their blood, destroying all the old certainties. The contradiction condemns the town to a constant cycle of destruction and rebuilding. But the rage is more than a disorder provoked by dislocation; it is equated with an animal instinct which is part of the laws of dark nature which still control human life.⁸¹ For instance, Metty reports how the massacres on the coast had begun as a market quarrel:

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. They were behaving as though knives didn't cut, as though people weren't made of flesh. I couldn't believe it. In the end it was as if a pack of dogs had got into a butcher's stall... (p 35)

Mahesh explains to Salim that this attitude to others is part of the history of the land, and characterises the local Africans as 'malins':

He had used the French word, because the English words he might have used - 'wicked', 'mischievous', 'bad-minded' - were not right. The people here were malins the way a dog chasing a lizard was malin or a cat chasing a bird. The people were malins because they lived with the knowledge of man as prey. (p. 62)

The idea is consistent with Mahesh's racism, but several episodes suggest why he sees in this way. For instance, an officer of the President's Youth Guard squabbles with some pavement sleepers; he stumbles and falls:

By that fall, that momentary appearance of helplessness, he invited the first blow with one of the concrete blocks; and the sight of blood then had encouraged a sudden, frenzied act of murder by dozens of small hands. (p 213)

All this is observed from Salim's 'Indian' point of view. However, Salim's diagnosis of the African rage is confirmed by Ferdinand's, by then an officer in the national army. Ferdinand is intelligent, perceptive and decent; he sees the dreadful consequences of disorder and has loyally tried to protect Salim. But he too is gripped by the frenzy, the urge to flee back to the tribal womb of the forest:

We're all going to hell, and everyman knows this in his bones. We're being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is so frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where? That is what is driving people mad. They feel they're losing the place they can run back to. I began to feel the same thing when I was a cadet in the capital. I felt I had been used. I felt I had given myself an education for nothing. I felt I had been fooled. Everything that was given to me was given to destroy me. I began to think I wanted to be a child again, to forget books, and everything connected with books. The Bush runs itself. But there is no place to go to - nowhere is safe now. (p.291)

As is usual in Naipaul's work, the relationship between the narrator and the novel's total perspective is not simple. Salim's position is rarely closed or consistent and it seems reasonable to assume that as a character he dramatises some of V.S. Naipaul's conflicts of view. At times, Salim's responses are significantly more sympathetic than those of the journalistic Naipaul in 'A New King For The Congo'; at others, his reflections are familiarly Naipaulian; and yet again there are times when Salim's point of view is explicitly situated in his ethnic biases, such as, for instance, his disgust with Metty, who is part Indian, for fathering a child on an African girl:

Don't you think it's disgusting to have a little African child running about in somebody's yard, with its toto swinging from side to side? Aren't you ashamed, a boy like you? (p.115)

Salim's point of view is also shown to be shaped by his jealous feeling that whereas he inherits only a civilization in decline, for Africans like Ferdinand, 'the world was new and getting newer. For me that same world was drab, without possibilities.' Again,

Salim recognises how easily his feelings of tenderness for the defeats and humiliations suffered by Africans are altered by his exposure to some exhibition of 'stupidity and aggressiveness and pride and hurt!' so that he falls back into 'the old way of feeling, the easier attitudes of the foreigners in the bars.'^(p. 111) All this suggests that Salim's point of view is not to be regarded as reliable or that of the novel as a whole. There is, however, a countervailing rhetoric in the events of the novel which consolidates Salim's more pessimistic and critical judgements of African possibility or the limitations placed upon that possibility by the colonial experience. These ambivalences are summed up in Salim's words when he observes the frenzy of the gaoled African political prisoners:

I never felt closer to them, or more far away.^(p. 288)

The feeling that a more sympathetic and sensitive view of Africa is struggling for expression in A Bend In The River is more than confirmed by Naipaul's most recent account of an African visit, 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' (1984). It is a piece of writing comparable to An Area of Darkness (1964) in that Naipaul constantly questions his own theories and his own way of seeing and, in particular, explicitly reviews his former conceptions of the African background of the slave in the Caribbean.

It is not merely that Naipaul finds in President Houphouet-Boigny's Ivory Coast an ordered, productive society, though that is important. What is wholly new is that Naipaul perceives an African society which is whole, rich and stable. However, his first impression is of a society split in two between the modernity of the French - created city and the African world of forest and night. He fears that the former is impermanent since it is created by outsiders whose 'skills might easily vanish from the continent'

and he is still inclined to see in the latter a heart of darkness. He puts a good deal of emphasis, for instance, on bizarre details of sorcery and even slips in some expatriate tall stories (in which he indicates his belief) about cannibalism and a trade in refrigerated human heads. At one point he describes the African world of night as 'ceaselessly undoing the reality of the day. One idea worked against the other.'

However, via an awareness of how much his approach to places is 'still dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background' and how much the quality of experience shapes the nature of perception, Naipaul begins to revise that first dichotomous model. He recognises that it comes from his historical vision of the double world of the slave in the Caribbean: the daylight world of Europe and the night-time world of Africa. In The Loss of Eldorado (1969) he had portrayed that African night as either one of poisonings and sorcery or of a pitiful and farcical fantasy in which the slave tried to escape from reality. In 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' he implicitly criticises that formulation and suggests a new appreciation of the spiritual resilience of the African slave:

To the outsider, to the slave-owner, the African night world might well appear a mimic world, a child's world, a carnival. But to the African - however much, in daylight, he appeared to mock it - it was the true world: it turned white men to phantoms and plantation life to an illusion. (p162)

Such a perception grows from what seems to be a new appreciation of the inner strengths of the African world. Two ideas in particular appeal to him. The first, told him by a former Government minister, revises his idea of the night undermining of the reality of the day world. The old man tells him that the two worlds are endlessly looking for each other. Although Naipaul records the description without comment, he is evidently struck by it, and by the old man's critique of the one-sidedness of Western materialism. The second idea, given to him by Arlette, the black woman from Martinique, is of the material world as 'sand', subject to constant change and

decay. By contrast the inner-world of African belief is enduring. Naipaul comes to see that this inner world would survive even if the modern city fell into ruins. Now he is no longer disposed to see the concern with holding onto the past as the 'African nihilism.' Instead, for a moment, he sees with Arlette's African-educated eyes that it is the European businessmen in the hotel who are the 'phantoms, preparing plans for things that were one day bound to perish.' For a moment he sees in her idea a parallel to the Hindu concept of maya, that the world is an illusion, but then recognises that Arlette's vision arises from a different cultural matrix:

The Hindu's idea of illusion comes from the contemplation of nothingness, Arlette's idea of sand came from her understanding and admiration of a beautifully organised society. (p. 157)

He sees then that the African vision endures whatever vicissitude the material world brings. Whilst Naipaul carefully avoids comment at the conclusion of his account it is difficult not to feel that he gives a measure of assent to Arlette's perception. He does not comment, but his description of the crassness of the French businessman who eyes Arlette's body as she is talking movingly about her awakened sense of inner realities, is as close to an endorsement as one might expect from Naipaul.

Though there are moments of culturally-induced misunderstanding which leave Naipaul feeling 'foolish, drained, sad. I felt Africa as a great melancholy...',^(p. 112) he is also inclined to see in individual Africans a psychic wholeness very different from the image of the person with a weak sense of self he portrays in his two African novels. He recognises that 'Africans looked up to nobody' and begins to appreciate that it is possible for people, like the poet, Ebony, to enter the 'new world' of Western ideas without losing their strong sense of African identity: Ebony is a 'whole man. He knew where he was, how he got there, and he liked the novelty of what he saw'.^(p. 153) Again, Naipaul begins to appreciate for the first time why Africans can feel pride in their past. At first when he

meets Mr Niangoran-Bouah, the expert on 'Drummologie', Naipaul is clearly sceptical about his mission to 'offer proof of African civilisation'. But he finds the expert 'academic, good-humoured, tender, passionate, always open'^(p.177), and when he hears the tapes of the drumming and has the significance of the Ashanti gold weights explained, he records:

It was impressive. I began to understand the richness of the material he had made his subject, and his passion to present this material adequately to Africans and the world.
(p.178)

If in 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' V.S. Naipaul appears to free himself from whatever Indo-Trinidadian prejudices about Africa he may have possessed, Shiva Naipaul's North of South : An African Journey (1978) reveals all that is barren in Indo-Trinidadian racism and all that is second-hand and second-rate in his work. He borrows the idea of the Indian interloper in the mutually destructive contact of black and white, expressed imaginatively in The Mimic Men, as a crude formula to structure repetitious descriptions of visits to Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia. He borrows his brother's irascible pose from The Middle Passage period and echoes the same weary voice: 'Zambia makes nothing; Zambia creates nothing'.[§] (At one point he even suffers an identity crisis as his brother had done in An Area of Darkness). Though he protests that he is constantly seen as an Indian rather than as an individual by the African officials he meets, he frequently uses individual portraits as illustrations of 'typical' African defects. He plays a despicable game of 'I didn't say it' when he quotes stories of African mental incapacity told by European racists. They are, of course, 'apocryphal'. However, there quite frequently follows a 'true' story, witnessed by Naipaul and told without comment, which supports such racist stereotypes as childishness, conceptual incapacity (an 'inadequate grasp of cause and effect'^(p.180)), credulity, mimicry, ('development...indefinitely arrested at the stage of

caricature'^(p.35)) proneness to fantasy and primitive savagery. The present 'collective derangement' of African societies, disfigured by their lusts for possessions, is linked to the 'insatiable appetite of the African Chiefs [of the slave period] for brandy, beads, tobacco and guns - all the gaudy bric-a-brac of European civilisation' and we are told that 'The sophisticated magic of the White man remains irresistably alluring to the black.'^(p.37)

Africa is portrayed as hopeless, not because of the European disruptions of the nineteenth century, not because of the arbitrary yoking together of peoples of different cultural traditions in the imperial scramble, not because of the inequalities of the world economy, but fundamentally because of African mental incapacity. African socialism holds out no more hope than the corruptions of African capitalism. In Tanzania, for instance, 'performance consistently negates intention'; the African is only capable in Naipaul's eyes of imperfectly parroting his master's voice: 'Marxism, like Christianity before it, has been reduced to caricature in Africa.'^(p.103) Naipaul puts Africa and Africans in a double-bind. If Africans try to 'develop' they become corrupted and absurd; if they do not they remain primitive and absurd.

The book works towards the conclusion that: 'Black and White deserved each other. Neither was worth the shedding of a single tear, both were rotten to the core. Each had been destroyed by contact with the other'. On the African side there is mimicry and the old familiar love-hate syndrome:

The African, lacking a vision of his own autonomous manhood, is vulnerable to every flattery. Between oppressor and oppressed, master and slave, there exist profound psychological bonds. (Never come between a man and his slave: the slave will surely kill you first!) Beyond all else the slave yearns to be like the master; he craves his acceptance and recognition. His hatred, so full of cruelty, is no more than a perverted adoration turned inside out... (p.81)

Even the stylistic panache does not disguise the second-handedness

and worthlessness of the generalisation, the absence of any kind of evidence. What black and white share, according to Shiva Naipaul, is their prejudice against the Asians. Yet even here the African supposedly mimics the White. The White's approach, unscrupulous and opportunist, is nevertheless rational. The Asian is a competitor, and it serves very well for the European to encourage African anger against him. On the other hand, Africans are apparently unable to draw even mistaken conclusions on the basis of their own experience. The African's attitude is simply a conditioned response, like that of the settler's dog trained to hate Africans. The comparison is odiously racist:

The dog's negrophobia betrays his settler provenance. His antipathy had been bred into him; it was part of his servile inheritance. He carried on his soul his creator's imprint: he had been programmed to dislike black men. The African antipathy for the Asian possesses similar characteristics. It is part of his servile inheritance. His dislike bears the imprint of the settler - as does everything that he is or wants to be. (p. 51)

It is set on African soil, but the war is a Trinidadian one.

In 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro', V.S. Naipaul constantly relates his vision of Africa to his reading of Caribbean history, a relationship no less important to those Afro-Caribbean writers, scholars and politicians who wished to see a reevaluation of the African dimension of Caribbean culture. During the 1960s there had grown a truer awareness of just how much of Africa had survived, in religion, music, language, folk-tales, food and healing lore²⁴ and how important a consciousness of Africa had been in popular rebellions in the past.²⁵

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a conscious adoption by some sections of the black middle class of an 'African' lifestyle. In Jamaica, Rastafarianism spread from the ghettos to the University campus.²⁶ In Trinidad many of the N.J.A.C. leaders took African names, and at the N.J.A.C. cultural rallies, along with calypso and steelband, there were groups of 'African' dancers and

drummers.⁸⁷ In Guyana there was official recognition for African elements in Guyanese culture such as cumfa; laws which had made obeah illegal were lifted in 1973.⁸⁸ Novels such as Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962) and Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959) portrayed African survivals as a buried tradition in conflict with Euro-Christian influences: George Lamming's Season of Adventure, (1960), portrays the African tradition as a revolutionary one. The participation of Fola, young woman of the middle classes in the tonelle is the beginning of her revolt against 'the corpse of England's feeling' and the beginning of her discovery of herself and a sense of community with the people of the island. The Indian middle class by contrast, has mainly fallen in with the prevailing Euro-centric neglect, condescension or contempt for African cultural elements. An article written by Seepersad Naipaul in 1950 on the Shouters in Trinidad is probably not wholly typical in its open-mindedness. He describes the 'trumping' (hyperventilation) of the possessed girl acutely when he writes of her 'gutteral oohoonk' charged with a 'choking heavy pain'. But later he betrays an attitude of amused distance as he describes how the dancer 'jammed her hands akimbo on her hips and gave a thorough performance.' His conclusion, though characteristically sympathetic, nevertheless uncannily anticipates the attitudes towards African cultural elements in the Caribbean of both V.S. and Shiva Naipaul:

On the way home I wondered whether all that I had seen was just a kind of masquerade, or whether there was something solid and real behind it all...the worst that can be said about the Shouters is that they have an utterly childish credulity; are predisposed to self-hypnosis; and are easily susceptible to fantasies. They bring to their altar a primitive dynamic emotion which they do not choose to hide. They let themselves go. (My emphasis).⁸⁹

'Letting go' the bounds of rationality and releasing a dangerous primitivism is one of the themes of Shiva Naipaul's second non-fictional work, Black and White (1978) and his third novel A Hot Country (1983). The main theme of the former is once more the

mutually corrupting relationship of black and white as they meet in devotion to cults of unreason. The mass suicide of the followers of Jim Jones's People's Temple in Guyana, is related on the one side to a 'primitive regression' to Africanism in the Caribbean, and on the other to the lunatic utopianism of various White American cults. However, whereas White irrationalism is portrayed as a specific cultural moment in American society, born of excessive affluence, guilt feelings and the fatal dominance of ideas, Black irrationalism is, in contrast, seen largely as the product of the 'Black' personality.

Shiva Naipaul 'discovers' 'primitive regression' in a well developed form in Guyana. It is not that Naipaul's account of the corruptions of Burnhamism, 'an unrestrained and cynical black supremacy,' is overstated. What is objectionable is his attempt to account for Burnhamism as the product of the black psyche, a 'projection into public life of savage instincts and gangster ideology.'⁴⁰ The racist pun is quite deliberate, for Naipaul argues that after the ending of colonial rule the Caribbean has rapidly regressed to a state of African barbarism. The charge is a depressingly old one, little different in substance and hysterical tone from that made by the negrophobes of the nineteenth century who claimed that with the ending of the discipline of slavery, the ex-slaves would regress to a state of savagery.

This fear is portrayed as a subsidiary theme in V.S. Naipaul's Guerrillas (1975) and as a major theme in Shiva Naipaul's A Hot Country (1983). In V.S. Naipaul's case the recognition of an African presence in the Caribbean represents a shift of view from that expressed in his earlier work. Up to the time of The Loss of Eldorado (1969) he appears to have believed that the slave had been wiped clean of any African cultural elements, and had become an imperfect mimic of European culture.⁹¹ In The Loss of Eldorado, Africa had appeared in the Caribbean, but only in the sensational

guises of sorcery and mass poisonings. In Guerrillas the survival of yearnings for Africa is portrayed as one of the main threats to an ordered and 'civilised' society. There is a scene when the two white visitors to the island and their Portuguese-Jewish-Creole host, Harry de Tunja, are watching a group of cultists holding a ceremony on a beach. Fragments of Christianity are interspersed with 'passages of gibberish', and a votary of the cult is described as addressing some imaginary presence 'in a private frenzy.' As the blind-folded cultists march out to the sea they 'stamped and stamped, digging their feet deeper into the sand...locked in a private world.' When the votive offering of candles is sent out into the sea it is 'doused at the first wave'.⁹² One suspects a deliberate inverted echo of the passages in Lamming's Season of Adventure and Of Age and Innocence where similar ceremonies are described with reverence for the inner African meaning of the sacrifice.⁹³ Nevertheless, if the ceremony is pointedly unsuccessful in Guerrillas, it is still seen with alarm by de Tunja, as a seismic warning of the racial earthquake which will drive him from the island:

I don't want to go. I love this country. But when you feel the ground move below you it is damn foolishness to pretend you feel nothing. (p 13.)

Shiva Naipaul's novel A Hot Country (1983) portrays this terror even more extensively. Its general thesis will be familiar to readers of Shiva Naipaul's journalism, and many ideas (and even phrases) will be recognised by readers of V.S. Naipaul's work. It is that the inhabitants of ex-colonial societies like Cuyama have been deprived of their Gods and culture by the experiences of slavery, indenture and colonial 'brainwashing'. Now in the post-colonial world, deprived of the illusion of colonial order, these abandoned people have only their millenarian dreams of a return to lost cultures to sustain them, and when those dreams prove false,

they are destined to fall into an atavistic nihilism. Alex Richer, the visiting British journalist, whose views are consistently given narrative endorsement, sees behind the socialist slogans of Cuyama, 'dreams of another sort altogether, ...all the phantasmagoria of miraculous transformation and redemption, of power untrammelled, unaccountable and mystical, of oppressors scattered like dust in the wind.'⁴⁴ Dina Mallingham listens to a black street-corner preacher promising deliverance for black people and a gory fate for their oppressors; Selma, her black maid, tells her: 'One day...black people going to rule the world. You hear me!...Black people ain't going to be slaves no more.'^(p 119) However, behind these messianic hopes, 'their wild dreams of a return to Africa...their ecstatic and compulsive sloganeering,'^(p 134) Dina sees a nihilistic 'desire to destroy.' Two explanations for this psychic state are suggested in the novel. Both belong to a nineteenth century, racially motivated, social Darwinism. The inhabitants of Cuyama are not only trapped in a reductive physical environment (a 'sun-stunned vacuum,' a 'disordered desolation'), and robbed of their 'selves, souls' by history, but are ultimately limited by their own primitive natures. Dina believes that:

Inevitably, men will succumb to their own reality. They will sink to the level of being where they feel most at ease with themselves. They would always act in conformity with their own values and remake the world in their own image. (p.63)

She finds support for her views in some racist nonsense gleaned from her reading of D.H. Lawrence, about the 'dark races' belonging to:

a bygone cycle of humanity. They are left behind in a gulf out of which they have never been able to climb. They can only follow as servants...It was hurtful. It was objectionable. But how different were her own feelings on the matter? Weren't there times when she, child of a dark race, wanted to pull the whole world down with her, to avenge what it had made of her - and all like her? (p.104)

The African dimension is also made evident in the parallels between this novel and V.S. Naipaul's A Bend In The River. For instance, the descriptions of the 'Africanisation' of 'Charlestown', the capital, seem to owe less to any observation of the Caribbean than to the descriptions of the fate of the city at the bend in the river in V.S. Naipaul's novel. Steadily Charlestown is being burned down, '...month by month the colonial town was fading away' ^(p. 133) as the squatters dig up the lawns of the abandoned houses of the middle-class to plant the African crop of maize. Again there is an obvious resemblance between the urge of the Cuyamese to 'wreak vengeance. To tear down. To burn. To loot. To insult. To kill,' ^(p. 155) and the 'African rage' in A Bend In The River

The specific moment which crystallized Indian uncertainties about the changes in Afro-Caribbean ethnic identity was the Black Power revolt which, for a period between 1969-1971 in Trinidad, shook the foundations of the creole nationalist state established by the P.N.M. It was a revolt against the P.N.M.'s policies of facilitating the dominance of foreign multinationals in the economy, its rapprochement with the local, white-dominated, business elite, the increasingly autocratic style of Dr. Williams and the party leadership's Afro-Saxon cultural face. It fed on the discontent of the P.N.M.'s poorest urban supporters over high unemployment, rising prices and increasing inequalities in the distribution of wealth generated by the oil boom. The movement itself was a loose coalition of ethnic nationalists, Marxists, trade union militants, urban youths and, for a time, radical social democrats such as the Tapia House group. ⁴⁵ However, Indian commentators, whatever their political perspective, consistently noted that all these groups were predominantly Black. Although equally hostile to the Williams Government, many Indians felt that the slogan, 'Africans and

Indians Unite', was simply an opportunistic attempt to use them by rebellious elements in a black family quarrel.⁹⁶ Thus whilst groups of Indians did join the long Black Power solidarity march to the Indian area of Couva, most went to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of the marchers' motives: 'We chose to align ourselves to avoid in some small measure any upsurge of racial riot,' wrote Dicky Ali, who reported that amongst watching Indians there was a mixture of sympathy, suspicion and indifference.⁹⁷ There were never more than small numbers of Indians involved in the Black Power movement, and only in the brief alliance of the leaderships of the oil and sugar trade unions in the United Labour Front (U.L.F.) in the mid 1970s did the call for unity bear any fruit.⁹⁸ By the 1976 elections, however, the U.L.F. had become an Indian party,⁹⁹ whilst Black oil workers remained loyal to the P.N.M. Even those Indians who shared the anti-capitalist perspective of the Black radicals, felt that they failed to recognise that Indians had their own specific grievances. They argued that Indian agricultural workers and peasants were the country's poorest social groups, victims of the P.N.M.'s neglect of the countryside,¹⁰⁰ and that since the Black Power movement was mainly urban, (and some of its supporters already received, in Indian eyes, a disproportionate share of Government patronage) there was little evidence that it would wish to change this imbalance. Some of the Indian middle class for its part complained about the under-representation of Indians in white-collar jobs in the state sector,¹⁰¹ or grumbled that though Indian enterprise stood between Trinidad and a Haitian collapse, they were constantly denied their rewards. Others feared that the socialist slogans of the Black Power movement simply announced a Black intention to get their hands on the economy in ways they could not achieve through their own enterprise.¹⁰² They alleged a pattern of racial expropriation in the state takeover of

sectors of the economy such as bus transport, petrol stations and cement production which had largely been in Indian hands. There were Indian critics of such views; the Socialist Youth Organisation saw them as dangerous diversions from establishing working class unity, though they felt that Indians needed to organise themselves rather than merge into Black organisations.¹⁰³

Middle-class Indian discontent with perceived racial discrimination is expressed in Peter Ramkissoon's Sunday Morning Coming Down (1975), a novel (briefly notorious when it was temporarily banned) whose pretensions to seriousness are undermined by the crudity of the writing. Occasionally it shows a sharp social awareness, but otherwise seems astonishingly unaware of its own prejudices and racial fantasies. Its hero, Jason Ranjitsingh, is presented as both a fighter for his ethnic dignity and sex-stud. In the office he battles with his underling, Errol Davis, who 'wore his blackness like a uniform', a stupid, corrupt and unsophisticated 'behind the bridge man'. Jason, by contrast is supposed to be suave and elegant, but Ramkissoon's insensitivity to language makes him appear a vulgar parvenu. However, although incompetent, Davis is the chairman of a branch of the black ruling party. He boasts, 'All you coolie go learn that black is beautiful',¹⁰⁴ and is soon promoted over Jason.

In the sexual plot, Jason has to fight off the attentions of a 'dusky creole' from one of the leading families. A black girl in the office makes the familiar Indian observation, 'Is only nigger does want everybody but deyself.' (p.24) Jason, by contrast, plays hard to get, suspecting that she is being used to buy him off politically, but his magnetism is so great that she is prepared to put up with his racial and sexual insults. Even so, when Judy, the 'dusky creole', wants to insult him, anti-Indian prejudices come readily to hand: 'Ranjitsingh makes one think of a seedy little thief with a donkey cart.' (p.73). Eventually, Jason, man

of independent principle, breaks free from Judy and leaves the civil service.

The novel is often absurdly contradictory. Jason is an ethnic and sexual hero, but the only Indian girls in the story are either sluttish or drab. Jason is a stud, but he speaks like a bashful maiden when he protests, 'I'm not a toy for you to play with.' And although he is 'cool' and sophisticated, he has all the middle-class Indian prejudices about Creole morals, black power marches and Afro-Caribbean folk-culture.

Ramkisson's preoccupation with inter-ethnic sex was shared by those Indians who feared that the slogan 'Africans and Indians Unite' referred to miscegenation. An alleged increase in mixed marriages was seen as a consequence of the desire of Blacks to 'mate with any race but his own' and the political scheming of the ruling party to destroy Indians as a cultural group and source of opposition. In more paranoid versions, black housing schemes were being set up in Indian villages with the express purpose of taking Indian girls away from Indian men, on whom unemployment was being inflicted so that Indian women would be forced to marry employed Blacks.¹⁰⁵ Even Christian proselytization was seen as a plot to 'get at our women' and destroy racial purity.¹⁰⁶ 'Successful' integration would be interpreted, according to one writer, as a victory by Negroes and a 'defeat for us.'¹⁰⁷ Indian chauvinists ignored the fact that amongst some sections of the Black Power movement there were also strong feelings in favour of racial endogamy.

Many Indians also resented being co-opted as blacks by the Black Power movement. Although Bro. Kallian of N.J.A.C. wrote:

You must understand
 We are as oppressed as the African.
 We origin is Black
 It's a fact
 We are all Black People too.¹⁰⁸

The more general Indian view was probably expressed by a young woman who wrote:

Don't call me black. No Indian likes being called black...
I have no need to parade with a placard saying, 'I am Black,'
for I have nothing to prove.' 109

Lloyd Harradan consciously echoed V.S. Naipaul when he argued that the arbitrary classification of 'our picturesque asiatics as blacks' was both a simplification and a ruse to divert Indians from recognising their own interests.¹¹⁰ Like many Indians he was also unimpressed by the Black Power movement's alleged anti-whiteness. He asked, 'Is County Caroni a wasteland because a white government is in power? Who hogs the jobs in the civil service?'¹¹¹ Ramdath Jagessar, masquerading as 'Bros. Oyoloco Zimba', satirised black 'extremism' in a piece which soberly advocates, 'in a spirit of moderation and justice' the extermination of whites to release land to the 'rightful black owners.' (Indian scepticism about Black interest in agriculture is suggested by 'Bro. Oyoloco's' proposal that the national flag be black, 'with hoe lying semi-prostrate at its feet in a position indicating readiness for work.'¹¹²) It is clear that a good many of the Indian middle-class regarded themselves and the local whites as jointly excluded from power.¹¹³ A more genuinely anti-racist criticism of unthinking anti-whiteism is expressed in Clyde Hosein's 'Bianca' in The Killing of Nelson John and Other Stories (1980), which deals with the plight of an old white woman caught up in a black power demonstration. When she is attacked by a group of blacks in the street she tells them:

I didn't do anybody anything...I was born here, you know that. I live here all alone...
My father left me when I was only seven. I hardly went to school. I started work when I was sixteen....
Who I oppress? Tell Me!¹¹⁴

Hosein also portrays the Black Power leader's speech as cliché ridden and ironises his assertion that the Blacks should 'Refuse this animal treatment in your own country, in this land where your

forefathers sweat blood to build and nourish Europe!' (p.66)

It is a frequent Indian complaint that Afro-Trinidadians forget that agriculture in Trinidad is almost wholly the product of Indian labour.

A similarly critical response to black militancy is expressed in Selwyn Bhajan's poem, 'Chains', which expresses puzzlement and pity over the way Blacks seem chained to resentment over past sufferings:

Ah, what pathetic anger still remains,
Anger that kills the soul
Of all its art and energies... ¹¹⁵

Other Indians evidently had no taste for the style of radical black politics, with its roots in Afro-Christian religious fervour, its preaching, prophesying verbal delivery, its tendency to biblical and millenarian metaphor and its organisation around charismatic leaders such as George Weekes and Geddes Granger. ¹¹⁶ The millenarian style - it seems to have been just that - encouraged Indian criticisms of the movement which either quoted V.S.Naipaul's charge that the Caribbean Black was prone to redemptionist fantasy, or came to the same conclusions. In reality, even N.J.A.C., the group most 'African' and 'Black' in ideology, appears to have been predominantly concerned with such messianic issues as the absence of water supplies, rubbish-disposal, drainage, high food prices and police brutality. ¹¹⁷ But clearly, even when Indians were sympathetic to the political objectives of the movement, they felt its cultural symbols excluded them. By the time Afro-Trinidadian radicals remembered there was an Indo-Trinidadian culture it was too late. The inability of young Blacks and Indians to achieve understanding is typified by their abrasive and increasingly polarised relationship on the campus of St. Augustine. The process can be traced in the writings of Ramdath Jagessar. In a poem written in 1969, 'On Attending a Literary Discussion', he regrets his sense of exclusion, recalling as

he touched his 'straight lank hair':

I was the only one whose fathers
were not chained in the long journey out
whose fathers came and kept
if not the kernel, then the shell
of an ancient culture.

He admits his unwillingness to share the Blacks' preoccupation
with their past:

...when they set down in printed robes
to flagellate their blackness. 118

But also expresses a sense of envy over the creative energy he
believes the pain has spurred. However, within a couple of years,
Jagessar, along with others of his generation had become part of
Mukdar, a small group whose journal devoted a good deal of energy
to virulent attacks on Trinidadian Blacks.

It is very unlikely that the vehemence of Mukdar's views was
shared by more than a small minority of Indians but even amongst
those who believed that Indians should 'renounce for ever their
aim to capture political power as East Indians', views on the Black
Power programme and style were very similar. There was a similar
tendency to reduce its objectives simply to race. One of the
principal Indian 'integrationists' wrote: 'Its central concept -
one might say its demi-urge - was of course blackness.' 121

I have outlined these political and literary responses to the
Black Power movement primarily as a context for discussing the
'Indo-Trinidadian' character of V.S. Naipaul's perspective on the
issue. However, the relationship between his work and that of
groups like Mukdar is, in a sense, even closer in that Naipaul
is often quoted approvingly and used as a source for chauvinist
attacks on Afro-Caribbean culture. This is not to accuse V.S.
Naipaul of guilt by association, but only to suggest that it is
proper to investigate how that identification might arise.

V.S. Naipaul first commented on the Black Power revolt in an
essay, 'Power?', published in The New York Review of Books in

1970. He portrays it as an outgrowth of the lunacies of carnival, in which black people act out their fantasies. He links this to Trinidad's only slave-revolt, which he had described in The Loss of Eldorado, as an occasion when the fantasies of the night (when 'Negroes played at being people') spilled into the day. He sees the make-believe as 'a vision of the black millenium, as much a vision of revenge as a black world made whole again.'¹²⁴ He argues that whereas in North America Black Power had a real political programme, in the Caribbean it had become part of 'the old, apocalyptic mood of the black masses' who are always awaiting 'crusades and messiahs'.

Then in 1972, news came from Trinidad which must have seemed to Naipaul proof of his summarising statement in 'Power?', that the Caribbean islands, 'black and poor, are dangerous only to themselves. On February 22nd 1972, the first of two bodies was found buried in the gardens of a house in Arima.' On July 17th 1972 the trial began in Port of Spain of Michael De Freitas, better known in Britain as 'Michael X and later as Michael Abdul Malik, for the murders. In Britain, Malik had achieved notoriety as a petty criminal turned self-styled Black Power leader whose activities had been exploited by the press in a typically sensationalist manner. It is clear in hindsight that Malik was a con-man who escaped to Trinidad to avoid the consequences of a forthcoming trial. He was, though, a con-man whose roles evidently served inner needs and in which he seems to have half-believed.

In 1973, after Malik had been sentenced to death for the murder of one of his followers, but two years before his eventual execution, V.S. Naipaul revisited Trinidad to research the background to the trial. The visit produced two responses, the journalism of 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad' and the novel, Guerrillas (1975). Both stand as works in their own right, but

there is much to be learned about Naipaul's methods and preoccupations by exploring their relationship.

Naipaul seems to have seen in the Malik case further evidence that the relationship of Black and White was mutually corrupting, and for the ill-consequences of racial mixing and the proneness of the Negro to mimicry, fantastic delusions and dependence. As in so much of Naipaul's journalism there is a mixture of tendentious generalisation, insight and honesty in pursuing flavour and detail. Sometimes the two tendencies clash. For instance, Naipaul links the murders in Arima and the 1970 Black Power revolt in Trinidad, and connects Malik's fund-raising activities in Britain to that revolt:

And it can be no coincidence that in March 1970, immediately after the Trinidad Revolution, he started on his largest fund-raising exercise, to make the big killing before his return to Trinidad.¹²⁶

Yet a few pages later Naipaul makes it clear that Malik fled Britain to avoid a trial. I have indicated above that the Black Power revolt had genuine class and cultural motivations, but Naipaul has disingenuously expressed his astonishment that there could be such a revolt in a country with a black Government. He is too taken by the way Malik can be made to fit his thesis to confront the movement's actuality. He writes:

While the dream of redemption lasts, Negroes will continue to exist only that someone might be their redeemer. (p.70)

This dream is seen by Naipaul as a 'deep corruption' in the Negro:

...a wish to be granted dispensation from the pains of development, an almost religious conviction that oppression can be turned into an asset, race into money. (p.70)

In fact it was Malik's failure to understand the political basis of the revolt which made him a wholly peripheral figure in Trinidad. And Naipaul, despite his attempt to yoke the two events together is honest enough to recognise that Malik was a joke in Trinidad, 'the Black Power man who was neither powerful nor black' (p.23) though

the last quotation indicates another misconception: there were a good many who took part in the revolt who were not 'black' either. Malik was in fact sourly critical of the 1970 uprising and, as Naipaul reveals, wrote a sycophantic letter to Dr. Williams. Again, Naipaul very honestly records that those who fell for Malik were 'the cynical and parasitic new men of Trinidad', impressed by his fictitious affluence and casual generousities. It was precisely against this class that the idealistic anger of the revolt was directed.

Where Naipaul's material supports his thesis more securely is in his devastatingly acerbic portrayal of the vanities of those whites who lionised characters like Malik, and those blacks for whom there was 'no point in being black and angry unless there were white people to witness.' (p.5-6) Naipaul saw Malik having become white people's 'very own and complete Negro', his 'very absence of originality, his plasticity,' enabling him to give people 'the kind of Negro they wanted'. (p.18) This may well have been a just summary of Malik's character, but it is clear that Naipaul sees these characteristics as being part of a more general 'Negro' personality type. He argues that Malik's career was 'like the ventures of so many Negroes who act not out of a sense of vocation but to trap themselves into performing, as Negroes, for an alien audience.' (p.38) This is an idea which is, of course, recognisable from The Mimic Men. There is pity of a lofty kind for the poor black actor who is 'required ceaselessly to perform,' but pity from an ethnocentric perspective. No opportunity is lost in detailing the astonishing lengths to which Malik and his followers were prepared to go in their play-acting: how Yeates was known as the Supreme Captain of the Fruit of Islam in Malik's Black Liberation Army, how Malik was 'doing agriculture' in an already mature garden, how Malik had idolised himself in the novel which he had

written from the point of view of an upper class Englishwoman who is, 'absolut ly bowld, litteraly. I took a seat and gazed upon this marvel, Mike,' (p.60) and how Mike is acclaimed by the crowds, 'We go crown him King.' (p.63) Naipaul also draws on older elements of the stereotype of the 'stupid black', referring to a childhood incident when Malik stole a racing-bicycle recognisable to everyone in the neighbourhood, just as in adult life he had included in the inventory of his property and enterprises things which belonged to others and were bound to be found out as such before very long. ~

Naipaul also draws on another familiar stereotype in his picture of Malik as a 'red man' who suffered from a confused identity. Naipaul detects a real pain over his blackness behind the flippant tone of Malik's ghosted autobiography, and argues that Malik only played at being a Negro (because that suited the times) and worked hard at the role because he knew he could always leave it. Naipaul's comment on Malik's humour in calling his Black Power group RAAS, is self-revealing. He argues that 'it could only have been made by a man who felt that he could, when the time came, withdraw from his negro role.' (p.31) The comment seems to assume that someone who was really black would not be capable of joking about blackness and that no-one, other than to liberate credulous whites from their money, who was only part black would want to claim blackness.

Reading this study in relation to Guerrillas shows again the strong facticity of Naipaul's fiction, and how much his art lies in simplifying and making shapely. There are though major shifts of emphasis. In Guerrillas, Naipaul develops the character of Jimmy Ahmed as a far more vulnerable and lucid figure than the Malik of 'The Killings in Trinidad', and casts him much more in the role of victim of the roles others thrust on him than the con-man exploiting the world's credulity. Naipaul also excises from

the character of Ahmed the more melodramatic and demoniac aspects of the Malik he portrays, for instance the detail that shortly before the murder of Gail Benson, Malik allegedly drank animal's blood. The simplifications occur in two main areas. Malik's relationship with Jamal, his Afro-American partner, disappears, to be replaced by Ahmed's relationship to Roche, the white South African who ironically comes to play the role of 'massa'. The other absence in the novel is of the two Indians who were present in Malik's household at the time of the murders, and of the Indian girls who were part of his entourage. Even in 'The Killings in Trinidad' Naipaul does not have much to say about the Indians, though he does refer ironically to the way one of them, Chadee, (of 'good family') was reduced to the occupation of yard-boy in Malik's commune. But Naipaul never really explores why the two Indians were drawn into the group. It seems probable that Naipaul excluded the Indian presence in the society he creates in Guerrillas in order to focus intensively on the psycho-pathology of the black-white relationship. Perhaps the nearest analogue to the role of Indian interloper in the novel is the character of Harry De Tunja, a Portuguese Jewish Creole. Although De Tunja has been on the island for over thirty years he recalls being accosted by an old black man with the accusation, 'You is a Jew,' whereas his white companion, a Creole from an old slave-owning family, is ignored. De Tunja remarks how his accuser did not 'point to Sebastian and say, "You is a white man." He knew it was Mr Sebastian. It is the complicity of master and slave; 'This is their place.'¹²⁷

However, Guerrillas is very clearly not only about the black-white relationship or the 'psychopathology' of the 'Negro'. Indeed, several critics have argued that the novel extends the universal dimensions of Naipaul's art.¹²⁸ There is some truth in the claim, but it seems to me that whether Naipaul is exploring his ideas

about personality or sexual relationships in general, he 'universalizes' on the basis of his characterization of 'the Negro' and of black-white relations. For instance, the idea of the 'diffuse', unstable personality which has been part of his concept of the Negro is applied to a character like Jane:

She was under no obligation to make a whole of her attitudes or actions. It was useless, as he [Roche] had found, to point out her contradictions. (p.100)

Similarly even more than in The Mimic Men Naipaul makes the sordid failure of sexual relationships and black-white relationships metaphors for each other. Sexual encounters lead to pyrrhic victors and humiliated losers. Jane's sexual history has been a cycle of 'passion, distress and violation.' In her relationship with Roche, she is 'the violated, he the comforter,' (p.97) an analogue for the relationship of violated black and the comforting white liberal. Jane's adventure with Ahmed both follows and inverts this pattern, though she is not to know that Ahmed dreams of both violating and comforting a white woman, or that her desire to be violated will be fatally achieved. At first, though, it is the white woman who violates, as Jane, selfish in her lust, sucks Ahmed's manhood out of him. She swallows him up with 'her hard big kiss', reducing him to a premature ejaculation: 'his little strained strength leaked out of him, and it was all over.' (p.80) Afterwards, hating her, he feels 'that emptiness he had lived with for so long'. (p.81) and that his room has been violated.

Ahmed's psychological emasculation is linked to the near literal emasculation Meredith suffers when he allows himself to be manipulated by the Government into playing the role of popular hero during the uprising. The crowd reject him as too much involved in the white world, too 'Afro-Saxon', strip him naked, hold a knife at his genitals and make him run for his life. Both Ahmed and Meredith have their revenges on the white world for their suffering. When Jane visits Ahmed again the roles are reversed:

this time he violates, but violator and victim are still in mutual complicity. After Ahmed spits in her mouth, Jane tells him, 'That was lovely' and despite his sudden brutalities calls out, 'Love, love.' It is only when he buggers her in an 'act of contempt' and tells her, 'Your are rotten meat' that Jane shows any awareness of her danger, and even then, 'it was the tone, rather than the words that alarmed her.' Parallel to the bugging is Meredith's verbal dismemberment of Peter Roche in the radio interview.

From the sordid violations at the heart of intimate relationships, Naipaul works outwards to the corruptions of social relations and the hopelessness of a society whose culture is rooted in slavery. The thread which links these levels is the maimed personality of the Caribbean Black, broken by self-hatred and unattainable desire, and trapped in fantasy and paranoia. Black political action, whether Ahmed's commune or the popular uprising which shakes the island, is seen simply as a collective symptom of individual derangement. Meredith argues that the government of the island is based on a faulty notion of the population's rationality: 'We don't make enough allowance for the madness,' (p.138) he says. Indeed, it is the failure of each of the major characters to recognise how much the island is trapped in the derangements of the past which destroys their contentment, security or life.

That past invades the present in countless ways. There is Mrs. Grandlieu, an old coloured woman from a planting family whose parties are incomplete without some anti-negro joke, or a reminder to black guests of the 'oddity of their presence in her house, where until recently Negroes were admitted only as servants.' Her speech is larded with sayings which reek of the brutal sensibilities of the past, such as 'his mouth ran like a sick nigger's arse.' (p.52) There is also her story about how her father-in-law was poisoned by one of his estate workers and had

spent his last hours:

...thinking about Negroes and the police and punishment. As though on the last day of his life he went back a hundred and fifty years and was a slave-owner again. (p.132)

De Tunja prepares to flee from the island precisely because, 'you wonder what century you living in' (p.131) fearing that the black rebellion which briefly sweeps the island will force him into a slave-owning mentality. He tells Peter and Jane, 'To tell you the truth, I'm not too happy about living alone in this house with JosephI got that big, hulking, hard-back nigger-man walking about my house and yard.' (p.181) Behind De Tunja's characteristically ironic exaggeration there remains the fact that he has taken to carrying a gun.

Suffocating memories also linger on amongst the descendants of the slaves. When Roche goes to visit Stephens's mother he is shocked by the violence of her hatred for the Thrushcross experiment. She sees it as an attempt to reimpose slavery on black people:

Nobody bringing back plantation days, you hear me! Not you, Sablich's or that Chinee man [Ahmed]. (p.111)

And indeed, when Peter and Jane visit Thrushcross what they see is more like some run-down slave plantation than the modern, politically advanced commune of the fantasy communiques that Jimmy Ahmed produces. Ahmed himself lives in a comfortable house separate from the spartan squalor of the 'communards', in a parody relationship of the grand house to the nigger-yard. Out in the vegetable garden, knee-deep in weeds, the boys play at the slave stereotype of malingering ineptitude:

As if in parody of nineteenth century plantation prints, which local people had begun to collect...with sullen downcast eyes, as though performing an unpleasant duty, were planting out long-stalked tomato seedlings which, as soon as they were set in their dusty little holes, quailed and drooped. (p.20-21)

The most crippling legacy of slavery is once again the ambivalence of all the black characters, with the exception of Stephens, towards their race and towards whiteness. Meredith, for instance, appears at first to Roche to be a complete person, but greater acquaintance reveals this persona to be 'a creation' under which lie a mass of resentments, 'rages, deprivations and unappeased ambitions.' (p.135) Playing a projection game at De Tunja's house, Meredith expresses a vulnerability little different from the slum-boy, Bryant's:

He raised his head slightly, so that again the great gap between his everted nostrils and his mouth was noticeable... He said, 'I would like to express myself fully.' And for a while he held his head in the same raised position, and the expression on his face, of the bullied schoolboy, remained unchanged. (p.145)

There is the paranoia of those who daub 'Birth Control is a Plot Against the Negro Race' on the city's walls, or Mrs Stephens whose 'disordered' speech, as she tells Roche of her fears about a return to slavery, makes him feel 'he was getting glimpses of a personality and a world that were as alien and shut-in as that choked little room (p.111) Although Mrs Stephens is proud of the black government ('Israel is in her glory'), her room speaks of a need to succeed in terms of whiteness: pride of place is given to a photograph of her son in England in an academic gown. Roche hears a similar mixture of aggression and self-contempt in the phrase 'rotten meat' which Mrs Stephens uses (as does Ahmed later) to describe white women who have sex with black men. The phrase, of course, suggests that the woman somehow becomes defiled by the contact. There are also Bryant's self-pitying confusions which are aggravated by his addition to the 'interracial-sex films with Negro men as star-boys! Watching such a film Bryant breaks down and weeps for:

...the man within the body Bryant carried...watching the film, he began to grieve for what was denied him: the future in which he became what he truly was, not a man with a gun, a big profession or big talk, but himself, and as himself was loved and readmitted to the house and the people in the

house. He began to sob; and other people were sobbing with him. (p.37)

The novel undoubtedly expresses a deep and genuine pity for the black person who feels excluded from the human house, who feels, in George Lamming's phrase, always a person 'in spite of'; but whereas Lamming sees the black person as frequently engaged in the active process of redefinition, Naipaul's pity seems at times patronising, particularly when his dominant image is of the black person who is incapable of escape. These reservations are crystallised for me in Naipaul's portrayal of Jimmy Ahmed. On the one hand, the portrayal seems fixed and limited within an increasingly familiar stereotype, yet the artistic expression of this image is subtle and moving. Structurally Ahmed's ambivalences are very dramatically expressed through his relationships with Jane and Bryant, and textually through Naipaul's brilliant creation of Ahmed's different voices and the effective use of literary allusion to deepen the resonances of the theme.

Thus Ahmed's pathetic urge for self-aggrandisement is expressed in the self-projective novel he is writing (where he describes himself as a 'saviour' for the 'ordinary people...they will parade in the streets and offer him the crown'); (p.62) in the absurd communiques he issues from the commune as Haji James Ahmed, ('Nobody's slave or stallion, I'm a warrior and torch bearer'); and in his attempts to impress Jane, meeting her at a hotel he was excluded from as a boy, and making the 'pathetic and absurd gesture' of tipping the doorman as they leave. In his letters, however, Ahmed expresses a lucid awareness that he has no such exalted position among the people. He writes to his friend Roy:

...the house is full up now, there are no more mansions. I suppose like everybody else I fooled myself that there was a mansion waiting somewhere for me, but I didn't really fool myself...I didn't believe there was or would ever be any mansion for me. (p.87)

He writes acutely and dismissively of 'those Harlem movies about interracial sex they're feeding the people on to keep them quiet', but pictures himself as a Heathcliff whose Catherine tells him, 'Your mother was an Indian Princess and your father was the emperor of China.' (p.62) His real pain comes from the gap between his periods of lucidity and his inability to escape from the futility and absurdity of his fantasies. The pain enrages. He must both impress Jane and alarm her with his hostility to her whiteness. Ultimately, of course, he buggers and murders her, the ending Meredith has predicted for the 'kind of dynamism' which grips Ahmed.

The dynamism is powered by racial uncertainty. He parades his blackness for Jane and Roche, but the reality is the conspicuous Englishness of his room at Thrushcross Grange, whose name, of course, is identified with gentility. His real attitudes towards the Blacks he has come to redeem are revealed in his novel where his white admirer, Clarissa, uses phrases which Ahmed subsequently uses himself. Clarissa refers to 'Those good for nothing natives,' 'black louts', but of the Ahmed figure she says, 'You wouldn't believe that he can be so different from them' and describes him as a 'man of good blood' of a 'gold colour' (p.62) Ahmed's feelings about his blackness are focussed on his treatment of Bryant, whom he sees as the black part of himself, 'very ugly, damaged from birth, who expressed all that he saw of himself in certain moods.' (p.43) He insists that he has given Bryant 'so much love' but the reality is sexual exploitation and contempt. He sees Bryant as 'shiftless and feckless like the others, a slum child and starving but they don't mind, yam and breadfruit and saltfish is all they know about'. (p.227-228) The allusion is to the Froudean slander of idle Blacks loafing under the breadfruit tree after the abolition of slavery, an overtone also suggested in Ahmed's description of how he treats Bryant when the youth becomes unhinged:

...I leave food for-him outside the door, you would think he is a dog, and he comes like a dog and eats the food... people always make you hate them, because I treat him like a dog and he comes like a dog...(p.228)

His attitude to whiteness is equally ambivalent. It is summed up in his recurring image of the raped white girl who is given a comforting drink from the cupped hands of one of her black attackers. The story is so potent for him that the act of writing it into his novel gives him an orgasm. In the Ahmed novel 'Clarissa' (the name, of course, of the raped heroine of Samuel Richardson's novel) is made to think that 'Jimmy' is 'the only man who can turn this hate into love.' At the end of the novel Ahmed is split between Jane and Bryant. The more he becomes involved with the white woman the more he alienates and unhinges Bryant, and the side of himself that Bryant represents. He tries to resolve the conflict by giving Jane to Bryant to kill. He tells her, 'Bryant and I are not friends now, Jane. You'll help to make us friends.' (p.240) He hopes by killing her he will ease the pain of his unrequited white desires. But killing her solves nothing, because he is killing a large part of himself. As Jane dies, Ahmed thinks once more of his dream of rape and comforting water. Her death takes even that from him, and takes too that white witness which has given him his sense of being:

...But the eyes below him had closed. They knew nothing; they acknowledged nothing; they had taken away everything with them. He entered a void; he disappeared in that void.
(p.243)

The end echoes his experience with Majorie, the white wife in England whose unconditional acceptance of him had given him a temporary wholeness:

You made me a man for the first time...I didn't have to hide anything from you, I didn't have to pretend I was anyone else. (p.228)

but whose withdrawal of acceptance left him feeling 'like dirt again.' After Jane's death, Ahmed is left not knowing 'who or what he was' except that he carries the stigma of his negro blood, the stigma revealed in his dream of the Sudanese whore who demands of

him, 'Nigger, give me a dollar,' and Ahmed feels 'betrayed, his secret known.' (p.244)

From this imprisonment of the spirit wrought by the slave past there appears no escape. Indeed, Naipaul parodies all the ways slaves attempted to escape from the theft of their full humanity. There are analogies to the survival of Africanisms, the tradition of marronage and slave rebellion. Each is portrayed as a dead-end and part of the madness which afflicts the society. The African primitivism of the cultists on the beach which so alarms De Tunja has already been discussed; the tradition of marronage, of escape from the plantation, is suggested in the references to the 'wild disordered men, tramping old paths, across gardens, between houses ...like aborigines recognising only an ancestral landscape and insisting on some ancient right of way.' (p.31) But it is an escape from the suffocations of a world made by slavery only into a kind of animal disorder. Jane is shocked out of her increasing indifference to the public displays of madness she witnesses when she finds a derelict 'wild man of the hills' asleep in a shed in her garden:

...in a smell...of dead small animals, a wild man of the hills was asleep. His matted hair was done in long pig tails, reddish brown in places and with a kind of thick blue grease. (p.59)

There are also the millenarian dreams of escape and redemption, which Naipaul has described as the corruption of the Negro psyche, and which keep the Negro in bondage to any new messiah to come along. Mrs Stephens lives in the hope that '...after Israel it was the turn of Africa. No matter what anybody say or do.' (p.112) The vulnerability to redeemers is portrayed in the enthusiasm of Adela, Roche's erstwhile stolid black house-keeper, for Dr. 'Handy' Byam, a white evangelist who tells his black audience that 'Israel is in her glory and the power is now on the Nig-ro people.' Adela reports how Byam, '...call on us to stop and shout if we were cured. And you shoulda hear them shout, Mr. Roche.' (p.118) Naipaul suggests

ironically that Byam, with his Southern States pronunciation of 'Nig-ro' probably has rather different ideas about black people than Adela imagines.

Finally, when the people move beyond their dreams of escape into actual rebellion that too is described as a futile act of madness, as doomed to humiliating failure as the slave rebellion. Naipaul mockingly describes in The Loss of Eldorado. De Tunja describes the rebellion as an act of childish rage, and the people as children waiting for some authoritarian father-figure to restore order:

Those guys down there don't know what they're doing. All this talk of independence, but they don't really believe that times have changed. They still feel they're taking a chance, and that when the show is over somebody is going to go down there and start dishing out licks. And they half want it to be over, you know. ... They would go crazy if somebody tell them that this time nobody might be going down to dish out licks and pick up pieces. (p.189)

And after the token arrival of the Americans, the rebellion subsides as De Tunja has predicted, former rebels making for cover with their tails between their legs. Prophetically of real life he reports that 'Everyman is now a government man, and they love the Americans. The whole thing can make you cry.' (p.195)

Such is the 'Negro' world, contact with which makes the lives of all the main characters founder. Roche the South African revolutionary hero finds himself playing the parodic role of absentee proprietor to Ahmed, Jane pays with her life when she fails to understand the depths of hatred and desire she stirs up in Ahmed and Bryant. De Tunja is driven into migrating again, and Meredith is humiliated by the black masses he imagines he can lead. That too is Ahmed's fate, to be destroyed by the black cry for racial redemption in which he can take no real part. His struggle has been more personal. Briefly he had touched a chord in the hearts of the rebellious blacks:

...they knew what I was offering them, the glory and pain of manhood, never mind the revolution,...I could have burned this place down to the ground...(p.229)

One is reminded of the parallel episode in The Mimic Men when Guru-deva brings his moral message to the black strikers and, after the brief moment of connection, there is a similar racially motivated rejection. Ahmed is rejected because he is not black, when Mrs Stephens, mourning the death of her son, refuses to have him into her house:

...and those crazy black people started shouting for Israel and Africa, and I was a lost man, but I was always lost...(p22)

There are, however, two areas of possibility suggested in the novel. There is the figure of Stephens, who never actually appears, but who, through the glimpses we get of him in the reports of others, is revealed as the one true guerrilla and man of action. Unlike the other boys at Thrushcross, Stephens appears to have been whole and without racial neurosis. His absence from the commune is noted in the loss of noise and gaiety. It is evident Stephens has seen through Ahmed's pretences when Ahmed refers to him as 'a little boy who wanted to kill me dead.' (p.27) We are given an admiring glimpse of Stephens's street-wisdom, of how he reads the newspapers 'in his own way' as a kind of 'private circular' full of information about the activities of the street gangs. Yet as a man of action Stephens has his vulnerability. He allows himself 'to be led to Thrushcross Grange' and allows 'himself to fall, as Roche had intended he should fall, for his own semi-political slogans...' (p.104) And ultimately, of course, Stephens is shot dead by the Government. The island remains a place 'whose possibilities were now exhausted', the Caribbean Black portrayed as a person incapable of gaining release from the stigma of having been a slave. The Black Power revolt seems to have been for Naipaul no more than a shaking of the chains.

Yet there is also a moment when Naipaul hints at an alternative perspective, a genuine critique of Black Power from a radical political position. It comes when Meredith is criticising Roche's book about his experiences as a saboteur in South Africa. He makes Roche admit that his book has 'no framework of political belief' (p.209), that he was an 'amateur', making gestures and that the book's message is 'You transgressed; you were punished; the world goes on.' (p.211)

The critique is also Naipaul's critique of Black Power and one which is very similar to that expressed by Earl Lovelace, a socially committed Black writer, in The Dragon Can't Dance (1979). The implications are that real change must come out of a coherent framework of political belief, be carried through by genuine revolutionary action, not gestures of protest and, above all, start from the vision of a remade world rather than remaining trapped by despair over injustices which have come to seem one's natural portion. The pity is that this vision is frequently obscured by Naipaul's stereotyped perception of the Afro-Caribbean person.

The Broken Dream of Ethnic Unity

The previous chapter focussed on fictional portrayals of Afro-Caribbean persons and society which expressed more widely Indian-held ethnic prejudices. The present chapter discusses that body of Indo-Caribbean writing which has displayed an awareness of the nature of Indian attitudes and explored the historical and contemporary bases on which Afro-Indian unity might be achieved.

The fact that most, though not all, of the writing in the latter category was written by Indo-Guyanese writers (whereas most of the ethnocentric writing examined in the previous chapter was Trinidadian in origin) seems to me evidence of the role of the prevailing social formations, ideology and political culture of a society in shaping the character of its imaginative writing. Although ethnic relations in Guyana have been no less divided and antagonistic than in Trinidad, and indeed in the 1962-64 period spilled into a level of bloody violence never experienced there, they seem to me to have been of a significantly different kind.

Firstly, relations seem to have been more intimate. Spatially, as was outlined in Chapter Two, Indians and Blacks live far closer together than they do in Trinidad, though most Guyanese villages are ethnically exclusive. Secondly, for reasons discussed in Chapter Seven, the Hindu middle-class, which has generally had the strongest anti-Negro prejudices, has been far less influential in Guyana than in Trinidad, and though there was also a revival of Hinduism in Guyana in the 1950s, it was largely confined to the religious sphere.² Conversely, the social formation and ideology of a large sector of the rural Indo-Guyanese has been very different from that of the rural Indian population in Trinidad. In particular the former estate communities with their social solidarity, industrial militancy and proletarian, non-Brahminical ideology, have, it seems to me, been less prone to the influence of caste ideology, which

I have argued, has tended to reinforce the holding of negative racial views about Caribbean Blacks. Before the troubles of 1962-64 there were traditions of good relations between the Indian majorities and the small number of black Creoles who worked in the sugar industry. Thirdly, both major political parties in Guyana have presented themselves as socialists committed to ethnic unity. Though this has been far from the reality, their stance has had some effect in determining the ideological framework for the literary portrayals of ethnic relations. Fourthly, the very events of 1962-64, in part a product of the relative closeness of the groups in Guyana, have made the issue of racial understanding appear a much more pressing one than in Trinidad. This has had the positive effect of prompting Indo-Guyanese writers to explore the possibilities and necessity of ethnic unity more actively than their Trinidadian counterparts, but there has perhaps also been a negative wariness about dealing with the sensitive issues of racial conflict and cultural oppression. It is perhaps also significant that it is mainly in the work of Indo-Trinidadian writers that the most searching analyses of Indian racial chauvinism have been made.

The other reasons for the differences between Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese writing must be sought in the biographies of the Guyanese writers discussed in the present chapter. Many, such as Sadeek, Kempadoo, Dabydeen, Itwaru, Kanhai, Guska (Kissoon), Mahadai Das and Rooplall Monar, grew up on sugar estates and were at some point in their lives involved with socialist politics, and in particular with the People's Progressive Party. Although many of these writers have subsequently fled from the political oppressions of Burnham's Guyana, they left behind them a body of work which is based on the concept, experience notwithstanding, that racial unity is the norm, division the deviation.

The dominant ideological influence on their work was the politics of the P.P.P. which had been formed by Dr. Cheddi Jagan in 1950.

Jagan had grown up on an estate, in an Hindu but westernising family. His father's closest friends included Afro-Guyanese workers and Jagan himself attended a Negro University in America. On his return to Guyana he had concentrated on building links between the radical nationalist intelligentsia, mainly Creole, and the Indian estate population.⁴ Along with Afro-Guyanese such as Forbes Burnham, Ashton Chase, Sidney King and Martin Carter, Jagan created the first mass nationalist party in Guyanese politics which, at the elections of 1953, succeeded in winning a sweeping 18 out of 24 seats. However, subsequent investigations of voting patterns have shown that this was not quite the triumph over ethnic divisions it appeared. In general the P.P.P. put up Indian candidates in Indian areas and Blacks in African areas; and though there was some cross-voting there was also a good deal of straight ethnic voting which was only negated by the P.P.P.'s superior organisation over fragmented opposition. Nevertheless, the P.P.P.'s triumph was widely felt to be a victory for working class unity over racial divisions.⁵

For reasons outlined in Chapter Eight, there is little Indo-Guyanese writing in this period, and still less which deals with Indian-Black relationships. Two stories, both published in 1953, represent opposite approaches. Sheik Sadeek's 'Wait Till Benji Come'⁶ presents an idealised analogy to the P.P.P.'s victory in the friendship between an ex-indentured labourer, Kunan, and George Sethman whom Kunan feels is a 'very-very good eddicate blackman'. Kunan helps Sethman support his son, Benji, through high school and legal training, and both await his return to help put right the injustices Kunan, in particular, suffers at the hands of members of the Portuguese and mulatto middle-class. By contrast, Paul G. Singh's story, 'That Angry Wave'⁷ deals with Indian racial prejudices provoked by the plans of an Indian girl to marry a Black man. Though the story is full of melodramatic elements (an elopement and near drowning) it is honest about the persistence of racial feelings, despite the P.P.P.'s success.

Singh's honesty was well founded, for after the British Government's high-handed and anti-democratic dismissal of the P.P.P. cabinet within only 127 days of taking office, the suspension of the constitution and the imprisonment of leading members of the party, the P.P.P. began to split into two rival socialist parties, each with its own ethnic support, though each retained the veneer of an ethnically-mixed leadership. Both groups were driven to widen their electoral support, and did so by bringing into their parties non-socialist and ethnically chauvinist elements.

Again, with the exception of a few poems published in the late 1960s, there has been little attempt in Indo-Guyanese writing to explore the breakdown in ethnic relations which occurred from 1955 onwards. One novel which implicitly recognises these facts is Lauchmonen's (Peter Kempadoo's) Old Thom 's Harvest (1965). It is a naive novel, some of the events in which only make sense if the reader realises that it is set in the Interim Government period of 1954-1957 when a nominated executive made up of right-wing political 'has beens' was imposed on the population. Strains begin to appear in the relations between Indians and Blacks, in particular within the family of Charlie Thom, the former estate headman, an Indian married to a black wife. In the economic crisis, Charlie Thom tries to revert to traditional Indian solutions, by planting rice (though the local environment is unsuitable) and cherishing his solitary bull-calf with obsessive devotion. His black wife, Ma Finey, supports him loyally throughout, but his dougla children abandon their Indian patrimony and Ma Finey's own black daughter, Blanche, is increasingly contemptuous of 'this coolie old man' and works to weaken her half-brother's and sister's loyalties. These tensions are set against Ma Finey's remembrance of times past when Africans and Indians lived together on the estate in the richness of their cultural difference.

Kempadoo is careful not to ascribe racial blame for what occurred. His targets are those who betrayed the people, so that there are both Indian traitors like Singh, the rice-board man, a stereotyped toady with a 'mouthful of gold teeth flashing and ringed fingers sticking out a mile from his hands', and black enemies of the people like the new Minister of Agriculture, the Honorable Eddie Joseph, a corrupt big-shot in sun-shades with a taste for attractive Indian girls, or Polo, Blanche's errant husband, 'a squat negro, a stumpy little piece of a man...thick woolly nigger hair ...round potato face with a broad fleshy skin-back nose' who returns to the village as a bogus black preacherman, full of the spirit (bushrum) and eager to let the 'sisters' try out his 'sweet-stick'. He is taken up by an American evangelical outfit and set up in a church with a hefty salary and the task of breaking the villager's resistance to the imposed government. As Polo says:

Society people scared like hell about this village. They ain't want them to vote again next election for them progressives who ain't believe in no church and they want me to keep on scaring them with all this Lord-talk.!!

In reality, a good deal of C.I.A. money was channelled into the anti-P.P.P. unions, the P.N.C. and some church groups, though Kempadoo does not make this explicit.

By the time of the publication of Old Thom's Harvest in 1965, the P.P.P. Government had been ousted from power by the imposition of a proportional representation system uniquely designed by the British Government for that purpose and by a cynical electoral alliance between the 'socialist' P.N.C. and the extreme right-wing United Force party. In the years between 1962-1964 these two groups had been involved in attempts to overthrow the P.P.P. by violent political demonstrations and industrial action financed by the C.I.A. One might have expected that Indo-Guyanese writing would have repeated the kind of ethnic bitterness and negative perception of black politics found in the work of Trinidadian writers such as the Naipauls and Dennis Mahabir discussed in the previous chapter.

On the contrary, there is a consistent attempt in Indo-Guyanese writing to explore the possibilities of ethnic unity, and some recognition that Indians shared the responsibility for the divisions which scarred society.

The P.P.P. had indeed, as a political expedient, moved in a more communalist direction after it was re-elected in 1957, when the constitution was restored. In the 1961 elections its unofficial slogan had been, 'apaan jaat', (vote for your own) and it is possible to see a distinct pattern of ethnic bias in the distribution of economic resources (investment favoured the Party's rural Indian supporters) in the period between 1957-1964.¹² Between 1962-1964, Indians were undoubtedly involved in racial counter-violence and, after the P.P.P.'s defeat in 1964, for a time the communalist elements in the party became more ascendant. In that year, for instance, Moses Bhagwan, leader of the party's youth organisation, was expelled for 'left deviationism' but mainly because he had criticised its ethnic chauvinism and questioned Jagan's commitment to ethnic integration.¹³

In plays such as Niamatalli Ameerally's, Appanjaat (196?)¹⁴ and Puran Chatteram's one act radio play, Vote For Me (c.1963),¹⁵ there are attacks on those candidates, Indian or African, who make use of race or religion to further their cause. The hero of Chatteram's play asks whether racist politicians can, '...give us shelter? Can they put a shirt upon our backs? Can they fill our bellies?'.¹⁵ The same theme is treated very effectively in Sheik Sadeek's play, Fish Koker, first performed in 1965, which is set in a mixed African-Indian fishing village in which all are very conscious that they face the same struggle for survival and the same enemy in the elements. As Ramjohn tells Cadell, 'Ahbe gat tanup trang an hussil lakka when e spring tide catcham you. All e rattin tory bout race an colah gat fu tap.' African Caddell finds a neatly proverbial agreement, 'One fingah cannah ketch louse' and complains to Ramjohn

that:

...dem gat ah lat ah asses wha gu try fu poke fiah battam de race, colah and class pat; we gat fu wahn dem suckas strang, ar else nah only stavation gu tear tail but Mr Naked Ass. 16

There are indeed conflicts among the fishermen and women, but the differences of race and culture are only one source of conflict: youth and age, male and female, respectable and outcaste all clash at various points in the play. However, although Sadeek does not conceal racial differences, there are only hints in the play that Guyana had just emerged from bitter communal conflict, and this is an evasion. There are, though, allusions to a more innocent past, and recent events are hinted at in the nervousness of the fishermen over any sign of racial argument. When a Negro and an Indian girl pass by childishly abusing each other, Ramjohn's son tells them:

Alyou na gat sence! Now is not time to tease and backbite an talk bout coolie and blackman! Now is time to hole han an play an pull togedda! Wha kine big people alyou gu grow to?
(p.12)

Besides their occupation, Indian and African fishermen and women share a common class outlook and a common imaginative possession: their language. When Ritter, the white Guyanese fishing-gear salesman tells the villagers how dedicated he is to helping them and his country, Ramjohn expresses their common suspicion in a typically pungent way:

...Tell me cooliemans dis, Sahib: Blackman an coolie sweatam till tun lakka cackwarie what tek whole day sun ah kokah-tap, an e pickni eatam rice wid sal an pepah till get white cannah mout; when backra-man cack-up e tail in cool breeze eaten toas bread, buttah, jam an e ham! drinkin e whiskey an e gin...! Tel me tru-tru tory, Sahib, me me mus still tek e sweat-an -breat nancy-tory? (p.8)

Sadeek, indeed, makes the creolese dialogue of the play both the medium and the message. As the medium, the language makes the play unfailingly vivid, though the action is very scant - simply the decision whether to set up a co-operative to buy modern fishing tackle. As message, the play demonstrates that in their shared creativity with language, African and Indian villager have a

common means of perceiving and dealing with the world. Though Sadeek carefully suggests the differences between the creolese spoken by Indian Ramjohn and African Cadell, they both possess a medium rich in proverbial wisdom, capacity for metaphorical invention and play. Thus Sadeek catches the Hindi-derived reduplications and the attachment of the direct object pronoun to the verb in Ramjohn's speech:

Dem backraman nah bin honely beatam-beatam, but bin ah
juckam-juckam wid e pitch faak an den nailam pan e crass! (p10)

But this only parallels similar qualities in Cadell's speech as he reminisces about his drinking:

Ole Cadell bin senin down dis brew down dis ole hatch ah
mine langah dan buckman bin shootin fish pon de postage
stamp. (p.5)

And it is through her command of creolese word-play that Betty, Ramlall's wife, is able to defuse the insult that Cadell gives when he fears that she will not allow her husband to invest in the co-operative:

Cadell: You tak you dam coolie ass an pass me insult me nuh?
Betty: You talkin like if Coolie ass an you blackman one
evah bin fu race. (p.19)

However, if Sadeek portrays his microcosm of Guyanese society moving towards a common purpose, it is on the basis of 'Indian' values. As Betty asserts and Cadell completes:

Betty: Ramlall nevvah believe in feast today an...
Cadell: Famine tomarrah! Me always try to live like the
East Indian, or the Chineeman... (p.20)

and adds that:

In Guyana, blackman wook umteen money, Buddie Ramlall, but
grag, skirt and palvarin was them trinity! Now is a different
set up...(p.21)

Even after the elections of 1968 when the P.N.C. had begun to show very clearly that it was prepared to use fraud to maintain its power, the need for reconciliation and understanding remain dominant themes in Indo-Guyanese writing. Indeed, some of the younger Indian writers had parted company from the P.P.P., and a few, such as

Monar, Mahadai Das, Guska Kissoon, became involved in the Afro-Guyanese dominated P.N.C. and its Guyana National Service scheme. For a period in the early 1970s it was just possible to believe that the Burnham Government was committed to a socialist and anti-imperialist position (it had nationalised bauxite and then sugar resources) and though few Indians had excessive confidence in the P.N.C.'s commitment to genuine cultural diversity, some felt that the only possibility of making the government recognise the existence of Indo-Guyanese culture was to become involved in its otherwise Afro-Guyanese biassed cultural programme.¹⁷

The writing such commitment produced varies immensely in approach and quality. Some is quite frankly political hackwork, some is a genuine attempt to deal with the complex basis of Afro-Indian relationships. Significantly, most of it is in verse, vehicle of desire, rather than in realistic fiction, the favoured means of portraying social actuality. Similarly, much of the writing is set in the past rather than the present.

There are, for instance, a good many poems which deal with the subject of slavery in a way that shows a good deal more sensitivity to black feelings than V.S. Naipaul in The Loss of Eldorado (1969). This was despite the fact that Indians could have been excused a measure of cynicism in their response to the Burnham regime's cultivated pieties towards the Afro-Guyanese past and to the way in which some Afro-Guyanese tried to rationalise the P.N.C.'s seizure of power by arguing that though they were a minority, they were its rightful inheritors by virtue of their sufferings under slavery.

In the late 1950s, when it was still possible to hope that the working class could be united, one finds a young poet, Cecil Prashad, consciously working in the vein of the Afro-Guyanese poet Martin Carter. In 'Somewhere in the Gut of the Forest', Prashad¹⁸ expresses the Guyanese dream of possessing the interior as the

historical fulfilment of the slave revolt the forest has witnessed:

Of a slave banner
 During a shirt-tailed insurrection
 Hacking and burning and looting...

 The forest would tell you too
 That someday the slave will return to the land
 With freedom and singing
 He will push the forest back...

Prashad's poem uses the slave revolt as a shared national image; Gowkaran Ramdial's Shackles of Colonialism (1977), a long, first-person, narrative poem, tries to inhabit the historical figure of the slave even more extensively. However, the historical view within which the survivor of an abortive rebellion recounts his experience is a conventional one, emphasising the savagery of massa and his agents but devoting little attention to the internal lives of the slaves. Though the poem shows evidence of historical research it lacks particularising detail; there is little evocation, for instance, of any surviving African dimension in slave culture. Nevertheless, whilst shunning any temptation to create a mythology of victorious defeat, Shackles of Colonialism bears fraternal witness to the Afro-Guyanese struggle to survive in spirit:

No fetters of the Colonialists
 Were strong enough
 To destroy our race
 And our desire to live.

The poem's particular insights are ones which perhaps come from an Indian estate background; the recognition, for instance, that communal solidarity could be exploited in the interests of production

Even our collective spirit
 Was enslaved
 To keep the sugar mill in action.

There is also an 'Indian' appreciation of the creativity of the worker who, even as a slave,

...tilled the soil
 Which had been for
 Many years 19
 A barren spoil.

At its best the diction is direct and colloquial, but too often, when it aims at an elevated epic tone, it becomes stilted and sometimes bathetic. Nevertheless, Ramdial's poem avoids the romantic-

revolutionary cliches which mar some of Guska Kisson's poems reflecting the slave past in The Masses Create (1978). Here one wonders how many of the poems reflect a genuine feeling for the Afro-Guyanese experience, how much a calculated use of the mythologies the Burnham regime cultivated, by a writer who was both a genuine revolutionary and sometimes a genuine poet, but who knew that a revolutionary Indian poet probably had to use Afro-Guyanese symbols to be heard or to receive any form of State support. At any rate the subject produces poems such as 'Cuffy, I Wish You Were Here', 'Dageraad Enlives'²⁰ and 'The Dutch Chimney at Chateau Margot',²¹ which are among the least distinguished in Kisson's collection. Sometimes he writes like a Rupert Brooke, glorifying the shedding of blood by the slaves who 'gallantly fought and bled' and of the battle-field whose soil is 'consecrated by the blood / Of those brave and freedom-loving sons.' However, in 'Cuffy, I Wish You Were Here' he uses the regime's own hero to criticise it:²²

Our People need heroes like you
Who could put an end to evil reign in high places.

There are, though, more complex responses to the slave-past. Nowhere else in the Caribbean are the historical memories of slavery so alive and so oppressive in the surviving architecture and the man-made environment of canal and poulder. Each of the poets whose work is discussed below grew up on a sugar-estate where the continuities with the slave-past are part of the daily landscape. The importunity of the past is heard in Cyril Dabydeen's 'In the Slumber of Night'¹³ which evokes these 'shadows drifting with life' which haunt the consciousness of the poet as 'hieroglyphs of blood.' These hieroglyphic messages from the past speak to the present with contrary signs, a doubleness explored in two adjacent poems in Dabydeen's Poems of Recession (1972): 'Ode to Cuffy' and 'Heiroglyph'. Both tales are a 'whiplash rhapsody' but in the former it is the 'spirit lifted against oppression' which speaks

to the faltering present:

Let these tales be written in the sky
 our patterns are our pride
 Cuffy's courage comes with the wind
 passion fills our hearts
 O the deep longing within us
 Is the limit of the sky. (p.13)

In the latter though, the past tells a tale of shame, of oppression suffered, the 'continuous hovel of lives lost.' Here the squalor of history bequeaths a sense of deracination and futility:

...the Atlantic's cry
 of shame salted men's brows
 in a narrative
 persisting style
 in the original word of ancestry
 within the hieroglyph of the tribe. (p.14)

Here Dabydeen expresses a consciousness 'of a thwarted vision/ within the middle passage', a wounded preoccupation with the past which taints the present.

A comparable though differently imagined sense of the complexities of the past is expressed in two of M.R.Monar's poems, 'The Chimney at Chateau Margot'²⁴ and 'Patterns'²⁵. The former explores a number of contradictory responses to a sugar estate factory chimney built during the days of slavery. The chimney is a monument to the material power of the Dutch slave owners,

..... unconquered
 After defying time's saddened moments

whilst the hopes of the descendents of those who built it remain unfulfilled:

Caved in alien land
 Often dreaming of a Messiah
 To fulfil their apocalyptic hope.

Yet Monar also sees in the chimney the skills and creativity of the slaves who built it, 'Each stone placed as perfection's image,' whilst recognising that the slaves were constructing the instrument of their own oppression:

Walled themselves to create history
 As blood and tears magic'd the form
 That now towers three centuries old
 Brooding upon the builders it has slain.

'Patterns', also set at Chateau Margot, attempts to explore these ambivalences in an even more dialectical way, going beyond the surface of past injustices to see within them patterns of regeneration. At times bafflingly obscure, the poem seems to suffer from not quite having digested the influence of Wilson Harris's thought. At one level the past tells its familiar tale of suffering:

Here at Chateau Margot
things lie in sleep
breathing in chorus
butchered tales.

But the third stanza of the poem suggests that latent within the day-time captivity of the slave was the inner emotional freedom, symbolised by the activities of the night:

Slaves who cried out
were fleshed by sun
towards patterns;
and moonlit lovers
dusted in affinity
with sugar and whips,
for the metamorphosis.

It is not wholly coherent, but the idea of contrast and change is clear, as it is in the fourth stanza which draws the distinction between the 'decayed stones' of the buildings and the living regeneration in the leaves which:

...recreate into colours
thrilling the soul
to ladders of assimilated perfection.

Again, the allusion to Harris makes it clear that Monar is driving at the idea of the contribution of opposites to the pattern of the whole. Just as it is the 'heaps of rotted mangoes' which are 'begetting new blossoms', so the lives of the slaves, however inglorious, contribute to the onward-going process of history:

though the climber falls
consumed by the tree
which gave him birth in passion
assembling patterns.

In the last stanza, in the image of the storm-driven sea which finally throws its riches up on the beach, Monar projects the turbulences created by the slave past (the names in the lines below were

the places significant in the 1763 rebellion) as the motive force of history, driving on the present in Guyana:

Patterns are forever here
 rising in fury
 like that of a storm
 fishing Dageraad
 Kyk-over-Al
 Fort Nassau
 then dies with immortal wounds
 until waves climaxed the beach
 assuring the fisherman of the Catch.

Attempts to explore the contemporary basis for ethnic unity also vary greatly in both genuineness and quality. Some is naive hackwork such as Petamber Persaud's collection of poems, From Utopia To Paradise (1976) which expresses a fawning admiration for Comrade Burnham, a sadly misplaced confidence in the P.N.C. as a non-racial socialist party, and a simplistic approach to resolving ethnic conflict:

Oh, Fratricide Guyana,
 Black bitches;
 Oh, Fratricide, Guyana,
 Coolie dawgs;
 Can't they come together.
 'Course they can
 Dogs and bitches are one.²⁶

Whether Persaud was advocating the racial mixing that the Burnham Government enthusiastically endorsed, and many Indians²⁷ abhorred, is not clear. However, Sheik Sadeek's 'The Gulf Between', published in 1974, at a time when he was the recipient of a certain amount of P.N.C. patronage, shows a writer who had expressed honest reservations about the difficulties which could arise from Indian-African marriages in several earlier stories, toeing the Government line in a lamely unconvincing way.

Other writers, in marked contrast to the Indo-Trinidadian treatment of this theme, argued that Indians and Africans were united by their common blackness. Neville Matadin wrote in 'Pride' (1968):

...yes I am BLACK
 not white
 full of pride
 who came from
 MONGOLIA AFRICA CHINA MADEIRA INDIA
 not from England and America. 28

An equally rhetorical but more effective poem, Guska Kissoon's 'Black-Bird in a White Cage', in The Masses Create (1978), deconstructs the European version of history and asserts the independent, civilised traditions of Africa, India and China, casting the 'wild Aryan' as the universal villain of history who

Destroyed the pious, peaceful and prosperous peoples
 Of Dravidia, Africa and China.

It is a poem designed for public performance rather than contemplation, and like others in Kissoon's collection suffers from a too unvaried fortissimo:

No, No, No,
 Alexander never conquered two worlds
 Columbus never discovered a new world
 The world was already OLD and BLACK. 29

This emphasis on a common blackness was not widely shared. In 1971 Burnham had welcomed the Afro-American militant Stokely Carmichael to Guyana. The latter had insisted that Black Power was synonymous with a Pan-Africanist approach and suggested that Guyana might have to be racially zoned. His talk of 'kill or be killed' did nothing to calm Indian fears, for whom, as Robert Moore argued, 'Black Power meant only one thing - perpetual black domination... by a group which they regarded as more fanatical in their racism than the present Black holders of power...'.³⁰

However, there was much that Indians and Blacks did share in Guyana, particularly the common experience of creolisation, which is explored in the outstanding poem in Kissoon's The Masses Create, 'Nigger-Yaad'.³¹ Strangely, in a collection written to celebrate the people's creativity, it is the only poem written in creolese, and one of the few poems which treats the people concretely rather than as a revolutionary abstraction. It is also the only poem in the collection which is not fixed in meaning, mirroring the ambivalences

of the culture it explores. 'Nigger-Yaad' is set in the estate days when Indians and Blacks still lived side by side and there was a good deal of inter-ethnic cultural transmission. The poem both enacts the energy and the rich juxtapositions of cultural mingling and explores the contradictory ethos of estate life. It celebrates the solidarity and spirit of resistance ('estate people ah practice cammanis') but also recognises the tendency to passivity and the false hopes of divine and mystical intervention which divert from action. Both the cultural syncretism and the duality of spirit are symbolised in the figure of the estate obeah man who, when he prays, does so:

wid de holy Bible - gaad of de devil,
 wid de holy Koran - prafitt of de Soad,
 wid de holy Gita - destroyah ah destruction
 wid de holy bahtles full ah med'cn.

Under the obeah man's spell things are both turned upside down - and stay the same because:

belief ah kill an belief ah cure.

The obeah man is also the channel for the multiple and contradictory 'desires of the people, some altruistic, others not:

neighba wuk fu neighba

 politician wuk fu powah
 poor wuk fu rich
 policeman wuk fu promotion
 coolie-gyaal wuk fu rich-man
 brahman wuk fu pass english G.C.E.

'Nigger-Yaad' expresses the perceptions of a poet who as a boy had run behind the manager's mule and was still very much part of the village world, but who had espoused scientific socialism. In most of the poems he speaks with the second voice; here the two visions are in tension. He hears the spirit of resistance of the yard in the African and Indian drumming:

while white-man ah listen in e bed
 to de strange gaad of de nigga-yaad stamma in ridams
 like an angry gaad...

but he also sees that in their beliefs in the spirit world the people express an ingrained sense of subservience to the white

master, symbolised in the fear of the 'white jumbie' which:

live in deh bady
raab deh blood
an confuse de mine until deh tun duss.

The spirit world is seen both as a false form of consciousness which expresses the people's mental bugbears and hopes of external intervention but also sustains the will to resist and the belief that one day an unjust world could be righted.

The shared history of African and Indian could also be seen in more negative terms. The Trinidadian poet, Selwyn Bhajan's 'Another World', (³³Quest, 1975) sees Africans and Indians both engaged in a hopeless search for ancestral certainties, though his characterisation of the African quest is distinctly Indian in image:

...the African dreams of
Seeds of untamed naturalness
The beats of fire-chanted freedoms.

whilst the Indian dream is of:

Conch shells that call to cutya
The puja innocence, brass bells
of ancient parables,
Meek dances of stubborn sacrifice.

Both dreams are unrealisable since both Africans and Indians are the victims of 'history's rape':

...unsuspecting hostages
Seeking new life
Forced into flotsam mimicry.

Again, though both dream of cultural purity, both 'Lose face to a callaloo of strains.' Only the natural world of Trinidad is seen as having the power to 'Erase all hymns of home' and:

Sing in new destinies
Message another world
A brand new renaissance
of human hope.

The last lines of idealistic wish sit rather uneasily on the Naipaulian view of history in the first part of the poem and rather hopefully project Bhajan's own feelings about the power of nature into the role of historical agent. In Arnold Itwaru's poem, 'Four Themes', (³⁴1970) there is an ambitious attempt to express a sense of

history which is always in the last resort man-made. It is a technically adventurous poem which makes use of shifts of register, parody, varied rhythmic patterns, the dramatisation of historical voices and elisions and juxtaposition in an attempt to capture the mingling of ethnic experiences, the multiplicity of meanings to be found in Guyanese history and the constant intersections between the past and the present. In 'Prologue', Itwaru describes the previous decade of fire and blood as part of the hell of the past in relation to which the present is 'our limbo', the zone of constant labour before the possibilities of the future can be reached. Fire is used as a symbol both of destructive hatreds and of a creative force which may speed the slow process of transmutation in the alchemical 'melting pot' of labour through which each separate race becomes fully Guyanese. The present is explained to the people as:

These the alembic contortions
O plodders.

The second movement, 'Freedom Voices' takes up the ambivalent images of fire and violence in the context of the slave rebellions of the past, dramatising the opposing voices of Akkarra, the ruthless rebel leader, and Cuffy, the reflective man. Akkarra justifies the violence with impeccable logic:

Is how else
how else
the water raging
their side o' Atlantic sea?

But there is also the voice of Cuffy, the leader who wanted to achieve a political settlement, who reminds the slaves of the indiscriminating destructiveness of violence as a means:

What can I say?
I wanted no war.
Fire consumed us.

In the third movement, 'Immigrants' Itwaru dramatises the voices of the Indian labourer complaining to the Protector of Immigrants ('Crassbee') of the 'promises withered' by the reality of indenture:

cane grow tal
Tall
Tall

O Crassbee
 Can
 Nuh pay
 At all.

and of the dreams of the settled peasant, as he sifts rice grains from chaff, of prosperity in the future:

This beeya bring hope
 India, Matha!
 Drifting in a cloud
 One day, one day!

The final movement of the poem, 'The Years', reviews the complex heritage of the colonial experience shared alike by African and Indian. It involves the process of creolisation through cultivation of the land:

...sugar and rice have evolved home
 Africa and India dim in their glory

but also of being brainwashed by the seductive dreams of Europe, the garbled irrelevance of which Itwaru suggests in the half-remembered snatches of past school lessons:

Lucy Gray lost somewhere in the snow
 Behold the lark!
 O nightingale...

Finally, the poem pictures the people (invoked as 'O plodders', neatly suggesting both Itwaru's admiration for their solid endurance and his frustration with their slowness in creating change) taking possession of the land through the slow, back-breaking processes of labour, the labour which will build the cities of the future in defiance of the racial violence which had almost torn Guyana apart:

It is another November in the quarry, and we have
 dug and axed and crushed the granite
 all those rock hours of building,
 knowing we must build, we must build
 even in defiance of the terror burning in the sky.

This kind of hope became harder to sustain during the later 1970s and the 1980s. Though all Guyanese have suffered political and economic repression at the hands of an incompetent, corrupt and authoritarian Government, the Indian population has suffered especially. Fraudulent elections and a referendum which made

Burnham an executive president for life and legitimized the party dictatorship have effectively disenfranchised the Indian opposition. The assembling of the most repressive paramilitary state apparatus in the English-speaking Caribbean has been used to cow the Indians (and the Government's Afro-Guyanese opponents) into submission. The police force, the Guyana Defence Force, Guyana National Service and the People's Militia are all 80 - 90% Afro-Guyanese in membership and wholly under party control. Each of these forces have been used to crush any sign of Indian resistance, such as the sugar strikes of 1975 and 1977. ³⁷ The Guyana National Service appears to have had as one of its objectives at least the splitting of Indian youth from the culture of their parents. ³⁸

Again, Indians have probably suffered disproportionately in the general economic crisis the Government has inflicted on Guyana. They lost out in the huge expansion of jobs in the State sector, which, between 1971 - 1976 grew from 21% of jobs to over 50%. The Indian-dominated rice sector, once buoyant, has been depressed by direct Government control, so much that production fell by nearly 30% between 1964 - 1970 and further since then. After the nationalisation of the sugar estates, the 50% of profits which under Bookers' ownership had gone into welfare schemes directly benefitting the sugar workers was syphoned off into the economy in general. The percentage of Indians in middle-management fell from 75% to 40% whilst the percentage of Afro-Guyanese rose from 25% to 60%. In the civil service and Government in general there are token Indians in visible positions (7/29 of the Government's ministers in 1976) but few in positions of real power and influence. ³⁹

With a few significant exceptions, the Indian response to this state of oppression can be summed up as flight, silence and despair. A disproportionate number of Indians, mainly from the middle class, have slipped away to the U.S.A. and Canada. The P.P.P., through a mixture of Government repression, obedience to its Eastern-bloc

and Cuban allies and an understandable nervousness of provoking racial tensions given the weight of Government controlled fire-power, has become largely irrelevant and the inconsistency of its policies towards the Government has served only to confuse and, dishearten its supporters.⁴⁰ Although the Working People's Alliance has accused the P.P.P. of conspiring with the Government to keep politics racially divided, many Indians feel that the P.P.P.'s response to ethnic discrimination is woefully inadequate. My own impression, gained from talking to P.P.P. leaders in 1976, was that the party had shied away from the issue, dismissing the feelings of racial and cultural oppression felt by many Indians as mere 'emotionalism'.

The only direct confrontation with the Government came when the P.P.P. affiliated Guyana Agricultural Workers Union struck for thirteen weeks against the diversion of sugar profits in 1975 and again in 1977 for higher wages. Despite sustaining the strike for 135 days in the face of army violence and great privation, the union was unable to prevent the Government's organisation of its paramilitary forces to cut the crop.⁴¹ The defeat of the strike was a severe set-back for the P.P.P. and several leading members defected to the Government.⁴² From this point on the P.P.P. surrendered leadership of the opposition to the Working People's Alliance

Although many younger Indians probably feel some sympathy for the W.P.A.'s attempt to build a non-racial opposition to the Government, and in particular admired the late Walter Rodney, it would probably be true to say that the support is latent rather than active.

The space created by the decline of the P.P.P. has also, to a limited extent, been filled by the re-emergence of traditional religious and ethnic groups such as the Guyana Council of Indian Organisations which has criticised discrimination against Indians with some clarity but without any practical success. The G.C.I.O.

probably represented a wide range of Indian views when it indicated that it wanted to see a democratic open society in which cultural diversity was welcomed and 'both streams ...actively encouraged'. It argued that 'in the headlong drive for cultural integration both groups suffer from a feeling of suffocation', though it accepted that in time a 'subtle blending of both streams may occur resulting in a truly Caribbean culture.'⁴³ There have been, in addition, more militant ethnic groups, such as those behind the banned news-sheet Muffled Voices (which appeared in the mid 1970s) who urged partition and an end to Indian restraint in the face of 'this eye-pass foolishness'. However, there is little evidence that such separatist groups had any substantial support.

The response of Indo-Guyanese writers to this situation has mirrored that of the wider Indian group. Many, including some who at some stage supported the P.N.C., left Guyana. Those who left included Cyril Dabydeen, Arnold Itwaru, Mahadai Das, David Dabydeen and Bramdeo Persaud. Some, such as the late Guska Kisson, became silent; others such as M.R. Monar have increasingly concentrated on private themes. The work of those such as Krishna Prasad and Mahadai Das who have continued to explore personal responses to public themes has become increasingly sombre in tone. Mahadai Das, whose work was discussed in more detail in Chapter Twelve, the writer of ringing Utopian verses in I Want To Be A Poetess of My People (1976), has tasted her 'bread of stone'⁴⁴ and writes of the spiritual and physical hungers of the people, starved of bread and truth.

However, inevitably critical of the 'corruptive' republic though much of this writing is, it is marked by an absence of racial bitterness. For instance in Harry Narain's story 'Man at the Bottom'⁴⁵ (Grass-Root People, 1981), there is a realistic portrait of the contrasting fortunes of two Guyanese, one African, one Indian, in the decade since independence. Edgar Samuels has attached him-

self to the ruling party, obtained its patronage and prospered; Mathura has remained poor, land-hungry and is prematurely aged. The story deals with the corrupt bureaucracy which oppresses poor men like Mathura, but the fact that Samuels is Afro-Guyanese is treated as incidental to the main focus which is the hypocritical gap between such party slogans as 'Land to the Tiller' and its actual practices. The commitment to a non-racial perspective is made evident in a further story, 'Fifty-Fifty Is Not Maths,'⁴⁶ in which a poor black villager is cheated by a wealthy Indian farmer. The contrast with the racial animosity of Peter Ramkisson's Trinidadian novel, Sunday Morning Coming Down (1975) is striking. Yet Narain in no way evades the social realities of contemporary Guyana. He sticks to what he knows, the lives of the Indian villagers, but through them he conveys a picture of a whole society under stress, in which the economic and political corruptions of the ruling elite have infected the personal and social relationships of those at 'the grass-roots.' In their lives too is a growing insensitivity, suspicion and the dominant ethos of 'every man for himself.' However, the poet who has best captured the brutal dishonesties of Burnhamism, from an Indo-Guyanese perspective, is P.D.Sharma in his collection The New Caribbean Man (1981) Sharma in his actions has been typical of the educated Indian middle class - he has emigrated to America - and his poems very honestly, and directly, communicate the perceptions of that class. No one escapes Sharma's withering satire, neither the elite who are

Inside
The winning side
Whichever side. 47

nor the people who, he feels, in some measure get the government they deserve. He mocks those who are surprised by each new act of Government suppression. He asks:

Why the hue and cry
to new arrivals -
welcome and enter
rigged elections. (p.15)

One of Sharma's acknowledged master is Martin Carter, but one also hears the laconic Brecht of the 'Buckow Elegies' with their pose of naive innocence.⁴⁸ In '2+2 = 7½' Sharma takes the Government's promises and subjects them to a puzzled logic:

When they say they'll forge national
unity, I am muddled
'cause if we have national unity they would
be overthrown. (p.20)

Although Sharma reflects on the particular difficulties of the Indians in Guyana, his concern is with the whole people. Nevertheless, in 'Unity in Diversity' he reflects ironically on the respective positions of Indians in Uganda and Guyana, playing on the fact that Burnham had taken to being known as the 'Kabaka' by his more servile supporters. In Uganda, the Indians at least knew where they stood:

You are out

whereas in Guyana:

With Big Boy
you have no where to stand
though you are in.

However, his portrayal of 'homo corrupticus', the new middle-class apparachiks of the regime, whom he mercilessly savages in 'The New Caribbean Man', relates to no racial group in particular:

Ubiquitous primate
of the nod, the hug, the shoulder pat and the
elbow jab; cocktail smiling, champagne handshak-
ing, old spice photographing - multiple metaphors
mock your ministerial mirror: mighty mouse, mimic
man, modern moses; paper tiger, people traitor,
penny taker - and on the street this refrain: mini
man on the maxi motor, monkey more than masa. (p.35)

The echoing of the alliterative pepsi-cola advert (lip-smacking, thirst quenching...) very cleverly suggesting the mimic materialist culture of the 'New Caribbean Man'.

Similarly, his frustration with the mass of the people is a general one. 'The Masses' spews out contempt, anger and pity for those who provided the unreasoning support for the politicians who manipulated race for their own ends. In the poem, the very humanity

of the masses is angrily questioned by the arrestingly offensive metaphors used to describe them:

miscegenated
 from a mutation
 of spit in lieu of sperm
 urine in lieu of uterus.
 Out of the re-productive factories of
 litter trash and refuse.

Indeed, the crashing alliterative litany of worthlessness almost conceals Sharma's pity for their fate:

led and leaderless
 prayed for and preyed upon
 tooled and fooled
 mass without matter
 solid without substance
 numbers without note... (p.25)

However, in 'My People', Sharma insists that his anger must be taken as a sign of thwarted love:

ah hate you dah much
 cause ah love yuh so bad
 ah mean it. (p.50)

What is impressive about the whole collection is its combination of withering honesty and refusal to fall into attitudes of exhausted despair. The anger always comes from the understanding that things should not, need not be the way they are.

So far, the chapter has emphasised a consistent commitment in Indo-Guyanese writing to the goal of ethnic unity. That goal was enshrined in the objectives of the P.P.P. when it won the elections of 1952, but it did not prevent the party from splitting on ethnic lines. Subsequently, political analysts have argued that one cause of the failure, and the failure of the P.P.P. ever since to escape from its ethnic ghetto, has been the party's reluctance to investigate and confront the divisive forces within Guyanese society, including Indian racial attitudes. This political reluctance has some parallel in Indo-Guyanese writing where explorations of the possibilities of racial harmony are frequent, but explorations of the nature of Indian prejudices are scarce. By contrast, Indo-Trinidadian writing has both expressed wider Indian prejudices and

explored and analysed them with an acuity unmatched in Indo-Guyanese writing.

The extent to which writers have been able to step outside the cultural orientation of their group and explore its perspectives have varied widely. As the previous chapter has shown, it is possible for writers to recognise and deplore ethno-centric attitudes ⁴⁹ and display them in their work. The range of response extends from ⁵⁰ attempted concealment, unawareness and recognition, to attempts to understand and explain the bases of such attitudes. As I have explored at greater length in Chapter Sixteen, it is at the point where a writer begins to explore the construction of a point of view that literature begins to make its own escape from ethnocentricity, and where often the attempt places the greatest demands on a writer's aesthetic skills.

The level of recognition is exemplified in the early work of Selvon and V.S. Naipaul and half-a-dozen other writers. ⁵¹ In A House For Mr. Biswas (1961) V.S. Naipaul makes many neat unelaborated observations about the nature of Indian prejudices. There is the episode when Biswas discovers Seth and his two black labourers destroying his rose garden. Biswas tells Seth to take 'those two rakshas' ⁵² away. Naipaul simply records that the labourers were 'unaware of their identification with Hindu mythological forces of evil'. Similarly, in Shiva Naipaul's Fireflies (1970) there is the uncommented observation on how the Khojas exclude Blackie, their servant of all work, from their inner world, 'simply because Negroes ⁵³ could have no place in the festivities'. In Selvon's A Brighter Sun (1952) the prejudices of Tiger's parents are treated as simple xenophobia whilst in I Hear Thunder (1963), Indian chauvinism is specifically linked to an intolerant concern with racial purity. Indian hostility towards miscegenation is, indeed a popular fictional theme. At the simplest level it produces such cautionary tales as Mohamed Hamaludin's 'No Greater Love,' ⁵⁴ Errol Tiwari's 'Ultima-

tum' or Rajkumari Singh's 'Hoofbeats at Midnight', in each of which an Indian daughter is forbidden to marry outside her race and commits suicide. All three writers are Guyanese. Dennis Mahabir's The Cutlass Is Not For Killing frankly acknowledges that even within the most Westernised Indo-Saxon families, though social relations with all races were free and cordial, as the patriarchal Isaac Kamarkar constantly repeats, there is to be, 'No Slave blood in the Family'. When his son Ben, who has himself succumbed to extra-marital temptations outside the race, is asked by his friend, the black D.M.O. whether he will let his son marry the D.M.O.'s daughter, the refusal is pungent: 'You are a damn nigger man.'⁵⁷ Even within the third generation Mahabir notes the persistence of gut feeling on this issue. Errol Kamarkar (who perhaps contains elements of Mahabir himself) on the one hand advocates the adoption of a completely Western outlook in the progressive journal he edits, but on the other writes in support of racially endogamous marriages in the rival Hindu chauvinist paper. Outside the Christian-Indian world, Mahabir notes that prejudices were cruder: 'Negroes - to Indians - were monkeys in clothes.' (p.52)

Mahabir goes beyond the recognition of prejudice to attempt some explanations. He suggests a mixture of Indian pride in their ancestral past ('Indian culture was the watchword, Aryan blood the cry.') (p.34) contrasted with contempt for the Black's slave past; the rootedness of negative stereotypes of the Negro in Indian minds; Indian resentment that their culture and presence was not accepted (they feel 'strangers in a foreign land'); (p.23) and a sense that they were being forced to struggle for a fair share of rewards. Mahabir also looks behind these contingent reasons for deeper psychological motivations for Indian prejudice. These include anxiety about their future as an ethnic group, being unconsciously influenced by the colour-class values of the society and, in relation to whiteness, not feeling 'well or at ease in their own skin.' (p.37) He

echoes V.S.Naipaul's famous dictum on monkeys pleading for evolution.⁵⁸ However, though Mahabir makes a considerable effort to explain, he does so in ways which are wholly unintegrated with the narrative. We are given a great deal of commentary, but are never shown in action the bases of his characters' feelings on these issues. Above all, as was shown in Chapter Fourteen, at the point in the narrative where Mahabir stops documenting and analysing and starts fictionalising, crudely negrophobic stereotypes flood into the novel.

What is particularly impressive about V.S.Naipaul's short story, 'One Out of Many' (1971) is that it both conveys with considerable pathos the despair of an Indian who feels he has lost racial purity by contact with a black woman and analyses the basis of his feelings through a richly detached humour. The detachment is all the more remarkable given the hints in V.S.Naipaul's other writings of his own attitudes to Indian and Black sexual unions. As in The Mimic Men (1967), it is Naipaul's decision to present Santosh's story through the mode of first person narration which enables him to gain an ironic perspective on his 'Indian' way of feeling and seeing. Santosh's experiences, as a household servant swept from his secure niche in Bombay to the uncertainties of a black neighbourhood in Washington, parallel those of the indentured Indian immigrants as they first came into contact with Blacks in the Caribbean. Naipaul mockingly ironises the assumptions Santosh brings to his meeting with the 'hubshi':

I had heard about them in stories and had seen one or two in Bombay. But I had never dreamed that this wild race existed in such numbers in Washington and were permitted to roam the streets so freely.⁵⁹

Santosh, indeed, is pleasantly surprised when he discovers that 'if you didn't trouble them they didn't attack you.' Nevertheless, if Santosh's first instinct is recoil, Naipaul indicates that he is also obsessed with the presence of the Blacks. The word 'hubshi' is

used, italicised, at least forty times in the thirty-six pages of Santosh's narrative. Like the Indian indentured labourers, Santosh also learns the dominant white attitudes to the hubshi to add to his own. He rapidly learns to distinguish the hubshi from the real Americans. When Blacks appear on the television commercials which give him his first glimpses of American life, he knows that they are only actors who will soon have to return to the street. However, it is in the episode when Santosh is seduced by the hubshi maid that Naipaul's comic perspective on Indian racial attitudes is best revealed. Santosh's sense of defilement is painfully real, but it is comically upstaged by the farcical contrast between his smallness and gentleness and the maid's largeness and aggression: 'she frolicked with me in a violent way,' he complains. Then, Naipaul conspires with the reader behind Santosh's back to make his reasons for his shame appear absurd:

...in our country we frankly do not care for the hubshi. It is written in our books, both holy and not so holy, that it is indecent and wrong for a man of our blood to embrace the hubshi woman. To be dishonoured in this life, to be born a cat or a monkey or a hubshi in the next! (p.38)

When Santosh finally succumbs to the woman, Naipaul mixes the portrayal of his real distress with the ludicrous character of his penitential efforts to purify himself by rubbing his skin with half a lemon:

...but it didn't hurt as much as I expected, and I extended the penance by rolling about naked on the floor of the bathroom and the sitting room and howling. (p.42)

However, underlying the comic absurdity of his response, Naipaul also conveys the real pathos of Santosh's position. When he has to marry the hubshi woman as the price for not being ejected from America as an illegal immigrant, Santosh has to abandon everything which has sustained his sense of self. He accepts his friend Priya's harsh words of comfort that, 'This isn't Bombay. Nobody looks at you when you walk down the street. Nobody cares what you

do' and reflects: 'It didn't matter what I did, because I was alone.' Being without the defining gaze of those who care what he does is, for Santosh, to be without meaning. He is condemned to live as a stranger in a culture he despises and cannot bring himself to enter. At the most intimate level of his senses he finds that in the 'dark house' he inhabits 'its smells are strange, everything is strange...'. (p.60) And though the Blacks try to claim him as a 'soul brother' during the riots, Santosh can only ask, 'brother to what or to whom?' All he looks forward to is when 'it will all be over.'

A similarly close relationship between ancestral piety and racial repugnance is explored in a moralistic short story, 'Juman Maraj'⁶⁰ by Rajkumarie Singh. Maraj is respected for his piety, but gains no personal serenity from it, being presented as a disturbed figure with an affinity to the violence of the elements. When the white estate manager and the black district doctor call at his house, Maraj calls for a brass lota of water for the whiteman and a crude wooden calabash for the black. The youths who are his acolytes protest and disobey him. Maraj, in a howling rage, tells them that 'the black man is a Rakshas, black evil spirits like Ravana...' That night there is a fierce storm and a tidal wave destroys Juman's temple and he is found drowned in mysterious circumstances. It is a melodramatic and sometimes confused story, but it strongly conveys an image of the poisonous effects of a fear of cultural violation on racial attitudes.

The contingent reasons for Indian prejudices are dealt with in a number of stories and novels discussed elsewhere in this study. In The Suffrage of Elvira (1958), V.S. Naipaul shows how electoral competition makes the usual patterns of avoidance between Indians and Blacks impossible. In The Mimic Men (1967) Naipaul develops the thesis that racial hostilities are unavoidable in plural societies where people of different cultures have been brought

together unnaturally and feel a mutual violation. Naipaul sees the recoil as inevitable, but Clyde Hosein's powerful short story, 'Morris, Bhaiya,' in The Killing of Nelson John and Other Stories (1980) portrays the possibility of mutually satisfying contact. It is a contact which occurs at an individual level, however, and is poisoned by the racialism of the group. Morris is a black man, son of a cane cutter living in South Trinidad, an 'island in a sea of Indians' a 'straddler of two worlds'. However, although Morris plays in the steelband of the local black village and has joined its masonic lodge, he does so with a 'sense of necessity of which he was not yet convinced', pressured by the local Afro-Trinidadians who warn him that he will end up 'Indianised' like his father, 'cutting cane with coolies and dead to we own things, like steelband, Saturday night dance, carnival.'⁶² Morris derives most satisfaction from participating in Indian festivals and celebrations, listening to the solace of the Ramayana and delighting in the community of the temple and the rituals of 'holy food passed from hand to hand in the silent simple grace of joy.' (p.115-116) However, when elections come Morris detects an unwonted coolness in some of his Indian neighbours and is put under pressure by his black acquaintances to side with his own race because, 'the coolies want to take over Trinidad.' Morris endures the growing estrangement until first he hears the pundit interpreting the Vedic scriptures in a racist way and then is rudely assaulted by a drunken Indian election cavalcade as he returns from the temple dressed, as usual, in cap and dhoti:

Suddenly a driver said, 'What is this karpur doing in dhoti?' Laughter flowed down the line. His passenger said, 'Ai nigger-man, why you not in John-John with the other monkeys beating old iron and jocking.' (p.120)

It is at this point in the story that Hosein for the first time stresses Morris's race:

Morris' nostrils flared; two bulbs at the end of his flat nose. He tossed his head as if to aright his kinky muff: a sure sign that he was angry. (p.121)

Although the racial antipathy subsides after the election and, as Hosein ironically comments, the 'calypsonian philosophy, "All ah we is one." took hold and spread like wildfire...', Morris cannot rid himself of the feeling of 'pollution'. He has to choose between staying and risking embitterment or leaving the landscape and customs he has revered. He leaves for Port of Spain, but when his Indian friend, Pat, visits him there he finds him drawn and diminished:

Pat went forward in fear and not without pity, for he had known the man in an air-filled house where light gave substance to his face. (p.127)

Separated from the environment which had nourished their friendship Pat withdraws in embarrassment. We know he will not visit Morris or call him 'bhaiya' (brother) again.

Hosein's perspective in the story, though strongly anti-racist, is one from 'within' Indian culture. The virtues of that culture over the Creole offering of steelband, Saturday night dance and carnival seem assumed. What the story attacks is the failure of Indians to live up to the ideals of community and gracious ceremoniousness which so attracts Morris. Hosein's story also demonstrates that it is possible to communicate an unmistakably moral message without writing in a crudely propagandistic way.

Trinidadian Sharlowe Mohammed's short novel, Apartheid Love⁶³ (1982) is an equally heartfelt attack on racism, but its tract-like insistence on its message, which overwhelms plot, narration and characterisation, makes it far less persuasive. It is, though, the first Indo-Caribbean novel to explore the issue of Indian and Black intimate personal relationships at any length. At first there is a gradual acceptance of the relationship between Indian boy and Black girl by the parents of the couple, but then two events occur to destroy it. Firstly, Timmy Ramsingh incurs the jealousy of the village bad-john, a black youth who objects to an Indian walking out with a good-looking black girl. Then Timmy's brother, Paul, returns to Trinidad. He is a 'megalomaniac' who

dreams of ruling the island and a racist whose first action is to throw Pearl, Timmy's girlfriend out of the house. Paul becomes involved with a chauvinist Indian political party which deliberately engineers racial antagonisms in order to win a few seats in the approaching elections. Inevitably, Timmy and Pearl become the victims of the racial violence which results.

However, Sharlowe Mohammed's position is not entirely consistent. In Requiem For A Village, published in the same volume as Apartheid Love, he portrays the corrupting and tragically disintegrative effects of the intrusion of an evangelical Christian sect on an Indian village. Cultural disintegration and moral disintegration go together. In Apartheid Love, however, Mohammed takes a very different attitude towards the preservation of Indian culture; it is Paul Singh's desire to preserve his cultural heritage which is identified as the source of his racialism. The contradiction seems the result both of mixed feelings and of Mohammed's total and ultimately restricting commitment to his message in Apartheid Love.

At an individual level, as Mohammed shows, prejudices against interracial marriage are frequently ugly and irrational. Yet given the subordinate status of Indian culture in Trinidad, and the reluctance of the dominant culture to accept Indian culture on equal terms, widespread intermarriage would almost certainly be a threat to Indian culture. By dealing with the issue only in a one-sided individualistic way, Mohammed loses the opportunity of examining the genuine tension between the individual and the social. Thus the novel stands solidly behind Timmy's demand that people be able to choose their own ethnic identity without in any way seeking to understand the perspective that Paul Ramsingh stereotypically represents. Mohammed fails to explore in any open, dramatic way the collision between what can in reality be experienced as moral imperatives of potentially equal force: loyalty

to community and culture and loyalty to personal principle. Instead, Indian concerns for the survival of their culture are identified with mere racial chauvinism. When Paul Ramsingh says that Indians must organise and unify to 'maintain our heritage, our dignity', Timmy, with heavy authorial approval, feels sorry for his 'myopic' brother. When Paul complains that Indians suffer discrimination in the society, this is simply dismissed as an illusion, without even any exploration of why Paul should feel this way. In general, ethnic consciousness is presented as an evil, something manufactured by devious and fanatical politicians, without whose intervention 'The Indians and Negroes live in harmony, in neighbourly love and affection.' What Mohammed's treatment fails to do is tell us why, merely at the instigation of the politicians, such loving and affectionate people should so rapidly become involved in the racial conflict described in the novel.

The reader is forced into seeing the onesidedness of Sharlowe Mohammed's treatment by his inability to let the story speak for itself. For instance, when Timmy's parents take racist brother Paul's side in an argument with Timmy, the novel comments, '...they had the brazenness to become angrier than Timmy.' Similarly, most readers will tire of being hectored by Mohammed's penchant for the rhetorical question: 'What had they done to become the butt of their neighbour's hate?'

Mohammed also burdens the story with a heavy-handed religious dimension. He attempts to make his hero not merely a victim of racialism, but a Christ-like figure who becomes the willing sacrifice for the people's sins. The treatment is melodramatic and mawkish and the allegorical element comes into conflict with the attempt to establish a realistic personal and social basis for the relationship between Indian boy and Negro girl. Indeed, the ending of the novel, when a halo is reported to hover over the grave of the couple (who have met a Romeo and Juliet-like fate) does much

to undermine the seriousness with which Sharlowe Mohammed has treated the theme.

The element of fantasy in the story is, above all, evidence that the dream of ethnic understanding has, in reality, only a fragile social basis. As this and the previous chapter show, Indo-Caribbean imaginative writing has been no less ambivalent in its treatment of the theme than the actual political and social behaviour of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana.

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Chapter Sixteen.Fiction and Concept: Escaping From Ethnocentricity.

The problem with common sense is that it appears a natural way of looking at people, society and history, whereas in practice common sense is frequently composed of the detritus of old philosophical theories, reconstituted for contemporary ideological purposes. Indeed, it is the very 'commonsenseness' of certain epistemological, psychological and sociological approaches which accounts for their continuing survival as the basis for an unwarrantably large proportion of work in the human sciences, despite prolonged and what ought to have been thoroughly discrediting criticism. As I asserted in Chapter Three, novelists are no less involved with ideas in the construction of their fictional world-views than psychologists, sociologists and historians, and no less divided between those who assume a commonsense view of reality and those who have self-consciously explored the philosophical basis of the ideas they make use of.

In Chapter Three, I asserted a causal relationship between 'commonsense' and ethnocentricity and an associational relationship between both of these and what I have described as the aesthetic of conventional realism. Further, I asserted that it is on the basis of ideas about the nature of reality, the person and history that novels begin to escape from ethnocentricity, and that the development of ideas critical of received commonsense has frequently, though not necessarily, stimulated writers to seek aesthetic alternatives to conventional realism. In this chapter these assertions are argued and the parameters of a conceptual framework which would permit an escape from ethnocentricity and commonsense appearances are mapped out. Finally, this chapter prefaces the discussion of three novels, V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967), Wilson Harris's The Far Journey of Oudin (1960), and George Lamming's Of Age and Innocence (1960), which in some measure begin to make that escape.

The epistemology and ontology of 'commonsense' closely resemble what has been elaborated as empiricism or its step-child, positivism. I don't intend to re-argue in detail the philosophical weaknesses of empiricism vis a vis conventionalism or realism, but ^{will} pick out two elements which seem relevant to the nature of works of fiction. The first element is the empiricist assumption that only those entities which can be directly perceived can be treated as real. For instance, behavioural psychology banishes such concepts as consciousness, will, intention and thought from its vocabulary because they are empirically untestable and unobservable. The second element is the assumption that, provided the observer avoids subjective distortions, knowledge may be taken as directly reflecting objective reality. However, in various forms of social discourse, avoiding subjective distortions inevitably becomes part of some ideological practice such as journalistic 'neutrality' or the rigorous adherence to 'facts' and elaborate statistical methods in the 'value-free', positivist human sciences. However, without an ontological distinction between 'facts' as real existents and 'facts' as propositions about the world, empiricism blurs two quite distinct orders of reality and fails to take into account the social and historical situatedness of the observer. Much of the fiction discussed in this study appears to be predicated on assumptions of this kind. The vision of the world which is presented, whatever the mode of narration, is treated as a transparent perception of reality. For instance, in a first person narration such as Jan Carew's Black Midas (1958) there is no gap between the narrator's perceptions and evaluations of other characters and what the narrated behaviour of such characters shows. ² Even in a novel such as Michael Anthony's Green Days By The River (1967) where an ironic distance is created between the narrator's misjudgements and the events of the novel, I have argued that the gap serves to reinforce a fixed adult vision. ³ Similarly, in Roy Heath's One Generation (1981), a novel which shows a high degree

of awareness of how ethnocentricity makes people see events in different ways, the omniscient perspective of the narrator is treated as wholly reliable, though I argue that Heath's portrayal of the Indian world is shaped by an unacknowledged Afro-Guyanese way of seeing.⁴

By contrast, as I describe in Chapters Seventeen, Eighteen and Nineteen, V.S. Naipaul in The Mimic Men, Wilson Harris in The Far Journey of Oudin and George Lamming in Of Age And Innocence, treat the issues raised by ways of seeing in ethnically plural societies in highly explicit ways. As I argue in Chapter Seventeen, up to the point of The Mimic Men, V.S. Naipaul's fiction is written within a commonsense empiricist framework. His fictional world equates to his direct subjective experience and he frequently seems unaware of the biases of his own viewpoint. In The Mimic Men, however, he shows an acute awareness of the problematic nature of perception; the relationship between the 'I' narrator's point of view and the story he tells is calculatedly complex. Naipaul stresses Kripalsingh's prejudices and ethnically shaped experiences as influences on his way of seeing, and emphasises the fact that Kripalsingh is 'writing' the novel to such an extent that the reader is frequently invited to question the narrator's version of events. Above all, Naipaul relates the problematic nature of perception to the problems of integration in the ethnically plural society he creates in the novel. Each ethnic group sees the society in different ways and experiences the way of seeing of other groups as a denial of its reality. Naipaul's break with naive empiricism would seem to lead him into a pessimistic subjectivism: each man in his prison. However, there are two points in the novel which offer some way out of that impasse. The first is Naipaul's ambivalence over whether Kripalsingh's incapacity to escape from his ethnocentric subjectivity is a specific ill of colonialism or a universal human condition. Secondly, as an historian of the events he has been involved in,

Singh's effort to set down and understand the 'vision of disorder', implies some possible alternative standpoint from which the disorder can be judged.

If Naipaul gradually arrives at a concern with the nature of perception, no Caribbean writer has given so much attention to questions of ontology and epistemology as Wilson Harris.⁵ I don't intend a full-scale analysis of what is a very complex body of work, but focus on those aspects of Harris's ideas which appear to shape his fiction and, in particular, the way he too has related these issues to the problems of ethnically plural societies.

It is difficult to construct a coherent account of Harris's epistemological position, both because his expression is sometimes elusive and because it is not internally consistent. Nevertheless, his profoundest and most valuable impulse is to make us see that our habitual perceptions carry deep social, cultural and historical biases. In 'The Phenomenal Legacy' he writes:

The constriction one feels may be traced to psychological biases, the principal one residing in our ingrained habit of a material civilisation to extrapolate assumptions of character from a dominant model...⁶

or, writing of Frazer's The Golden Bough, he argues that it:

reveals more about the unchanging biases of a ruling individual establishment than about possible levels of creative participation in the phenomenon which the book claims to perceive and describe.⁷

In this Harris is at one with both the conventionalist and realist critiques of empiricism. However, in 'Reflection and Vision' (1975), he apparently accepts the empiricist theory of reflection as having one kind of superficial truth, but contrasts it with the visionary truth of the artist. Whereas in 'The Phenomenal Legacy' he recognises that empiricism misconceives its active role in the creation of knowledge as a passive one, here he accepts the idea of its passivity in order to contrast the activity of the imagination:

...reflection is built into a passive order of the imagination which possesses its own marvels of exactitude, though to reify it absolutely is to submit to a straitjacket of tradition ultimately as a code of sensibility.

Objects are reflected by history (and this is right and

proper) as though history is part and parcel of the reflected nature of objects. As though history, in a sense, subsists upon the nature of reflection one sees in nature at large...⁸

For Harris, the 'reality of vision' consists not in the passive reflection of objects but in the process of imagination which approaches the essential nature of objects directly:

It is here, I believe, in the curious unravelling as well as ravelling textures of the imagination, that reflection (as passive order) turns - in some degree - into activity of the light and dark imagination and the genesis of a dialogue between the past and the present may renew itself into the future...⁹

Yet elsewhere, in 'The Phenomenal Legacy', Harris presents the process of knowing those essences as a passive one, where phenomena either bypass the active construction of our everyday frameworks for perceiving reality or where the perceiver of 'true' essences must shed all 'ephemeral' social, cultural and historical accretions from his consciousness in order to participate directly in the nature of the object. The first process is suggested in Harris's question:

Where then do we draw the dividing line between those factors in experience that we 'understand' through a logic of ephemeral and material control (which we impose on nature) and the phenomenon of reality which may strike us when it occurs as a feature of great purity on the one hand - such as the rainbow - or, on the other, as a capacity to dwarf or annihilate what we know and possess?¹⁰

In another formulation of the process, Harris even seems to suggest some external agency as the source of knowledge:

...in the medium of art and science, one becomes susceptible to a species of unpredictable arousal; one virtually becomes a species of nature which subsists on both mystery and phenomenon, participating in an otherness akin to the terrifying and protean reality of the gods. It is within this instant of arousal that abolishes the 'given' world that one's confession of weakness has really begun: a confession that because of mortality, the mortality of all assumptions, there is and must be an inherent device of consciousness which looks beyond the fortress of self-created things towards a paradoxical womb through which we are being cautioned that a fantastic originality exists as the omen of unity. ||

One wonders by what or by whom, other than by a supernatural god, we are being cautioned? Harris's quest for this 'inherent device of consciousness' bears an uncanny resemblance to Husserl's impossible quest for the phenomenalist 'epoche', the moment of pure consciousness, which is separated from history and society, and alone gives

access to real essences.¹² This is suggested in a later essay, 'Some Aspects of Myth and the Intuitive Imagination' (1978) in which Harris writes of those moments when:

the individual imagination at the heart of the folk, the intuitive archetypal imagination - is aware that the limits of community fall into mysterious otherness; a pressure accumulates, as it were, from nowhere and everywhere, upon the imagination to obey a conscience-in-depth that breaks fashionable optimism, fashionable pessimism, or dictates of commerce, class race.¹³

Here Harris explicitly offers his theory of perception as a way out of the prisons of ethnocentricity and historical 'appearances'. He sees very clearly that a commonsense empiricism is closely related to ethnocentric bias:

At the edge of the mimicry of natural fact lies a pit into which cultures fall when they succumb to the idolatry of cruel appearance.¹⁴

However, in the idealist conventionalism which Harris offers in its place, I believe that we are offered an equally biased and misconceived framework. Although Harris is characteristically reluctant to commit himself to any fixed position or erect new counter-mythologies, he seems to me to come dangerously close to doing so in his image of true perception coming through a process of cultural disintegration. He gives as his 'model' of escape from ethnocentricity a highly romanticised view of the Amerindian legacy, which he sees as an example of the disintegration of a closed cultural identity through the process of historical conquest and virtual extinction, and through it the possibility of access to a deeper universal consciousness. He sees in the catastrophic change suffered by the Amerindians a model of how the shedding of historical and cultural biases offers the possibility of perceiving those alternative realities ('phenomenal legacy') which may lead to a new scale or illumination of the meaning of community.¹⁵ It is a model which seems to me socially rooted in Harris's position as an isolated intellectual from a society hostile to intellectuals, and in his position as a person of mixed racial origins in a society which was polarising along ethnic lines. It is a way of seeing which, I have argued in my discussion of The Far Journey of Oudin, leads

Harris to see the East Indian world as culturally and materially assertive and to portray some aspects of this world in terms of the same kind of stereotypes which are the stock-in-trade of much of the conventional, ethnocentric fiction discussed in Chapter Six, for instance.¹⁶

George Lamming makes the same connection between epistemology and ethnocentric ways of seeing. However, he neither, like Naipaul, simply undermines naive empiricism without suggesting a real alternative, nor, like Harris, does he fly from empiricism into the subjectivity of individual intuition. Although Lamming has not, to my knowledge; written explicitly about his philosophical frameworks, it is possible to characterise his approach to epistemology as implicitly realist. He recognises the situatedness of perception, including his own. He calls his The Pleasures of Exile (1960) a 'report on one man's way of seeing'¹⁷. However, he sees this subjectivity as being 'modified, even made possible, by the world in which he [the artist] moves among other men', and that the condition of being a particular kind of man, a Negro for instance, is modified by the fact that 'he is condemned by the fact of his spirit... [to] the world of men. He shares in their community'¹⁸. However, Lamming sees the escape from ethnocentricity and subjectivity taking place not only on social and moral grounds, but on intrinsic perceptual ones. Of Age And Innocence (1958) not only recognises the subjectivity and situatedness of ways of seeing, but implies the existence of an objectively real world existing beyond individual subjectivities. This is an important distinction, because it enables Lamming to escape from the solipsism that Naipaul becomes entangled in and the extreme relativism which follows from Harris's treatment of reality as a subjective fiction. Lamming conveys the individual subjectivity and socially-situated partiality of his characters' ways of seeing by structuring the novel around their multiple and often conflicting points of view, One particular point

of view which he emphasises from time to time is his own as narrator. However, Lamming does not leave his fictional world merely as a collection of competing subjective fictions, but shows that there is a social totality which is created through the relationships of the characters. It is, however, an objective totality beyond their individual, subjective grasp, though some characters come closer to 'knowing' this whole than others. He suggests a sense of the total in the surface of the text as well, in particular by his extensive use of free indirect speech which weaves contrasting viewpoints into a textually coherent whole.

Lamming, indeed, explicitly portrays the social consequences of ways of seeing which are on the one hand naively empirical, on the other, wholly conventionalist. In the first case, an empiricist passivity in the face of appearances leads to Babu's giving in to the obviousness of racial loyalties, in the second case, a subjective annihilation of the real objective world by the mind's own fictions leads to Shephard's megalomania.

At this point, it is perhaps helpful to warn the reader that in order to establish the central argument of this chapter I have found it necessary to outline some of the debate about the nature of appropriate conceptual frameworks for descriptions of the person and society. This discussion is inevitably somewhat abstract and raises issues from other disciplines which may be unfamiliar to some literary readers. However, I hope the reader will bear with these initial abstractions, necessarily presented in a condensed and schematic way, and will be able to see their relevance to the more detailed discussions of works of fiction which follow in this chapter and the three which come after. In particular, the ideas I discuss are important to the distinctions which I wish to draw between the different approaches to the person and society found in the novels of V.S. Naipaul, Harris and Lamming.

There are several possible objections to this approach which I will attempt to anticipate. Firstly, it may be felt that the discussion of the relationship between, for instance, philosophical and psychological ideas about the person and types of characterisation departs from the study's central East Indian-Caribbean theme. Secondly, the discussion may be felt to introduce ideas from one discipline, psychology, which have little relevance for another, literary criticism.

In the first instance, I would remind the reader of my argument that ethnocentric, stereotyped portrayals of Blacks or Indians in Caribbean fiction are based on ideological 'commonsense' notions of psychology and that in order to understand how certain writers have gone beyond such ethnocentric images, it is necessary the nature of the different psychological concepts which have been employed.

In the second instance, there are two possible types of objection to the bringing together of psychological and literary critical concepts. Firstly, there is the mainstream literary critical position which accepts the notion of character as a proper topic of discussion, but can see no purpose in introducing psychological concepts. However, such discussions of the presentation of character frequently make use of descriptive terms such as 'flat' or 'rounded' or 'multi-dimensional'. This vocabulary is readily understood (we can all tell the difference between one of Dickens's rounded and one of his single-dimensional characters) but it is imprecise and usually silent about what, for instance, is meant by the notion of 'dimensions'. In what follows, there is an attempt to explore what is usually unarticulated.

However, there is a second, more radical, objection: an objection to the discussion of the very concept of character itself. In both formalist and structuralist criticism there has been a sustained attack on the idea of character in the novel to the

extent that it has been liquidated back into the text under the cover of such structural roles as 'actants' or as symbolic patterns of imagery. Clearly, my attempt to explore the relationship between philosophical concepts of the person and the role of character in fiction is quite contrary to this new orthodoxy.

The attempt to liquidate character as a critical construct seems to have been motivated firstly by the poverty and naivety of most literary discussions of character (in particular the tendency to remove characters from their structural position in the narrative) and secondly by the wider critical project to separate imaginative literature from other forms of discourse and in particular from any reference to reality. Formalism has done much to reveal the conventions on which the construct of character rests and the literary devices through which it is realised in the text. However, I feel that a more rewarding approach to character is one which attends both to the formalists and the humanism of a critic such as E.M. Forster.²³ Dissolving away character as a specific layer in fiction seems to me to do violence both to the intentions of many novelists and the reasons why most readers of fiction find novels a rewarding medium. It is significant that the formalist-structuralist approach to character derives from Propp's analyses of the folk-tale, a form in which characterisation remains undeveloped. On the contrary, countless novelists have followed Henry James in testifying to the equality of character and plot structure ('What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?'),²⁴ even to admitting the extent to which characters have taken over the direction of the novel. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, indeed, fiction has been marked by an increasing concern with the complexity of the personality and, as I argued in

Chapter One, some of the most rewarding recent social psychology has imitated the methods of the novel in recognising that personality can only be described adequately through both synchronic and diachronic means. However, it seems to me that critical discussions of character need to catch up with the sophistication of the most subtle novelists. The problem has been that the concepts of the person used in critical discussions of character have tended to be crude. Even such a shrewd and balanced discussion as Seymour Chatman's in his Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (1978) makes use only of a 'trait' theory of personality,²⁵ whereas the implicit personality theories of novelists such as, say, George Eliot, are far more subtle.

There is a neat definition of the scope of studies of the person which is that it is to do with the extent to which we are like all other people, like some other people and like no other person.²⁶ This definition indicates that conceptions of the person inevitably rest on some philosophical conception of the nature of humankind, a classificatory system and an analytical approach to individual differences. Both literary criticism (see Charles Child Walcutt's Man's Changing Mask (1966)) and social science (see Changing Images of Man, edited by O.W. Markley and Willis Harman (1982)) show very clearly that images of humankind are historically specific and are closely related to particular types of economic organisation and social structure. For instance, it is possible to see the replacement of animistic images of man, as part of a natural continuum, by religious images of man, as somewhere between God and fallen nature, as the product of new technological relationships to nature and the development of social hierarchies. In our own technological, historicist and 'scientific' culture, it is possible to see images of man, or of human nature, which have arisen on the basis of the creation of the individual producer and consumer

Theories of the Person : Parameters

Inherited	-	Learned
Biological	-	Environmental
Instinctual	-	Rational
Emotional	-	Cognitive
Individual	-	Social
Subjective ideas	-	Material practices
Voluntary	-	Determined
Agency	-	Structures
Conscious self-awareness	-	Unconscious processes.

within the market forces of capitalism. It is part of the ideology of the free-market economy that social changes cannot take place because they are contrary to human nature: that man (in this case the male) is aggressive, competitive and individualistic. At the extreme there is the behaviourist view of man who has become a commodity; a mechanism driven by biological impulses and conditioned by material rewards and deprivations.

There are, of course, alternatives to the dominant image. There is the liberal-humanist view of man as the creative, goal-directed, adaptive learner and there is the perennial mystical view of man as spirit.

Inevitably, few psychological views of the person have exact correspondence to any one historical image. This is even more true of the implicit philosophies of the person which underlie the presentation of character in the novels discussed in this study. Nevertheless, it is possible to see that in much of the fiction discussed there is an implicit image of man as an environmentally determined organism, though in Lamming's fiction there is a consistent vision of man as the creative agent pursuing his own human goals, and in Wilson Harris's work there is a fundamental questioning, from the basis of the concept of man as spirit, of the notion of material individuality.

More specifically psychological theories of the person have, to date, been characterised by their tendency to be biassed towards one or other pole of a series of related constructs which are set out in the table opposite. These constructs set the parameters for what I would regard as the starting points for an adequate theory of the person, assuming that the contrary poles are brought into a

properly dialectical relationship. Of the major schools of psychology only three tendencies seem to me to have the capacity to grow towards a genuinely holistic view of the person: psychoanalysis, particularly in the development of interpersonal psychology in the work of H.S.Sullivan;²⁸ social learning theory in the work of Walter Mischel and Albert Bandura²⁹ and the personal construct theory of George A.Kelly,³⁰ which more than any other set of ideas has structured the approach of this study. Each of these approaches is open-ended, views the person as active, conscious and, potentially, socially situated. Significantly, with the exception of perhaps the least valuable elements of Freudianism, none of these approaches is concerned with creating a typology or classification of individuals. However, none of these theories, with the exception perhaps of some elements of social learning theory³¹ and vulgarisations of Freud, is part of what I take to be a 'commonsense' empiricist view of the person. Such views have much more in common with two psychological approaches, trait theory and behaviourism, which seem to me least capable of offering any real understanding of the person. As I will argue below, conventional approaches to characterisation rest heavily on a trait approach.

In brief, trait theories of personality argue that people possess broad dispositions to behave in particular ways and that the personality can be measured by the strength of traits, in terms of their intensity, their frequency and the range of situations they are displayed in.³² Trait theorists vary in the extent to which they regard traits as genetically inherited or environmentally learned, but they share a generally static view of character. Trait theory is very much an outgrowth of 'commonsense' in the respect that language itself is full of trait-terms (18,000 in one estimate, in English).

This relationship accounts for both the inadequacy of traits as an explanation of individual differences and for the persistence of the theory despite its manifest defects. Firstly, traits are both evaluative and ideological (as are most of our judgements of other people) and thus reveal more about the labeller than the person described.³³ For instance, one of the leading trait theorists, Raymond Cattell, uses the dimension, emotionally sensitive vs. tough-minded or hard realist, in one of his personality measures.³⁴ Clearly to put these traits as opposites rests on a false cultural stereotype that people are one or the other. (One also detects a hidden male / female dimension in the contrast.) Secondly, traits are static and based on the accumulation of past instances; as such they express a need to impose a false stability on the flux of our perceptions of others. As such they are in reality poor predictors of behaviour though they may seem to have the capacity, when used by those who have the power to define, to fix a static and often negative image on others which can become part of their self-image. Thirdly, traits depend on the observable, whereas some capacities may exist without observable behaviours. As Rockey, in George Lamming's Of Age And Innocence, says: 'Everyman hides many sources...an' there's no tellin' till the lids be taken off'.³⁵ Fourthly, traits are based on statistical regularities between situations and responses, implying that the accumulated frequency of a particular response is more significant than an isolated response. In A House For Mr. Biswas, however, V.S. Naipaul makes Biswas's single act of courage in giving his notice to quit Mrs. Tulsi's house far more significant in the shape of his moral career than all the accumulated acts of cowardice which precede it. Finally, if traits are examined in real-life situations as opposed to self-concept questionnaires, behaviours are found to be so specific to situations that the idea of organising traits is undermined. Some trait theorists have attempted to take greater account of situations,

but they have tended to bypass the problem that the conceptualisation of a situation may not be shared by the actor and the observer. For instance, how does one determine that obsequiousness is a trait of a person's behaviour? It clearly depends on the observer's prior classification of a situation as one not requiring a show of submission. From the actor's point of view, the situation could be read as one requiring an exhibition of servility as a ruse in order to live to fight another day.³⁶

The other commonsense theory of the person is behaviourism.³⁷ In its essentials, behaviourism assumes a tabula rasa view of the person whose personality becomes the sum of learned behaviours, which are responses to environmental stimuli and subsequent reinforcement. Virtually the only intrinsic motive seen to belong to the person is the drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain. As a theory for understanding people behaviourism seems to me worthless on several grounds. As a 'scientific' theory, its results have mostly been obtained in laboratory conditions, not real life; it has no real place for consciousness and other active cognitive approaches and it is almost wholly deterministic in its emphasis on environmental influences. Yet we are all from time-to-time unreflective behaviourists, particularly when our power is effective (and trait theorists when it is not). Twain catches this marvellously in Huckleberry Finn when the new Judge decides that he can reform Pap Finn by kindness but concludes after Pap has drunkenly abused his tolerance that 'he reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way.'³⁸ Behaviourist views of the person can be found in planter writings about Indian indentured labourers. Common wisdom had it that if you treated the coolie firmly but kindly he would behave obediently. When the Indians proved less malleable than

the planters desired, then trait theories (the Indian as revengeful, perfidious and cunning) were evoked.³⁹

It is hard to imagine any full-scale novel written within a totally behaviourist framework since the very concept of character in the realist novel is based on the premise of agency and consciousness.⁴⁰ However, one can find an implicitly behaviourist view, in countless sentimental short stories, noted in this study, in which characters without inner awareness are the passive victims of misfortune, oppression and natural disaster.

Trait theories and the naturalistic novel of observation, however, go hand-in-hand, led by the very resources of language itself. Traits are clearly the building blocks of ethnocentric stereotypes of the ethnic other. Even in what is otherwise a very perceptive examination of inter-ethnic contact, Roy Heath's One Generation (1981),⁴¹ one finds that to a much greater extent than the Creole characters, the Indian characters, even those sympathetically presented, are described in terms of fixed traits. For instance, Mr. Mohammed, Rohan Armstrong's friend, is presented in terms of his disposition to gravity, good humour, tolerance, tact, perceptiveness and occasional moodiness; Sidique Ali, Rohan's rival, is ingratiating, crude, insecure, jealous, boastful, malicious, hysterical, obsequious and intemperate. As I argued in Chapter Six, though Sidique is ultimately portrayed as having the power of reflection and self-awareness, this capacity is only shown at the point when he is making his revolt from what Heath portrays as the negative qualities of the Indian world. Where a novel pursues the idea of fixed traits with rigour, as Shiva Naipaul does in The Chip-Chip Gatherers (1973), the idea that a character's orientation to life is a quirk of the genes heavily reinforces its ideology of stasis and despair.⁴² However, as Chapters Eleven and Twelve show, stereotyping obviously exists not

only across groups but within them. For instance, even in Indo-Caribbean fiction, the estate labourer is frequently stereotyped as crude, brutish, submissive, drunken and feckless.

Again, it is in the work of V.S. Naipaul, Harris and Lamming that I find an approach to the portrayal of character which echoes, and is in some respects superior to, the kind of psychological theories which provide a basis for understanding the person. It is not that any of these writers works within or demonstrates any knowledge of specific psychological theories. Indeed, the only novelist discussed in this study who appears to have made explicit use of such theories is Shiva Naipaul (who read psychology with philosophy and physiology at Oxford) and in some respects his two recent novels illustrate the dangers of making direct use of single theories.⁴³ The strength of V.S. Naipaul's, Harris's and Lamming's portrayal of character is in the combination of the intuitive sophistication of the concepts they use and the fluidity and open-endedness of their approach, whereas professional, academic psychology is frequently restricted by the need to defend a particular paradigm against attacks from other schools.

However, it is not my intention to try to determine whether writers have been influenced by particular psychological theories or whether they have intuitively arrived at similar positions. What I am interested in is the extent to which novelists have made use of constructs about psychological processes which begin to do justice to the real complexity of people.

One approach to the person, which writers as different as V.S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon share with the tradition of Freudian psychoanalysis and its humanistic derivatives, is the concept of intra-psychic conflict between competing drives (biological drives,

internalised social values and an intentional sense of self) and the production of anxiety and the various defence mechanisms employed to divert it. In Turn Again Tiger, for instance, Selvon shows Tiger to be in a state of anxiety about whether he has achieved manhood. He feels that in terms of his relationship to his father, white people and the Indian heritage of subordinate labour that he has not. He tries to deflect these feelings by denial ('You talking to a man', he tells his father), rationalisation, isolation and undoing⁴⁴. For instance when Tiger comes across the white manager's wife for the second time he undoes his earlier shame at having run away from her by the violence of the sex he has with her and then undoes his unconscious shame at having betrayed his feelings by ritually purifying himself in the river. He defends himself against his conflicting feelings of desire and hatred for the white woman by isolating them. Physically he makes love to her; mentally he is killing her. Finally, he articulates the classic defense of repression when he thinks, 'If there must be memory, let it be all now, so that later I can forget.'⁴⁵

Again, the way that V.S. Naipaul constructs the life-history of Mr. Biswas in A House For Mr. Biswas, lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading. Biswas's behaviour in later life can be seen to be marked by the experiences of his childhood. In many respects Biswas represents a classic version of the oral-personality type.⁴⁶ He is narcissistic and his habitual way of dealing with other people is to type-cast them as bit-players in his own mental universe, rarely recognising their otherness. He alternately submits to authority and rebels against it. His acts of generosity, for instance his gift of a doll's house to Savi, are made to bind others to him. He is never able to enjoy the periods of security in his life, fearing always that they will be taken away. He is torn between the desire for isolation and privacy and the need for social approval. Symptomatically, when he is under stress, he eats certain kinds of foods,

a peculiarity Shama notices when she complains, 'You have a craving? You making baby?' .Above all, Biswas at moments of crisis has the fear of being swallowed up, of seeing his environment either as a consuming 'void' or having the power, even in its inanimacy to harm him:

He was rocking hard on the creaking board one night when he thought of the power of the rockers to grind and crush and inflict pain, on his hand and toes and the tenderer parts of his body. He rose at once in agony, covering his groin with his hands... On the wall he saw a nail that could puncture his eye. The window could trap and mangle. So could the door. 48

This demanding but fearful response to life is shown to be grounded in Biswas's infancy of neglect and malnutrition, where after the few weeks of importance when he is massaged and cossetted, his 'importance steadily diminished'. Only towards the end of his life does he begin to free himself from the need to relate to mother and father figures. Always feeling in some respects neglected by his mother, his relationship with Shama never really goes beyond the acceptance or the rejection of the maternal in her. Similarly, like Oedipus having unintentionally killed his own father, Biswas looks for substitute relationships, for instance playing rebellious son to Seth's authoritarian father. Seth tells the truth when he complains that though Biswas reviles him as 'the Big Boss', that 'as soon as trouble start they will be running back here'⁴⁹. Significantly, when Seth is finally dismissed from the Tulsi family when Owad snubs him on his return from abroad, Biswas alone feels some sadness.

However, the richness of Naipaul's portrayal of Biswas goes beyond any psychoanalytical typology and is based on his fluid and creative use of a wide range of approaches to the person. Firstly, Naipaul gives a salutary reminder of the extent to which the wholeness of the personality and the health of interpersonal relations rests on a material basis, and are ultimately at the mercy of time and mortality. After his heart-attack, Biswas grows querulous:

A lethargy fell over him... His complexion grew dark; not the darkness of a naturally dark skin; not the darkness of sun-burn: this was a darkness that seemed to come from within, as though the skin was a murky but transparent film and the flesh below it had been bruised and become diseased and

Dimensions of Biswas's Character

(n.b. the following are listed as behaviours, not traits.)

Orientation to external world

fantasist vs realist
unobservant vs shrewdly observant

Orientation to self

self-mocking vs desire for self-respect
open self-concept vs playing inauthentic role models.
analytical detachment vs absorption in own feelings.

Orientation to others

generosity vs desire to manipulate
desire for privacy vs fear of isolation
self-centredness vs dependence on others

Orientation to authority

childish rebelliousness vs desire for order
desire for freedom vs imposition of own tyrannies.
desire for independence vs desire for protection by authority.

Orientation to cultural values

free-thinking, critical vs primordial caste prejudices.

Orientation to time

future as abundant promise vs nostalgia for mythical past
need to make his mark on the earth = fear of the void.

its corruption was rising.⁵⁰

Secondly, Naipaul stresses the extent to which behaviours are the product of conscious or unconscious responses to situations. It is impossible, given a careful reading, to construct any consistent trait-type account of Biswas. If there are situations where he fantasizes, there are also those where he is highly realistic.

Thirdly, Naipaul shows the extent to which the personality is a learned construction, created in interaction with others and through the performance of roles. For instance, Biswas's defensive use of self-mockery is shown to be rooted in the positive reinforcement it receives from the time of his school days when it saves him from a beating. In childhood, Biswas is shown to see that he has suffered some wrong only when he sees a confirming response in others. After his expulsion from Pundit Jairam's, he cannot at first acknowledge his feelings, but 'when he noticed that Tara was giving him sympathy he saw his own injury very clearly ... broke down and wept'.⁵¹ Similarly, later in life, it is only from contact with the 'alert and intelligent and enquiring' Miss Logie that Biswas derives a new sense of his wholeness and capacities and begins to behave in a 'relaxed' and 'debonair' way with her, an aspect of his personality he has not previously displayed.

Fourthly, Naipaul, having located so many aspects of Biswas's personality in his conscious interactions with his environment, also tries to suggest ways in which Biswas escapes from its determinations. Here Naipaul falls back on the idea of irreducible traits in his nature, a formulation which, though conceptually shaky, is handled creatively within the context of the total presentation of his character. At one level, then, Biswas's personality can be seen in terms of a tension between contrasting poles, and his movements in opposing directions as the product of the attempts of a constantly alert and reflective man to maintain his personal integrity within an uncertain world. The dimensions are given in tabular form on the facing page, and it is significant that the

only one of Biswas's desires which has no opposite is his need to lay claim to his 'own portion of the earth', which is, of course, Biswas's defining characteristic and the theme of the novel. However, there is something more, several breaks in the logical causal explanations of Biswas's life, which Naipaul can only present as some kind of inbuilt trait. He seeks, I think, to suggest an essential 'Biswasness', a uniqueness which explains why Biswas responds to situations in very different ways from those about him whose circumstances are not dissimilar. Biswas is in this sense presented as a mutation within his breaking-up world. There are, for instance, no explanations to be found in his experience for Biswas's spirit of romance, his sense of the absurd, his instinct for luxury and his conviction that life is 'to come'. It is these mutations of the spirit which explain why a boy destined for the canefields should become what he finally does.

Although there are few novels which have presented a life which is both so individual and so universal, so coherently presented and yet so full of an awareness of the ultimate unclassifiability of the person, there are still, in my view, certain limitations in Naipaul's conception of character which emerge in a comparison with, for instance, George Lamming's conception, and indeed with some of V.S. Naipaul's later fiction. It is perhaps necessary to explain that I have chosen to concentrate on Naipaul's portrayal of Biswas rather than his treatment of character in The Mimic Men or other later novels, because his approach to characterisation in A House For Mr. Biswas is central to some observations I want to make about Wilson Harris's critique of the concept of character in the conventional novel, which he exemplifies by the portrayal of Biswas.

However, before considering Harris's critique and his own approach to characterisation, I wish to look at several aspects of Lamming's treatment of the person in his fiction which represent, in my view, considerable advances on the implicit frameworks V.S. Naipaul uses.

Firstly, whereas for Naipaul the decision of a character to rebel against an oppressive social world is portrayed as an almost inexplicable kind of mutation because his concept of the person is essentially asocial, Lamming explores in depth both the subjective conditions on which human agency rests and the objective social world in which action takes place. There is a revealing comment in A House For Mr. Biswas when Biswas suddenly defies Seth's tyranny:

There is, in some weak people who feel their own weakness and resent it, a certain mechanism which, operating suddenly and without conscious direction, releases them from final humiliation.⁵²

The vagueness of 'a certain mechanism' is revealing, and contrasts with Lamming's attempt to show the cognitive basis on which a person's response to social reality is made. Such a cognitive framework is not only the most important determiner of the way persons act in the world, but of what they are as persons. In this emphasis, Lamming pursues an approach to the person which has had its formal expression in the work of one of the most creative of psychologists, George Kelly. In brief, Kelly's theory is that persons develop a system of constructs (interpretive concepts) out of their experiences of reality. Construct systems are complex and hierarchical with core and peripheral constructs. Kelly's essential model is of the person as a scientist for whom all behaviour and the effects it has is potentially an experiment to test the predictive capacity of the system. Inevitably, some people are better scientists than others. Thus some people develop only narrow and rigid constructs and refuse to modify their systems even though the result is maladaptive behaviour or, in a deliberate attempt to protect their systems from change, a restriction of their lives to those experiences which can confirm their systems. On the other hand, people are capable of developing broad and flexible ways of viewing reality and revising their construct systems, and, in the process themselves, in the light of their construal of experience. Kelly argues that construct systems can be faulty both at the level of the constructs

themselves or in terms of the organisation of the system as a whole. For example, two ways in which constructs can be faulty is in being either excessively permeable (so ill-defined and elastic that it can be used to incorporate virtually any new event) or excessively impermeable (so rigid that it permits no new event to enter it which is not absolutely identical to previous elements.) Kelly recognises that people do sometimes act in highly predetermined ways if they become prisoners of the rigidity of their construct systems, but he argues that people always have the capacity in the last resort to change their systems and themselves.⁵³ In Lamming's Of Age And Innocence, something very closely approximating to Kelly's contrast between permeable and impermeable is shown to make the behaviour of several of the characters in Kelly's jargon, maladaptive. In one case phenomena are viewed as if they are fixed and unchangeable and human agency is denied; in the other, the objective world is seen as infinitely malleable and reality is denied.⁵⁴ The one character who has a coherent, active and realistic orientation to the world is described as having 'no difference between the thing he knew and the man he was. He was his knowledge'.

However, if Lamming explores the psychological basis for human action along lines which parallel Kelly's, he also to a considerable extent overcomes some of the defects of Kelly's psychology: its subjective relativism and its lack of a socio-historical dimension. By creating characters who are historically situated, who in the relationships they have with each other represent particular social and political forces, Lamming is able to bring into sharper focus not only the external conditions within which human agency functions but the way personalities are constructed through people's experiences of social structure and historical process. What is more, Lamming does this without falling into the trap of seeing people only in terms of their social roles or of creating characters who are merely social types.⁵⁵ Although he shows his characters acting in

terms of both their true collective social interests or false consciousness, he never loses sight of the individual choices his characters have to make. By contrast, though V.S. Naipaul shows a strong awareness of the general material basis of the personality, his approach lacks the kind of socio-historical incisiveness of Lamming's.

The third way in which Lamming's concept of the person is both more dynamic and properly social than Naipaul's is in his more extensive treatment of the way the personality is actively and socially constructed in interaction with others. As such, Lamming recognises the fragility of the personality but also sees it as something which can be remade. One of the major themes of Of Age And Innocence is the idea that the personality is created in the eyes of others and can be deformed, as Shephard's is, by their lack of positive regard. Yet Lamming also sees that in the vulnerable openness of the personality lies a strength, that out of that openness a genuine intersubjectivity can grow. He shows too that the remaking of a personality is not merely an individual enterprise. Shephard enters mass politics both to remake himself and the world, and the movement he is joint leader of touches deep psychological needs in its supporters.⁵⁶ Interestingly, V.S. Naipaul takes up many of the ideas expressed in Of Age And Innocence and uses them in The Mimic Men. He too deals with the idea of the personality made in the eyes of others, but because his concept of the person remains an individualistic one, he treats the need for interpersonal witness as only a weakness and vulnerability and never a strength.⁵⁷

Between the concepts of the person implied in virtually all the fiction discussed in this study and those expressed in Wilson Harris's work, there is a major philosophical break. Harris himself has made this clear in his unambiguously dismissive account of Naipaul's approach to the characterisation of Biswas in his essay 'Tradition and The West Indian Novel', (1964). He sees Naipaul's approach as lending itself 'to a vulgar and comic principle of

classification of things and people which gives the novel a conventional centre', and argues that the novel rests on ' a "common picture of humanity" so called', which:

restricts the open and original ground of choice; the vision and stress of transplantation in the person out of one world into another, the necessity for epic beyond the present framework, or tragedy within its present framework, since the assumption remains to the end a contemporary and limited one of burial and classification, a persuasion of singular and pathetic enlightenment rather than tragic centrality or a capacity for plural forms of profound identity.⁵⁸

This reading of Naipaul's novel strikes me as containing a mixture of profound insight and clumsy misrepresentation, a result of the fact that Naipaul and Harris have incompatible assumptions about the nature of the personality. For Naipaul, it is created within the finite biological span of life; for Harris the authentic personality is to be found in the free life of the spirit, immaterial, ahistorical and asocial. It is from that fundamentally different perspective that Harris fails to distinguish between the kind of fiction which depends on a commonsense trait-type 'theory' of the person, which is indeed well described by Harris's phrase about the 'principle of classification of things and people', and the subtlety of approach Naipaul in fact achieves in the novel. It is true that Naipaul, like Lamming and virtually every other novelist working within the concept of an objectively real world 'restricts the open and original ground of choice', but Harris will not traverse the ontological divide which separates him from such realist novelists to see that within the set of what he aggregates together as the conventional, there are in fact radically different approaches to the relationship between the person and the 'grounds of choice'. He grossly underestimates, for instance, the extent to which Naipaul, far from consolidating the character of Biswas, shows it to have been an essentially open structure, so that Biswas's life is an heroic and risky journey over a constantly yawning void. Again, Harris's description of the characterisation of Biswas as being limited to the 'comedy of pathos and the pathos of comedy' seems to me an insensitive

reading of the deep existential dread Naipaul shows his character to be suffering.

However, there are several points which Harris makes which are both just and necessary. Firstly, Harris rightly describes Naipaul's concept of the person as one which does not radically question the limitations of the 'present framework', and that above all it accepts without question the notion of the 'sovereign individual' as 'natural'. Harris is well aware that the 'sovereign individual' is the creation of a western, post-seventeenth century culture of bourgeois social relations and individual patterns of production and consumption, and that very different concepts are to be found, for instance, in Buddhist teaching.⁶¹

Harris's concern with the grounds of 'community' is an important corrective to the bias towards the individual. However, Harris sees the process whereby the self-sufficient barriers of individuality are broken down and a state of genuine community reached occurring, not through the social process of human relationships and collective political action, but, paradoxically, through the individual subjective process of shedding all historically and culturally situated elements of identity to reach an ahistorical, primordial 'medium of consciousness' which involves us in a similar essential oneness'.⁶² I argue in Chapter Eighteen that though The Far Journey Of Oudin communicates a vision of the capacity of the personality to change and grow and to free itself of imprisoning social and historical roles, Harris's subjective idealism limits the capacity of his fiction to give an open and sympathetic view of his characters' material lives. For instance, I feel that because of the emphasis on inner spiritual freedom, the outward characteristics of his East Indian peasant figures are in some respects ethnically stereotyped.

Even so, Harris, together with Naipaul and Lamming, brings a conceptual depth and subtlety to the portrayal of character which,

in going beyond the classificatory, evaluative scheme of traits, shows how the novel can go beyond the superficialities of ethnocentric ways of seeing to reveal the true complexities of the human personality.

I have made clear my own conviction that any genuinely holistic exploration of the nature of the person must have a socio-historical dimension. That is sooner said than done, for there are not only very sharp differences of view about the nature of such societies as Trinidad and Guyana, but also, as I argued in Chapters Two and Three, real difficulties for writers in the way of having intimate knowledge of the lives led by ethnic groups other than their own. As Parts Two and Three of this study indicate, the consequence has been that the vast majority of novels and stories written in Trinidad and Guyana make no attempt to represent the complex totality of their societies. There are, however, a few novels which have attempted that portrayal and, as the discussion which follows shows, have arrived at as diverse conclusions as are to be found in the social sciences.

However, before considering how such novels have portrayed these societies, I wish to consider some of the problems of conceptualization that the task of representing society raises. At the heart of the issue is the problem of 'knowing' something which exists beyond any individual experience. The individual experience of any structurally complex society will inevitably produce images of differences between the activities, values and levels of power of individuals and groups. But how can these differences be explained? What frameworks should be used to analyse or classify them? These questions lie at the heart of sharp differences of view about how society can be conceived. On the one hand, historical materialism, argues that the nature of a society's social formation must be sought in the relationship of groups to the real but unobservable structure of material production. As a dialectical discipline, historical materialism

is concerned with uncovering the causal mechanisms of change, seen in the historical activity of people, in the context of existing productive and social relations. In a genuinely dialectical historical materialism, forms of human consciousness (the values, attitudes, beliefs, ideas and knowledge people have) and the meanings they attribute to social phenomena are seen as of equal importance to the material basis of production.⁶³

By contrast, bourgeois sociology has been an empiricist, ahistorical discipline dominated by those who wish to maintain or tinker with the status quo. As an empirical discipline it has focussed on the observable, which is the behaviour, physical and verbal, of small groups and individuals. Instead of the concept of classes which have structural relationships to the means of production, empirical sociology deals only in aggregates of individuals clustered together around testable, statistically quantifiable data such as levels of income, consumption, education or occupational status. As an ahistorical discipline it has focussed on what keeps societies stable, particularly on the existence of 'consensual' norms which bind groups together within the same system. Such structural-functionalist approaches to society divorce the nature of social organisation from the forces which have brought it into place, and look at social groups in terms of the functions they perform which serve to maintain the organisation's equilibrium. If social change is explored, it is in terms of the mobility of individuals within an unchanging structure. Of course, even apparently stable societies show signs of stress, and it is part of the social function of bourgeois sociology (often heavily funded by the state) to explore the reasons for deviance from consensual norms.

In addition to the Marxist criticisms of bourgeois sociology, there have been several counter-tendencies within bourgeois sociology itself. Firstly, its goal of value-freeness has been rejected as illusory, particularly from the direction of phenomenology.⁶⁴

However, if this approach to society has rejected the myth of the value-free fact, and instead concentrates on the meanings people place on their social experience, it has tended to sunder those meanings from the objective social relations through which and about which they are constructed. Phenomenology has itself gone in two directions. On the one hand there has been the recognition that the social constructs that people place on reality are in the last resort 'caused' by that reality, but that the nature of reality is unknowable other than through these subjective meanings,⁶⁵ and on the other, there has been the pursuit of a full-blown conventionalism.⁶⁶ It is only a short step from asserting that the frameworks for human action can only be found in the meanings people attach to their experience to the idealist position that what people call 'society' is simply an imaginative fiction and that all history is the project of the human mind.

The second critique of structural functionalism focusses on its emphasis on static consensual norms. In reality, it is impossible to ignore the fact that in modern industrial societies there are periods of conflict and actual differences of interest. However, rather than seeing such interests as being related to the fundamental relations of production, the pluralist⁶⁷ thesis argues that such interests, for instance, of the managers of corporate capitalism and the trade unions, is negotiable and that out of conflict a new equilibrium is achieved.

The other major critique of structural functionalism comes from the tradition of structuralism in social anthropology, particularly from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. It is a critique motivated by the desire to find genuine causal explanations for the structural relations of phenomena rather than just discovering their functional interdependence. However, whilst structuralism shares with historical materialism the willingness to explain surface appearances in terms of unobservable 'deep' structures, the similarity is only superfic-

ial, since in structuralism the notion of structure is only synchronic, idealist (the ultimate source of deep structures is the human mind) and non-dialectical because surface features tend to be reduced to deep structural rules⁶⁸.

When Caribbean sociologists and political economists attempted to create explanatory or simply descriptive models of Caribbean societies, they did so within the parameters of the ideas outlined above, though there have been a number of attempts to develop new Caribbean models. The process of creating adequate models is still very much at a preliminary stage. Thus far there has been an embracing and then discarding of inappropriate and ill-fitting European models and the trying out of new models which at this stage are still partial and unbalanced.⁶⁹ It is a process to which, I believe, the novel has something to contribute.

There are three salient features of Caribbean societies which social models have to take account of. Firstly, Caribbean societies are, with the partial exception of Cuba, still very much part of the metropolitan economic system. Secondly, as a consequence of this economic relationship, the Caribbean has been the location of capital and managerial skills from Europe and labour from Africa, India, China and to a small extent, Europe; these components have been brought together in the plantation production of agricultural commodities. Thirdly, as demographic consequences of the plantation enterprise, large areas of the Caribbean have been over-populated with a surplus of unskilled labour; Caribbean societies are still marked by a colour-class hierarchy; and, in the case of Trinidad and Guyana (and Surinam), ethnically-plural societies with almost equally African and Indian populations have been created.

I wish to focus, in particular, on the attempts to develop a social model which comes to terms with the phenomenon of ethnic pluralism. For a time, intense debate focussed around two apparently opposing models, which in reality had a good deal in common. On the one

hand there was the attempt, in the work of sociologists such as Lloyd Braithwaite⁷⁰ and R.T.Smith⁷¹ to apply the consensualist stratification model to Trinidadian and Guyanese societies; on the other there was the application, principally in the work of M.G.Smith,⁷² of J.S.Furnivall's cultural pluralist thesis.

In the first case, Braithwaite's pioneering Social Stratification in Trinidad: A Preliminary Analysis (1953) is a portrayal of Trinidadian society in terms of a hierarchy of occupational status groups and earning levels. Trinidad is seen to be in the process of social change, but only in terms of the breakdown of the colour-caste barriers to upper status levels. The concept of social structure itself remains static. The most evident empirical weakness of Braithwaite's model was that it took little account of the Indian presence, a neglect based on the assumption that they fitted into the common stratification system and shared the same consensual norms. R.T. Smith's work on Guyana between 1955-1962 pays consistent attention to the Indian presence, but he similarly argues that they had been assimilated to a common Guyanese way of life. In both Braithwaite's and R.T.Smith's models, it is clear that consensus rests on the acceptance of European achievement criteria and that conflict, where it arises, arises from competition for scarce opportunities for occupational mobility.

This model of social stratification is present implicitly in a good many novels. It is presented very clearly in Edgar Mittelholzer's novels Corentyne Thunder (1943)⁷³ and A Morning At The Office (1950).⁷⁴ In the former, Mittelholzer carefully portrays a whole series of inter-connecting social levels between Weldon, the Euro-creole planter and Ramgolall, the illiterate cow-minder. As I showed in Chapter Five, each level is marked by differences of income, command of English and level of access to 'civilised' culture. The different levels are connected not only by the fact that Ramgolall's daughter is Weldon's mistress, but because each social level agrees on the

superiority of European values. In A Morning At The Office , Mittelholzer shows the intimate relationship between gradations of colour and status. He shows that though there are resentments and conflicts between the levels, there is agreement amongst all in the office that the accepted criteria for advancement is lightness of skin, education and the possession of Euro-creole cultural skills. However, in both novels, Mittelholzer is honest enough to recognise that his model of society doesn't wholly fit. In Corentyne Thunder, there are moments when the Indian peasant world is shown to have a cultural dynamism of its own, and in A Morning At The Office, he reminds the reader at times that there is a world outside the office, for instance, the world of Mary Barker's errant son, a world of steel-band, gang violence and clashes with the police, which threatens the social order which the hierarchy of the office symbolises.

Opposed to the consensual stratification model is the cultural pluralist thesis, neatly summarised in the words of M.G. Smith, its principal theorist:

By cultural plurality I understand a condition in which two or more different cultural traditions characterise the population of a given society. To discover whether or not this heterogeneity obtains, we must make a detailed study of the institutions of the population in which we are interested to discover their form, variety and distribution. In a culturally homogeneous society, such institutions as marriage, the family, religion, property, and the like, are common to the total population. Where cultural plurality obtains, different sections of the total population practice different forms of these common institutions; and, because institutions involve patterned activities, social relations and idea systems, in a condition of cultural plurality, the culturally differentiated sections will differ in their internal social organisation, their institutional activities, and in their system of belief and values. Where this condition of cultural plurality is found, the societies are plural societies. 75-

Smith goes on to argue that plural societies only survive as unitary entities when one cultural section dominates the other(s) or where, as typically under colonialism, all cultural sections are ruled by an external power. Cultural pluralism, as M.G. Smith defines it, is to be distinguished from ethnic diversity; he rightly recognises that different ethnic groups may share the same culture, as in the

U.S.A.

The actual level of interethnic conflict in Guyana, and to a lesser extent Trinidad, in the years immediately before independence would seem to support the cultural pluralist thesis. However, as a range of criticisms make plain, there is no necessary connection between such conflicts and the presence of ethnic groups who have separate cultural institutions. The racial violence in Guyana is equally explainable in terms of ideological conflict and the subsequent use of race as a mobilising strategy. ⁷⁶ The even greater level of political violence between the two leading parties in Jamaica, both supported by the black working class, indicates clearly that ethnic difference is in itself not a necessary factor. Although it offered itself as a real alternative to the stratificational model, the cultural pluralist thesis in fact shares the same deficiencies. It, too, is ahistorical. It is not difficult to show empirically, for instance, as the stratificationists frequently did, that the Indians were in the process of cultural change and that the level of cultural difference between Indians and Creoles was decreasing. There ought to have been, according to the model, less likelihood of conflict between the cultural sections. Instead, there is evidence to suggest that conflict occurred as the groups moved closer together and the Indians began to participate more fully in national life and seek employment in the same sectors of the economy as creoles. Secondly, the cultural pluralist thesis by treating human practices as institutions reifies them. This is no doubt related to the empirical goal of isolating quantifiable testable facts, but it would seem to deny the point of the pluralist thesis which is to show how differential cultural frameworks provide the basis for the conflicting social actions of ethnic groups. This reifying of practices into institutions is shared by the stratificationists in their counter-arguments. ⁷⁷ Both R.T. Smith and ⁷⁸ M.K. Bacchus see the shedding of specifically Indian cultural practices as evidence that separate

cultural institutions don't exist or are ceasing to exist and that the Indians are moving towards consensual norms. Both pluralists and stratificationists fail to see cultural practices in terms of their meanings for their practitioners. In truth, the evidence of the past thirty years would suggest that though, for instance, Indian family patterns may have moved closer to the 'normative' creole patterns (nuclear households, later marriage, free choice of partners) Indians may still perceive the nature of Indian marriage and family to be very different from creole patterns.

Thirdly, the pluralist thesis in seeking to base the frameworks for social action in cultural institutions fails to give proper emphasis to the real differences of interest which are generated by different levels of access to economic resources and power.⁷⁹ It has failed to predict the extent to which the Indian and Black middle classes have been able to reach an accommodation or the extent to which the Indian agricultural working class has acted in terms of its class and economic interests.

As a theory, the cultural pluralist thesis has been influential. It appears in many respects as a commonsense way of seeing societies such as Trinidad and Guyana, particularly at the times when ethnic groups have come into open conflict. As I suggested in Chapter Two, it is not difficult to see Trinidadian and Guyanese social reality as fragmented, and much of the fiction discussed in this study expresses this social image both in the way that much of it deals only with its own ethnic group or portrays members of other groups in ethnocentrically stereotyped ways. However, only a few novels and stories deal with this image of social fragmentation in an explicit way, or try to portray it within the context of the 'whole' society. The one novel which really comes to grips with the pluralist thesis is V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967) which is discussed in Chapter Seventeen. Although Naipaul does not make use of such concepts as cultural institutions (as one would not expect a novelist

sensitive to people's experiences to do), he nevertheless portrays his fictional island of Isabella as lacking any common reality, because its ethnic groups see it in different, culturally-shaped ways, and lacking any common purpose because its groups have very different, historically-derived goals. Each of the groups exist in a state of tension, their primordial racial sensibilities violated by contact with the alien other. He echoes M.G. Smith's thesis that plural societies only survive as single units by virtue of some form of external power holding the different sections in place. As soon as Isabella achieves self-government and the colonial power withdraws, things fall apart. I have argued in Chapter Seventeen that though The Mimic Men has immense value as a novel which shows why the plural thesis is so persuasive and which poses the problems created by ethnic diversity more searchingly than any other Caribbean novel, its deficiencies are essentially those of the social model it expresses. In particular, it poses the false dichotomy between the idea of social homogeneity and heterogeneity implicit in the whole pluralist thesis.

There has been one interesting attempt to go beyond the reification of the cultural institutions framework and ground the cultural pluralist thesis in the meaning cultural practices have for people. In his study of Indian and Creole life-styles in a small village in a cocoa-growing area, Morris Freilich's Cultural Diversity Among Trinidadian Peasants (1960)⁸⁰ confronts one of the main objections to the cultural pluralist thesis, that it ignores the participation of ethnic groups in the same economic system. He argues that despite earning their livings in broadly similar ways and sharing a system of status stratification which cuts across ethnic differences, each group in the village, held values, expressed in their life-styles, which were not merely dissimilar but opposed. Freilich's hypothesis was that when behaviour was looked at as meaningful and expressive and as a cultural whole, it could be seen to have a

deep inner logic and congruence. For instance, Freilich argues that the creole cultural system is located both in the immediate present and in the immediate space of the village, whereas the Indian system emphasises the future and the wider space outside the village, a space created by a network of kinship ties with Indians in neighbouring villages; and that whereas the most conspicuous Creole goal is 'fete' or the seeking of immediate pleasures, Indian goals are directed towards the future of family advance and provision for old age. Freilich's thesis has no real validity as a social model for several reasons. Although his description of the value systems of the peasants he studied might have some truth, it is certainly not generalisable to classes outside the peasant community. Secondly, his argument does not really prove that the possession of different cultural values can be taken as a necessary framework for differences of social action, to the exclusion of Indians' and Creoles' perceptions of their place in the social structure. Above all Freilich has fallen into the trap of polarising Indian and Creole values as two mutually exclusive ideal types instead of the reality of overlap and internal diversity. Nevertheless, Freilich's model certainly parallels the tendency of each group to see the cultural values of the other in a contrastive way. In Chapter Ten, I explored how Indo-Caribbean writers have portrayed the relationship between Indian and Creole culture in just such polarised terms, seeing them as variants of the contrast between order and energy. The creative germ in Freilich's concept is perhaps best revealed in Ismith Khan's underrated novel, The Obeah Man (1964), which, as I tried to show in Chapter Ten, dialectically transforms the contrast between the values into a vision of the necessary interaction of 'Creole' and 'Indian' values as the basis for the creation of a humane society.

In The Obeah Man, Ismith Khan in fact disguises the Creole / Indian identification of values by making his leading characters of

mixed race. His perception of the possibility of interaction between cultures and the actual existence of racial blends in the Caribbean is part of a much wider alternative cultural view of Caribbean societies which, instead of seeing cultural groups as discrete, focuses on those points where cultural boundaries break down. It is an approach which introduces several important concepts to the description and understanding of Caribbean societies, but is in my view as one-sided as the pluralist model it criticises.

One of the first presentations of the idea of intercultururation is Daniel J. Crowley's article 'Plural and Differential Acculturation in Trinidad' (1957)⁸¹, an imaginative picture of a Trinidadian cultural melange, of a home where the father is of African and Chinese parentage, the mother of Portuguese and Indian, where the child attends a Catholic school, goes to Hindu festivals and Shango and Shouter services, hears African folk-tales and eats the food of every group. As a generalised picture of Trinidadian life it is fanciful, but Crowley rightly observes that at the interstices of contact between groups, syncretic practices develop, such as the Hindu cult of the Divina Pastora at Siparia. As Chapter Seven noted, considerable intercultururation has indeed taken place in the zone of spirit beliefs between African and Indian country dwellers.⁸²

The notion of intercultururation is taken up and refined in the work of Edward Brathwaite⁸³ as a valuable corrective, on the one hand to the emphasis of the consensual stratificationists on assimilation to European norms and, on the other hand, to the emphasis of the pluralists on cultural disjunction. Brathwaite is, however, sufficiently realistic not to suggest that intercultururation is the dominant social process. In his study of the development of Creole society in Jamaica he focuses on the interaction between the process of the acculturation of the African slaves to the dominant European norms and the process of intercultururation in which, for instance, the Jamaican whites were partially indigenised by the subversive

influence of the Blacks who surrounded them. Brathwaite sees the process of miscegenation as a particularly powerful channel for interculturalisation, but does not seek to erect a general model on the basis of this process. Nor does he see the existence of a cultural continuum between the Blacks and the Whites as evidence of consensus, since he sees no incompatibility between his cultural model and a model of class conflict. Brathwaite is also very honestly aware that his model does not really encompass the Indian presence.

The inadequacies of models which do not take into account the basis of culture in social structure or attempt to build a model on a metaphysic of racial mixing are sharply revealed in Lee Drummond's intersystems model and Dennis Williams's Image and Idea in The Arts of Guyana (1969). Drummond's model⁸⁴ rests on the application of linguistic theory to cultural analysis, and though he advances good reasons for using Derek Bickerton's Dynamics Of A Creole System (1975) which is based on the idea of a linguistic continuum and diachronic change, rather than the idea of discreteness of language systems and the priority of synchronic analysis to be found in Saussurian or Chomskyan linguistics,⁸⁵ his application of the thesis only serves to strengthen doubts about the validity of using linguistic models to describe culture at all. Drummond argues that Guyanese society possesses a cultural continuum, 'primarily organised around variable concepts of ethnic identity', and that though different ethnic identities are conceptualised in different ways, they belong to the same continuum, so that it is theoretically possible to find transformative rules to explain the relationship of one end of the system to another. The analogy with the creole language continuum leads Drummond into a number of confusions. It is true that native Guyanese speakers possess the capacity to operate across the language continuum, though the span is very different for say the urban middle class African and the elderly rural Indian. However, his assertion that Guyanese have the same capacity to span a broad

range of 'creole' cultural practices is just not supported by evidence. It is not the case that the vast majority of Afro-Guyanese have any access to Indo-Guyanese cultural practices or have an Indo-Guyanese cultural identity at their disposal. Drummond confuses the valid argument that Guyanese share the same symbolic system for talking about ethnic identities and the invalid assertion that there is a continuum of identities which Guyanese can freely inhabit. Ultimately, he has to found his assertion on the evidence of inter-ethnic mixture, which is in reality still a peripheral aspect of relationships between Africans and Indians. He asserts:

The extent and duration of interethnic mixture in Guyana, together with the diversity of established ethnic stereotypes, gives Guyanese the routine choice of constantly bringing into operation a range of ethnic identities.⁸⁵

In support of this argument, Drummond refers to the mixture of cultural practices at two weddings involving partners of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds. The confusions he describes are very much part of the Guyanese experience, but he treats a marginal experience as if it was central. Drummond's thesis is also confused in its attempt to relate cultural system to social structure. He treats the former in a wholly idealistic way and the latter in a mechanically materialist way. Ethnic identities derive purely from the 'interplay of cultural categories' whilst class consciousness derives from economic realities. He asserts, for instance, that in Guyana. ⁸⁷ 'people have fought and died in the context of ideas about race'. This is palpable nonsense. Africans and Indians did not kill each other in the context of ideas, but as part of a struggle for real political power. But this kind of nonsense comes naturally from the one-sidedness of a theory based on the assertion that 'The analysis of culture must proceed at the levels of semantics and discourse'.

The illegitimacy of socio-cultural theories founded on the existence of racial mixing at the peripheries of ethnic groups is even

more sharply revealed in Dennis Williams's polemic in Image and Idea in the Arts of Guyana (1969). He argues that in Guyana there is a fundamental divide between the unique New World mix of racial strains and the remnants of the 'pure' races of the Old World in the area, whether from Africa, Europe or India. On the one hand there is miscegenation, 'and conservative reaction to miscegenation on the other'. He argues that the transplanted old world cultures are made degenerate by transplantation and that their continuing 'filiastic' dependence on the old world will result in a diminution of vigour and eventual cultural arrest.

The one new source of cultural vigour is seen in the emergence of an original mestizo culture which has its biological precedent in the genetically unique situation of the Caribbean mulatto, the 'first reality of the region'. He appears to assume that cultural dynamism will follow the dynamism of genetic mixing. However, Williams quite frequently contradicts his mixing of biology and culture when he observes, for instance, that Guyanese society has an 'obvious vitality and persistent freshness' which is 'paradoxically rooted in the filiastic separateness of its constituent elements'. This does not square with his argument about the degeneracy of 'filiastic' cultures, so a new chemical metaphor is employed to explain that the old world cultures are merely 'catalysts' which change their surrounding substances without themselves changing: 'these racially static elements acquire a fortuitous dynamism'.

Williams's thesis was explicitly directed against the pan-Africanist ideology of A.S.C.R.I.A., which was currently challenging the cultural dominance of the mulatto and Afro-Saxon elite in the P.N.C. but its implicit subject is also the Indians as the most significant old world group in Guyana who refuse to melt in the cultural mélange and which still possessed those 'tribal, religious, social or psychic taboos which secure and protect the continuity of the line'. Since Williams believes that 'the creative potential of a given racial element in Guyana stands in direct relationship to its subject-

ion to the process of catalysis', he regards the Indian presence as irrelevant to the process of melange. He writes, for instance, that the 'religions and philosophic systems [of 'oriental and other immigrants to this country'] never will have any relevance in the New World' and he adds, casually, 'One is regrettably but necessarily vague in matters of oriental religion, philosophy, art, and literature in this country...'⁹³ The ideal person in Williams's mestizo cultural vision is represented by characters like Oudin in Wilson Harris's The Far Journey Of Oudin, or the 'race-less pork-knocker' that Kaiser becomes in Harris's later novel, Heartland (1964). However, in returning to the actual, Williams is realistically pessimistic about the likelihood of the kind of racial mixing which he believes would be the basis for integration and cultural originality.

Williams's thesis does not, in the end, amount to anything which could be called a coherent social model. The same is true of Wilson Harris's writings on Caribbean society and culture, though there is much which is genuinely important in Harris's work, particularly in its criticism of static, narrowly empirical and deterministic models of Caribbean societies. Moreover, whereas Williams's lack of coherence is the product of his confusion between biology and culture, the contradictions in Harris's work represent shifts of view in response to changing situations.

Initially, Harris espoused much the same kind of cultural melting pot thesis as Williams, though expressed in more liberal and provisional terms. In an essay of 1968, 'The Unresolved Constitution',⁹⁴ Harris contrasts the task of the 'creative imagination' in discovering the essential primordial man with the practice of the empirical social sciences which merely record observable but superficial facts. In particular, he criticises the pluralist thesis for its static and pessimistic perception of discrete, antagonistic cultural sections. The creative imagination is involved in:

a centring process, an internal representation of alien, however forbidding, particulars rather than an external representation of familiar hopelessness, stalemate and feud. It is this vision of the translation of capacities within a violation of cultures - the splinters at the heart of the 'crash' which, centrifugal-wise and centripetal-wise, may infuse a diverse unity of consciousness into every cloak or vehicle of memory; hereby sustaining the history of crisis as a living process of individuation rather than as an expendable and fortuitous creed.⁴⁵

He supports this vision by reference to the kind of interstercial phenomena Drummond builds his cultural model on.⁴⁶

This welcoming of the process of the breaking-down of self-sufficient cultures and a process of cultural fusion as a step on the road to the discovery of universal man is, as I have argued in Chapter Eighteen, the position implicit in Harris's treatment of the Indian peasant world in The Far Journey Of Oudin. However, Harris returned to Guyana in 1970, and it must have been apparent to him that his vision of the cultural melting pot could become the justification for an authoritarian cultural policy, at odds with existing cultural realities and human needs. The Guyanese Government, glorying in the hosting of the region's first festival of artists and writers,⁴⁷ was in the process of trying to force a new 'Guyanese' cultural amalgam into being, which incorporated token elements of Indian culture into an Afro-Guyanese cultural matrix, whilst at the same time ignoring and suppressing what was vital and autonomous in Indo-Guyanese culture. Harris has the perspicacity to see that what he had offered as a corrective vision to the assumption of cultural solidity had, in the process of becoming a new orthodoxy, revealed the extent to which the actual diversity of cultures had to be recognised. In 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination' (1973) he warns:

...any wholesale digestion and liberation of contrasting spaces obviously is a monolithic illusion. Or a monolithic imperative...And yet it seems one thinks all the time in terms like these because, to a major extent, we are dominated by what I would call a homogeneous imperative...and therefore we fail to see that the homogeneous imperative very often masks or conceals from us the heterogeneous roots of a community.⁴⁸

If the strengths of Harris's social writing include its insistence on the falsity of static social models and the significance of social processes which are apparently peripheral, its weaknesses are its exclusively cultural approach to society and its idealist philosophical framework.

Harris's intellectual project has had as part of its motivation the attempt to see the Caribbean in its own terms, and this inevitably means in terms of its particular historical legacy. This is an approach shared by the otherwise very different 'plantation model' of Caribbean society, different because in contrast with Harris's concern with culture, the plantation model focuses on the material, economic basis of Caribbean society.

The plantation model⁹⁹ attempts to explain Caribbean social structure and culture in terms of the region's experience of being an outpost of metropolitan economic enterprise, and in particular of the plantation mode of tropical agriculture. The model has had a double focus. The first is on the consequences of the way Caribbean societies have existed in a state of economic dependence on metropolitan capital and management, so that the whole orientation of the society was towards the metropolis and their social formation was largely determined by metropolitan economic force. The second emphasis has been on the plantation as a genetic model for the society as a whole, seeing its rigid social hierarchy and colour-caste system being replicated and surviving into the present. Those who advanced the plantation society model distinguished it both from the cultural pluralists and the stratificationists by virtue of its concept of historical dynamic and class conflict. For instance, Elsa Goveia argued that:

...the very division between the classes is in fact part of the rationale, part of the integrating organisation of the society in which the different classes live differently. I have tried to point out elsewhere that this integrating factor which affects the society as a whole, is the acceptance of the inferiority of Negroes to Whites.¹⁰⁰

However, in distinction to the consensualists, Goveia saw this 'divisive integration' as inherently unstable and predicted that Caribbean societies would be marked by sharp conflicts between those who benefitted from the survival of this structure and the mass of the people who had been enfranchised as a result of the political demonstrations of the late 1930s, but who had not yet claimed their full political portion.

The organisation of the plantation was also seen as an explanation for the degree of common ground between Africans and Indians in Guyana in particular. The plantation was seen as a 'total institution' of the Goffman type in which the life-style and values of immigrant groups are modified to fit the needs of regimented agricultural production. R.T. Smith argued, for instance, that many aspects of Indian culture (caste, language and family organisation) were heavily modified by the plantation system.¹⁰¹ The reality was in fact much more complex. As Chapters Seven and Nine point out, the plantation was only one kind of framework for Indian lives, and there is considerable evidence that in fact many estate managers preferred to leave social control as much as possible to the surviving internal mechanisms of the Indian estate micro-societies.¹⁰²

The relevance of the plantation model as an explanation of social forms and forms of consciousness has been questioned from several directions. Firstly, it has been argued that the plantation was only one form of economic organisation and that particularly in the form of agricultural estate, it is rapidly becoming a less important part of the economies of most Caribbean societies. The importance of mineral extraction, the growth of local industries and a degree of bureaucratic state management have all been recognised as generating social formations more complex than the plantation model is capable of explaining. Secondly, the model has been criticised for encouraging the continued perception of Caribbean societies as mere

appendages to the metropolis, a tendency apparent in even a nationalist historian such as Dr. Eric Williams,¹⁰³ and , as I argued in Chapter Fourteen, in V.S. Naipaul's The Loss Of Eldorado (1969). Thirdly the model has been reproached for its tendency to confirm pessimistic and deterministic conceptions of Caribbean social possibilities. Edward Brathwaite has, for instance, criticised the model's emphasis on the assimilation of the subject population to European norms, to the exclusion of what he has called the 'inner plantation', those areas of estate life where slaves (and one can add indentured labourers) created their own forms of cultural practice, their own social relations and, in the slave markets, their own form of economic activity.¹⁰⁴ Although the plantation model distinguishes itself from the cultural pluralist model by its emphasis on integrative mechanisms, it is not incompatible with it. Indeed, V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967) illustrates how the two frameworks can fit together, linked by their common determinism. Nevertheless, the plantation model properly relates cultural forms and social structures to their economic basis; it confronts the realities of economic dependence and faces up to the negative social and cultural legacies of European colonialism. Without such a recognition, social models are condemned to being merely utopian.

However, I believe that it is only in a historical materialism of a dialectical, imaginative and non-dogmatic kind, that the inadequacies of other social models can be overcome and their positive insights integrated into an holistic model which does justice both to social structure and social action , to the material basis and cultural forms.

Outside the work of C.L.R. James¹⁰⁵ there is not yet an independent and creative tradition of Anglo-Caribbean Marxist thought. Much of what passes as Marxism has been no more than the importation of European class categories without fresh analysis of the Caribbean situation. There has, indeed, been some excuse for the arguments of such social democratic theorists as

Lloyd Best that Marxist class analysis was irrelevant.¹⁰⁶

However, there is in the work of George Lamming, in his fiction and essays, the outlines of an approach of inestimable value which Caribbean social science has not yet surpassed. My detailed analysis of Lamming's achievement in Of Age And Innocence follows in Chapter Nineteen; at this point I wish to identify those aspects of Lamming's conception of society, both explicit and implicitly expressed in his fiction, which enable him to present a portrayal of a Caribbean society which recognises both its diversity and its potential wholeness.

Firstly, running through all Lamming's novels is the perception that the Caribbean context is always in part the context of a colonised experience. It is the particular subject of Natives of My Person (1971); and in Of Age And Innocence it is seen in Shephard's traumatic experiences of London, Singh's overhearing of Baden-Semper's imperialist arrogance towards the workers on the sugar estate, or the presence of the metropolitans, Flagstead, Bill, Penelope and Marcia, in San Christabal. At the same time, however, Lamming gives due emphasis to the inner resources of Caribbean societies, to the tradition of the tonelle in Season Of Adventure or the example of resistance by the Tribe Boys in Of Age and Innocence.

Secondly, Lamming's vision is always genuinely historical, but never in a deterministic way. Contemporary actors perform within structures inherited from the past, but always have the capacity to act on those structures. Shephard's project is to remake the world which has maimed him.

Thirdly, Lamming's novels show a keen awareness of the complex relationship between class and racial consciousness. For him class is not simply a statistical allocation according to income or status, but a relationship between groups with competing and mutually exclusive interests. He shows this dramatically at the point when Crabbe, the European police chief, feels 'feeble' when he sees the close

alliance of the African and Indian groups under the leadership of Shephard and Singh, but recovers his confidence when he suspects an Indian conspiracy against Shephard:

Singh's passionate homage to Shephard had made him feeble; but now he felt strong. Something had cleansed his doubt. He was redeemed by his knowledge of their obscene alliance... 107

Class, for Lamming, is also a relationship between objective position and subjective consciousness, and this enables him to articulate the relationship between class consciousness and ethnic consciousness with great insight, though his apparent ignorance, as a Barbadian, of the social basis of Indian ethnic consciousness is one of the inadequacies of Of Age And Innocence. 108

Since the discussion above has already indicated that the most valid attempts to create models of Caribbean social reality make use of some concept of historical process, it is not my intention to discuss conflicting directions in Caribbean historiography in any detail. However, I wish to draw attention to the very different concepts of history present respectively of the work of Naipaul, Harris and Lamming. They are concepts which have a considerable influence on their approaches to Caribbean society.

V.S. Naipaul has described the kind of material which passed for the history of Trinidad during his childhood:

History was a fairytale about Columbus and a fairytale about the strange customs of the aboriginal Caribs and Arawaks; it was impossible now to set them in the landscape... History was also a fairytale not so much about slavery as about its abolition, the good defeating the bad. It was the only way the tale could be told. Any other version would have ended in ambiguity and alarm. 109

Such was the non-historical vision which V.S. Naipaul reacted in despair against when he wrote, 'How can the history of this West Indian futility be written'... 'History was built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies'. 110 And although Naipaul responded in a more measured way to this challenge in The Mimic Men and The Loss Of Eldorado, I cannot feel that he has ever entirely escaped from having to respond to the parameters of the imperialist history of his childhood. It is significant that the

imaginary works of history Naipaul invents for Isabella in The Mimic Men are all works which make of the island merely an annexe of Europe. Naipaul's vision of history is also quite frequently deterministic. For instance, in discussing the relationship between the brown middle class and Blacks in the Caribbean, he writes: 'their relation had been fixed centuries before'.¹¹²

As one might expect, Wilson Harris's writings about history make a radical break from the conventions of historical understanding. History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas¹¹³ (1970) illustrates both the strengths of Harris's approach and its limiting eccentricity. He makes certain important points. He insists, for instance, that historiography must be as concerned with what has apparently disappeared ('the trail of silent things') as with the more obvious facts of achievement and change, since the lives of all those 'persons known and unknown in the structure of time and space' are part of the 'enormous heritage' the 'broken parts' of which it is the task of the historical imagination to recover because they are part of 'the epic strategems available to Caribbean man in the dilemmas of history which surround him'.¹¹⁴ He rejects the notion of the 'historylessness' of the Caribbean as a false state of consciousness. Deliberately punning on the title of Orlando Patterson's novel of Caribbean historylessness, An Absence of Ruins (1967), Harris insists that historians need to look 'deep into the rubble'. He charges Caribbean historiography with a suspicion of 'folk-obscurity' and of censoring aspects of the people's creativity, the 'crucial inner recreative response to the violations of slavery and indenture and conquest...'¹¹⁵ He rightly observes that some nationalist historians, in seeking to indict imperialism, 'conscripted the West Indies into a mere adjunct of imperialism and overlooked a subtle and far-reaching renaissance'. His charge that much historiography simply constructs a version of history in line with the ruling

prejudices of the time is, of course, unchallengeable, but his concept of 'scale' which he offers as a means of 'freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions' is an illusory attempt (and Harris recognises it as such) to escape from history itself. Similarly, Harris's recognition that all historiography is a mental construct leads him not to a realist concern with method and underlying assumptions but to the idealist position that as history is a fiction, it can be freely patterned according to the promptings of the subjective imagination.

In many respects the determinism of Naipaul's history and the freedom Harris feels to rewrite history as a moral fable are inverted images of each other. The merit of Lamming's approach is that he both recognises the harsh structures of the past which oppress Naipaul's vision and also sees the possibility that history can be constantly 'rewritten', not as in Harris's work through an act of romantic fabulation, but through the actions of the Caribbean people.

In the last section of this chapter, I examine briefly some of the formal aesthetic means writers have used to represent their conceptions of society in the fictional text. This is used as a prelude to the consideration of the relationship between ideas and literariness and my argument that the relationship can most fruitfully be seen in the context of the potential communicative relationship between writer and reader.

A consideration of how novels represent concepts of society leads to the inevitable recognition that narrative fiction must be regarded as a heterogeneous form which takes over methods from other discourses as well as employing its own specific potentialities. The most obvious way of representing society, widely employed in all kinds of novels irrespective of their aesthetic commitments is, of course, the insertion of direct sociological description. This

can take the form of the kind of expositions found in C.L.R. James's Minty Alley (1936)¹¹⁷ where he outlines the social structure of the yard as well as dramatises it, or the kind of montage techniques used by Selvon in A Brighter Sun (1952) which convey the rapid social changes taking place in post-war Trinidad. Secondly, society is frequently revealed through the speech, inner speech and actions of characters. Speech and action can, of course, be used both to convey the social perceptions of 'aware' characters, and reveal the way society works through the behaviour of characters who are unconscious of its influences on them. Both methods are used in Of Age And Innocence. Singh's account of his estate experiences and his subsequent actions uncover the class antagonisms in the society of San Christobal, whilst Ma Shephard's decision to betray Singh's and Lee's role in Crabbe's death demonstrates how pervasive colonial ideology has been in winning the obedience of the older generation. Thirdly, novels reveal social structure and social consciousness through the interactions of their characters and their role in the novel's structure. The fact that only a small number of novels discussed in this study use this means of revealing social structures and relations is indicative, once again, of the difficulty of seeing societies such as Trinidad and Guyana whole. Nevertheless, a number of different devices may be observed. In Mittelholzer's A Morning At The Office (1950), the dramatic device of the closed microcosm is used to focus on the hierarchical colour-class relations of the wider society. On the other hand, in Earl Lovelace's The Dragon Can't Dance, focussing on one geographical location in combination with a serial form of episodic narration enables Lovelace both to relate a much wider range of social scenes to the life of the central characters and stress both the links and the discontinuities between their lives. Again, in introducing one character from a different social and cultural background, the Indian Pariag, into the life of the focal social group, Lovelace employs another recurr-

ing device used in novels such as Minty Alley, Roy Heath's One Generation¹²⁰ and Selvon's A Brighter Sun and Turn Again Tiger.

A fourth means of revealing concepts of society is through the ambitious creation of a wide social canvas, rather than a microcosm, of characters who represent different groups and forces in society. Both Ralph de Boissière in Crown Jewel and Lamming in Of Age And Innocence convey a broad and representative span of an ethnically plural, class-divided society in the process of turbulent change. They both have similar radical political visions, but the way each chooses to show the relationships between characters begins to indicate something of the relationship between concept and mode of representation. de Boissière, in order to maintain a naturalistic narrative plausibility, provides some point of connection which links his wide cast of characters together. For instance, Andre de Coudray, the light-skinned protagonist, has a relationship both with the family of Judge Osborne and with Elena, the coloured girl whose mother does work for the de Coudrays. Similarly, Cassie, a black girl whom Andre meets in the working class movement, has also at one point worked as a servant for the Osborne's. At one level de Boissière reveals the interplay of class and racial relations through these connections, but his emphasis on connection also seems to me to give the novel the unintended picture of a more comfortable social family linked by blood and forms of service, than is indicated by the actual bitter class and race conflicts between the workers and the Trinidadian ruling class. In addition, as I argued in Chapter Five, de Boissière's commitment to naturalistic plausibility prevents him from adequately portraying the Indian presence, other than as marginals to his conception of Trinidadian society. By contrast, Lamming deliberately creates situations where characters are thrust into isolation and stresses their absence of contact. By this means, he is able to convey the actual gulfs between classes, at the same time as the novel as a whole reveals their antagonistic

relationships within the same social polity. The technique, of course, is not new. It is a feature of later Dickens novels such as Bleak House, a novel with a similarly profound and poetic grasp of the social atomisation of capitalist societies.

This comparison, between Lamming's ability to find a mode of representation aesthetically adequate to his ideas and the way that de Boissiere's radical ideas are to some extent subverted by the conservatism of his narrative form, leads inevitably to considering the objection that a novelist may well have sensitive and profound conceptions of the person, society and history and yet be incapable of producing a novel of 'literary' quality. There is, of course, 'something else', other than the conceptualisations I have drawn attention to in this chapter, which shapes one's response to works of fiction, but I want to define that something else rather differently from what is usually implied by such terms as literary excellence, a term with specific historical biases, linked, I believe, to the separation in European literature between serious writers and a broad social audience.¹²¹ In contrast, I want to restore the idea of literary excellence to the broader conception of what the imaginative literary work enables us to see.

In the first place, there is frequently a confusion in criticism between responding to concept and responding to expression. Very often what is condemned as a literary failure in fact turns out to be a failure of a different kind. For instance, in a review of Orlando Patterson's Die The Long Day (1972),¹²² John Hearne attempts to distinguish between his praise for Patterson's sociological and historical understanding, his 'wide knowledge of social structure, his gift for penetrating and original analogies' and his 'compassion', and his criticism of Die The Long Day as a novel because it lacks, in Henry James's words, 'the sense of felt life'. Thus far Hearne's critique is unexceptionable. However, it soon becomes clear that Hearne's real objection is to Patterson's conception of the social

determinations of character, as opposed to his own equally conceptualised preference for some asocial, ahistorical essence of man 'not tied to any circumstances'. Moreover, when he gives chapter and verse for the faults of the novel most of them relate to allegations of Patterson's inexactness in portraying the relationships of characters to their circumstances and to awkward lapses in verisimilitude. These are clearly faults at the level of Patterson's conceptualisation of his subject, though Hearne, anxious to establish the primacy of literariness, pretends that they are not.

A similar process occurs in Ken Ramchand's discussion of Vic Reid's New Day (1949)¹²³, where he advances the view that the novel which has an intuitive grasp of history may offer more profound insights than the novel which is 'more directly or documentarily concerned with recreating the past'. Ramchand is somewhat nervously defending the special contribution of imaginative literature which offers 'the freeplay of imagination and intuition' as opposed to the more rigorous and scrupulous but confined imagination of the historian. Although the whole tenor of my argument is against a dichotomy between literature as intuitive and other discourses as rigorously conceptualised, it is possible to accept the point that Ramchand makes. However, what he goes on to demonstrate very persuasively, is that New Day's defects stem from Reid's inadequate grasp of historical process rather than any absence of literary skills. The point I am making, then, is that criticism must be clear whether it is criticising a writer's conceptualisations or his capacity to realise those ideas in the structure and texture of the novel.

However, there is an important reminder in Hearne's critique that the novel, if it is to communicate its ideas, must engage the reader's attention. Serious reading is hard work and the novelist must be all too aware how easy it is for the reader to put the book down. It is here at this point of possible communication that I

wish to locate the importance and the role of literariness. Yet it is not merely because we become involved with characters, become curious about what happens next or enjoy the text-labour of reading that we become engaged in a novel. Engagement and pleasure can equally occur, as I argued in Chapter One, because we feel that we are gaining some enlarged understanding or challenge to our way of seeing.

A genuinely holistic and liberal criticism ought to recognise all those levels. For example, if one compares de Boissiere's Crown Jewel with, say, V.S. Naipaul's A House For Mr. Biswas, one ought to be able to admire them for the different things they do. A narrowly defined 'literary' response cannot do this. If one compares broadly similar passages in each novel it becomes very easy to show that Naipaul has the skill to bring character alive and engage the reader in the texture of the prose in a way that de Boissiere has not. In this episode from Crown Jewel, Elena is trying to comfort her mother Aurelia, who is distressed and humiliated after bailiffs have removed property from her home:

An invisible lock had shut the door on happiness from the day she married Henriques. Life had thrown her down a well. She had worked like a cockroach that struggles endlessly and with desperation to climb up the smooth sides of the glass into which it has fallen. It is halfway out but it slips and falls back. It tries again, choosing another side, but fails to get a grip. It falls on its back, its legs vainly clawing the air. At last it succeeds in righting itself. It pauses to gain strength, laboriously it begins to climb once more. For a long time Aurelia sat turning over the leaves of the fashion book and occasionally blowing her nose. At length, however, she rose and her scissors crunched again on the cutting-table. Elena came out and conferred with her about basting a collar. She broke off to tell her mother in an eager yet timid voice how lovely was some style she had seen a day or two before, describing it with that minuteness of which only young girls in poor circumstances seem capable. She was trying to say that she loved her, was not ashamed, that she thought no less of her for failing to keep out the bailiff. But Aurelia did not understand this, and Elena was too shy to embrace her and warm her heart.... 124

In the episode from A House For Mr. Biswas, Shama is trying to console Biswas who feels humiliated by the way his mother's corpse has been treated by a snobbish middle-class Indian doctor:

She went to the front room one evening and stood at the head of the bed. He was writing; his back was to her. She was in his light, but he did not shout.

'What's the matter, man?'

He said in an expressionless voice, 'You are blocking the light.' He laid down paper and pencil.

She worked her way between the table and bed and sat on the edge of the bed, near his head. Her weight created a minor disturbance. The pillow tilted and his head slipped off it, falling almost into her lap. He tried to move his head, but when she held it he remained still.

'You don't look well,' she said.

He accepted her caresses. She stroked his hair, remarked on its fine quality, said it was going thin, but not, thank God, going grey like hers. She pulled out a hair from her head and laid it across his chest. 'Look,' she said, 'completely grey,' laughing.

'Grey all right.'

She looked over his chest to the sheets he had put down. She saw My Dear Doctor, with My crossed out and written in again.

'Who you writing to?'

She couldn't read more, for beyond the first line the handwriting had deteriorated into a racing scrawl.

He didn't reply.

For some time, until the position became uncomfortable for Shama, they remained like that, silent. She stroked his head, looking from him to the open window, heard the buzz and shrieks upstairs and down stairs. He closed his eyes and opened them under her stroking.

'Which doctor?' Though there had been a long silence, there seemed to be no break between her questions.

He was silent.

Then he said, 'Doctor Rameshwar.'

'The one who...'

'Yes. The one who signed my mother's death certificate.' 125
She went on stroking his head, and, slowly, he began to speak.

The strengths and deficiencies are glaringly apparent. Whereas Naipaul presents the episode directly and dramatically and in all its physicality (the weight on the bed, the pillow tilting), de Boissiere tells about what happens, and though he describes Aurelia's actions, it is only the crunch of the scissors which suggest those actions physical actuality. Naipaul reveals the habitual relationship between Biswas and Shama ('She was in his light, but he did not shout.') and their current feelings (the deteriorated handwriting of the letter) in economical and dramatic ways. De Boissiere by contrast has to explain the relationship between Elena and her mother. Naipaul makes effective use of both direct and indirect speech, both summarising economically and suggesting Shama's way of speaking ('said it was going thin, but not, thank God, going grey..');

de Boissière's use of indirect speech is flat and he has to tell us how Elena speaks to her mother. In Naipaul's prose, the style frequently enacts the meaning, the double parenthesis in the following sentence neatly reinforcing Biswas's hesitancy: 'She went on stroking his head, and, slowly, he began to speak'. Yet though the style has this expressive quality one is never conscious of Naipaul as an obtrusive presence and the contrast between the silence of the room and the noise outside further concentrates our attention on Biswas's and Shama's moment of intense involvement. By contrast, de Boissière's prose is at best workmanlike, and in the choice of words such as 'conferred', somewhat stiff. Above all one is constantly aware of his intrusive presence, and the more he intrudes, the more he grates with the knowingness of 'that minuteness of which only young girls in poor circumstances seem capable.' The series of metaphors and metaphorical clichés at the beginning of the passage are unfortunately mixed (locked doors, wells, cockroaches in glasses) and they constitute an unnecessary and indulgent comment on Aurelia's position which has been clear enough from the point where the bailiff calls. More points could be made, but it is obvious why Naipaul should so readily seduce our attention whereas one remains engaged with de Boissière's novel almost in spite of the writing. The quality of literariness is of undeniable importance, but it is not the only matter of importance. As I have argued in Chapter Five, few Caribbean novelists have communicated so vividly an awareness of how people at all levels of society become engaged in the historical process, where history is not some vague backdrop to their lives, but something which in their witting and unwitting ways they are making themselves. If Crown Jewel does not always please in the execution, the over all conception engages and excites.

Literariness is, however, more than a matter of the individual writer's skills. It is part of the writer's conception of the nature of his art and the function of that art in relationship to an

audience. In the conclusion to this chapter, I wish to compare three statements made respectively by Naipaul, Harris and Lamming which throw some further light on how each of them has conceptualised that relationship.

In a newspaper article, V.S. Naipaul records that whilst he was writing A House For Mr. Biswas he had to seek information about certain details because he had no country background:

What I would do was to write according to my imagination, and then consult people on little items of inconsequential information to lend vividness and verisimilitude to the story. ...I'm afraid I was quite unscrupulous about this; in the scene with the flying ants, I wasn't at all sure that there were such things (actually I've found out since that there are); but I needed them for the scene, so flying ants I put in. In a way it's like a sleight of hand; you mention a chair and it's shadowy; you say it's stained with wedding saffron, and suddenly that chair is there, palpable. 126

The passage suggests both the strengths and limitations of the concern with 'vividness' and verisimilitude. It conveys Naipaul's keen awareness of the necessity of involving his reader, in a 'palpable' sense, in the experience of his characters, but the concern with inconsequential detail perhaps confirms Wilson Harris's criticism that novels like A House For Mr. Biswas, by the very exactness and 'realism' of their surfaces, tend to confirm their readers in a conviction of the solidity of a 'commonsense', but in reality ideologically structured vision of the world.

By contrast, Wilson Harris's fiction has been devoted to attempting to dismember such solid bodies of assumption. He has consistently asserted the need for an aesthetic which is adequate to the expression of a perception of a 'reality' which is complex and uncertain. He recognises the difficulty of communicating such a vision:

Can the life of the imagination in intuitive overshadowed depth genuinely breach the perfectly natural historical biases and prejudices that seek to imprison us very often in the name of common sense or ritual convention? 127

Then, in recalling his astonishment in discovering a book by another writer which echoed certain themes in one of his novels, he confesses:

Had I in fact known this at the time of writing these novels - had I realised I was less isolated than I thought I was - I may have been able to insert more explicit facade to my novels, to lean upon certain terminologies etc. Perhaps it was just as well since the reality of the experience - however half-cloaked and difficult for the impatient reader - may have been diminished in narrative substance or authentic imagery that belongs to the exploring consciousness as it makes contact with genuinely new terrain and 'with a self, or selves far deeper than historical or conventional ego.'¹²⁸

Harris, then, confronts the paradox that because he wants to break down existing assumptions he must bypass conventional conceptual structures even though he is aware that he makes it more and not less difficult for the reader to grasp his ideas. There is a logic in Harris's position. If his ideas are generated in a way which is 'beyond logical comprehension', they must be apprehended directly by the same non-logical intuitive processes. However, he too, like Naipaul, recognises the power of narrative substance and authentic image in making ideas palpable. Yet for me there remains the paradox that whilst Harris is passionately concerned with challenging the naive and deterministic empiricism which has imprisoned so much of Caribbean fiction and social science, he should obstruct the communication of his fertile ideas by a reluctance to provide a more explicit facade.

Lamming has seen the need both to challenge and communicate.

He has argued that :

...it is the function of the writer to return a society to itself; and in this respect, your writers have been the major historians of the feeling of your people...¹²⁹

In his fiction Lamming has invested his portrayal of characters, of scene and the very language he uses with great poetic power. The purpose of this concern with engaging the reader is suggested in Rockey's warning to Thief:

A man must struggle, Thief, 'cause that is what man was fashioned for, but this struggle got to keep a clear meanin' in his head an' heart or else.¹³⁰

From Consensus To Pluralism : Changing Concepts of Society
And Ways of Seeing in the Fiction of V.S.Naipaul

This chapter is devoted to exploring the changing conceptions of society in V.S.Naipaul's Caribbean fiction, and the connections he draws between ethnically constructed ways of seeing and the problems of social integration. It focusses, in particular, on the expression of these ideas in The Mimic Men (1967).

Although he had lived in both Indian areas such as Chaguanas and black Creole areas such as Port of Spain, it was only gradually that V.S.Naipaul began to explore the consequences of Trinidad's ethnic diversity in his fiction. Indeed, the points at which he began to perceive that diversity as a threat to social integration and began to reflect on how ways of seeing are constructed, can be identified with some confidence. The first was almost certainly the result of his long return visit to Trinidad in 1960-61, and the second of his experiences in India between 1962-63. Up to that point he had portrayed a Trinidad which belonged to his direct subjective experience, family history and folk-knowledge; up to that point he had largely seen it as a society with consensual if borrowed norms.

For instance, in Miguel Street (1958), with its mixture of creolised 'city' Indians and black creoles, there is general agreement amongst the inhabitants, that the pursuit of fete with the minimum of work and the establishment of an individual 'style' are the main accomplishments of life. Moreover, the values of the street are not much different from those of the wider society. It is, for instance, only by paying a bribe to Pundit Ganesh that the boy obtains the scholarship which helps him escape the street. In The Mystic Masseur (1957) there are, however, two worlds: the Indian world and the Euro-creole world, and the complexity is reflected in

the way the story is told. Although in Miguel Street there is an accumulation of evidence about the street's less amiable qualities which begins to contradict the boy narrator's affectionate memories, the gap between is not given much emphasis. In The Mystic Masseur, however, there is gulf of belief between the narrator and the world he describes which is marked by the ironic distance between his complimentary tone and the implicitly deflationary judgements. In the distribution of voices in the novel - including the pompous Ganesh's own - there is the beginnings of Naipaul's recognition of the consequences of cultural diversity. However, although the novel initially emphasises the separateness of the two worlds, the Indian world is increasingly shown to be a subordinate section of the Euro-creole world and subject to its values. Whether as the country-bookie ridiculed and ashamed of his Indian dress in San Fernando, or the masseur who plays on the tensions between the two worlds, or in his final apotheosis as the complete Indo-Saxon gentleman, G. Ramsay Muir, Ganesh's values are always those of the wider society. Indeed, the route Ganesh takes is preordained. In a society where roles are borrowed, the pretence of being the anti-communist Indo-Saxon gentleman is that much more prestigious than being the theatrical anti-colonial politician, or the Indian mystic with his feet in the East and West of Socialinduism, and immeasurably more than the poor Indian school teacher who is told, 'This teaching is an art, but it have all sort of people who think they could come up from the cane-field and start teaching in Port of Spain.'² Thus, though there are different levels in the society, they are united in recognising the prestige of all that is European, and the absurdity of all that is not. Ganesh's father is insulated from the Creole world's laughter when he wears dhoti ('Jackasses bray at anything') but Ganesh is not. At school he 'grew so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread the story round that he was really called Gareth.'³

In The Mystic Masseur we see little of the Afro-creole world. However, we are shown that ex-country Indian and uneducated Black are equally victims of their attraction towards the white world. At the Governor's dinner party it is not only the ridiculous Mr Primrose who suffers (... 'the blackest M.L.C. wore a three-piece blue suit, yellow woollen gloves and a monocle.') but Ganesh too. 'The meal was torture to Ganesh. He felt alien and uncomfortable'⁴. When he arrives home he symbolically ploughs through a plate of rice and dal with his fingers.

It is not until The Suffrage of Elvira (1958) that Naipaul begins to portray the relationship between those who are 'at the foot of the colonial table'. However, while Naipaul deals with the differences and animosities between the ethnic groups, he does so only superficially, though, the novel does at least go beyond the sentimental and mendacious 'all of we is one' view of Trinidadian society. Thus when Pat Harbans, Hindu candidate, tells Muslim Baksh,

In this modern world everybody is one. Don't make no difference who you is or what you is. You is Muslim, I is Hindu. Tell me, that matter?⁵

we know, as much as Harbans, that this is pure electoral flannel. There are sharp caste rifts among the Hindus, and bitter enmity between Hindu and Muslim, though these can be overcome by bribery and their mutual fear of the Negro; but between Indian and Black, there is an unbridgeable divide. Thus The Suffrage of Elvira questions the extent to which consensual norms really exist. For instance, though Indians and Blacks appear to be participating in the same institutions, such as the electoral system, they are shown to use it in wholly different ways. Each group remodels the event according to its own cultural predilections. Harbans 'hinduises' the election whilst Preacher turns into a millenarian black religious

crusade. The Indians of Elvira use the elections primarily as a means of testing the 'praja' relationships within the community, the mutual bonds of favour and duty between the powerful and the weak. The praja relationship is even extended to the local Spanish group so that Chittaranjan is genuinely shocked at their 'nimakharam' or ingratitude when he learns from Edaglo, the Spanish leader, that they are abstaining in the election:

It come as a big big pussional blow... The man is my good good friend. For years he eating my food, drinking my whiskey and borrowing my money. And now he tell me he ain' voting.

Even when Black and Indian appear to be sharing the same emotional experience, the reality is different. At the wake for Mr Cuffy it appears that both Preacher and Dhaniram are joined in mourning. In fact Dhaniram is, unknown to Preacher, who clasps him in brotherly embrace, selfishly bewailing the running away of his daughter-in-law.

There are, though, two areas of genuine consensus: the desirability of getting money at any cost and being subject to the same superstitions. Thus Chittaranjan's wealth and power is shown to cut across ethnic boundaries:

No wonder Foam, like nearly everybody else, Hindi, Muslim, Negro, thought and spoke of his house the only concrete two story house in Elvira as the Big House. As a Hindu Chittaranjan naturally had much influence among the Hindus of Elvira; but he was more than the Hindus' leader. He was the only man who carried weight among the Spaniards of Cordoba. (It was said he lent them money); many Negroes liked him, muslims didn't trust him, but even they held him in respect.

It becomes clear then that in an ironic sense Harban's lie that 'In this modern world everybody is one' is in a manner true. All are corrupted by the pursuit of money, and though it is a consensus which prevents the separation of society into competing ethnic groups, (since ultimately each person is concerned only for himself) it is also a consensus based on values which prevent the possibility of any real community.

At this stage Naipaul's exploration of the plural realities of

Trinidadian society is superficial; ethnic division is treated as a given reality, a topic for satirical farce.

The image of society which informs Naipaul's next novel, A House For Mr Biswas, (1961), is not substantially different from that in The Mystic Masseur (1957), though the cultural differences between the Indian world, as it had existed whole at the beginning of the novel, and the creole world are more deeply and extensively explored than ever before.

At first, A House For Mr Biswas appears to support the cultural pluralist model of a society made up of separate self-enclosed ethnic sections. For the inhabitants of Hanuman House, 'everything beyond its gates was foreign and unimportant and could be ignored.' The novel portrays a series of contrastive relationships between Tulsidom and the world outside it: the Creole nuclear and the Indian extended family units, Indian communalism and Creole individualism, Creole role mobility and Indian role fixity and the contrast between a Creole rationalistic view of life in which an individual is responsible for his actions and the Tulsidom-Indian view of life as controlled by fate. However, the relationship between the two worlds is not that of parallel, separately integrated entities, but rather a relationship of concentric enclosure in which a decaying world is contained within a larger more vibrant one.

When Mr Biswas first becomes involved with the Tulsis there appears to be a boundary of fortress-like strength preserving the inner world, but it is soon evident that the Tulsidom system is rotting at the centre, suffering defections at its borders and unable to prevent incursions from without. Within a dozen years, by the time the clan moves to Shorthills, the system is in total disintegration. As the Tulsidom world collapses, each of its surviving members, now simply a solitary atom, is absorbed into the larger dog-eat-dog world of scrabbling individuals. What had only existed outside

Tulsidom, the random aggregation of people that Biswas encounters in his role of investigator of deserving destitutes, begins to exist inside it. By the end of the novel the alternative world of the Tulsis has ceased to exist. All are now part of 'modern' Trinidad, sharing its individualistic, self-seeking values.

That was the perception of Trinidadian society Naipaul evidently carried away with him when he left in 1950. He summarises it in The Middle Passage (1961) when he writes:

Everyone was an individual, fighting for his place in the community. We were of various races, religions, sets and cliques; and we had somehow found ourselves on the same small island.⁹

...In the colonial society every man had to be for himself... he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group. (p78)

However, Naipaul returned to Trinidad just before the 1961 elections when racial antagonisms between Blacks and Indians were more exposed than ever before. He is forced to recognise that:

Trinidad in fact teeters on the brink of racial war. Politics must be blamed; but there must have been an original antipathy to work on. (p86)

The gap between the two propositions seems to flummox him, as there is nothing in his account of Trinidadian society which can really serve to explain the change. He is reduced to blustering lamely that, 'It is sufficient to state that the antipathy exists.' (p.86) When Naipaul does try to explain the antipathy he does so in psychological terms which at best can be described as circular:

The Negro has a deep contempt for all that is not white... The Indian despises the Negro for not being an Indian; he has, in addition, taken over all the white prejudices against the NegroLike monkeys pleading for evolution, each claiming to be whiter than the other, Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged White audience to see how much they despise one another.(p86-87)

It is true that many of the racist stereotypes of Black and Indian personality had their origins in nineteenth century European speech and writing, but their employment in the 1960s can really only be understood in relation to social, political and economic factors which Naipaul leaves out of his accounts. The inability to explain

these changes, without challenging the validity of his previous perception, leads Naipaul to a certain disingenuousness. For instance, early in the narrative, he reports the feelings of a group of Trinidadian Indians who, 'spoke of Negro racism, and on the subject of miscegenation wound themselves up to hysteria...' The surprised Naipaul comments solemnly: '...Believing that racial co-existence, if not co-operation, is of urgent importance to the West Indies, I was disturbed by these Indian views and wanted to explore them further.' (p.22) Both the surprise and the piety ring false if one considers that no Indian who had grown up in Port of Spain, or who had revisited Trinidad during the 1956 elections can have been unaware of 'Negro racism'; or that the author of The Suffrage of Elvira and A House For Mr Biswas cannot possibly have been unaware of Indian racial feelings.

Sometimes Naipaul is plainly just ignorant of the economic realities which underlay Trinidad's apparent social structure. For instance, he confidently asserts, in support for his mystification over the reasons for racial conflict:

The fact is that in Trinidad power is so evenly distributed - Whites in business, Indians in business and the professions, Negroes in the professions and the civil service - that racial abuse is without meaning. (p.84)

The power elite in Trinidad might have looked multi-racial but, as Acton Camejo's detailed empirical studies were to show, lightness of skin was still the major determinant of economic power; similarly Winston Dookoran's careful analysis of incomes showed that in relation to the Black Trinidadian population, the Indian population was, on average, significantly poorer. There are other such misleadingly glib assertions in The Middle Passage, such as, for instance, that universal adult suffrage was granted 'after no popular agitation'. The absence of reference to the upheavals of 1937 and the Butler movement is either dishonest or astonishingly ignorant. In general though, any attempt to rescue a coherent

viewpoint from The Middle Passage is doomed to failure. For instance, at one point he writes about the lack of community in the past (p.45) and then complains that in the present has come:

all the apparatus of the modern society for joylessness, for the killing of the community spirit and the shutting up of people in their separate prisons of similar ambitions and tastes and selfishness: the class struggle, the political struggle, the race struggle. (p.83)

The lack of coherence seems to me to have several causes. One is Naipaul's failure to look at Trinidad as a dynamic society with real class conflicts complicated by a cross-cutting ethnic consciousness. The events of 1960-61, shook the static consensual paradigm Naipaul had espoused until that time and he is left with its contradictions. Secondly, the lack of coherence seems to me a consequence of Naipaul's attempt to move beyond the experiences of his family life in Trinidad without having examined the construction of his point of view. A House For Mr Biswas was perhaps the last novel he could have written on the basis of those experiences without repeating himself. As I have argued elsewhere (see Chapters Twelve and Sixteen), Naipaul achieves the coherence and solidity of A House For Mr Biswas by its rigorous concentration on Mr Biswas's point of view and the congruence between that view and the view of the world which the novel as a whole presents. For instance, when Biswas visits the Eastern sector of the city, he (and the novel) sees only its squalor and people who have become part of the city's useless waste:

Day after day he visited the eastern sections of the city where the narrow houses pressed their scabbed and blistered facades together and hid the horrors that lay behind them: the constricted, undrained back-yards, coated with green slime, in the perpetual shadow of adjacent houses and the tall rubble-stone fences against which additional sheds had been built: yards choked with flimsy cooking sheds, crowded fowl-coops of wire-netting, bleaching stones spread with sour washing: smell upon smell, but none overcoming the stench of the cesspits and overloaded septic tanks: horror increased by the litters of children, most of them illegitimate, with navels projecting inches out of their bellies, as though they had been delivered with haste and disgust. Yet occasionally there was the neat room, its major piece of furniture, a table, a chair, polished to brilliance;

giving no hint of the squalor it erupted into the yard. Day after day he came upon people so broken, so listless, it would have required the devotion of a lifetime to restore them. But he could only lift his trouser turn-ups, pick his way through mud and slime, investigate, write, move on. (p.383)

It is a powerfully and artfully assembled list of horrors. The visual exactness in the naming of objects, the cohesive pattern of adjectives ('narrow', 'constricted', 'choked', 'overloaded'), the accumulating parallelisms of sentence structure rising to the image of the children as simply another mess of disgusting rubbish: all these mutually reinforced each other to assert a vision of the place which denies all possibility. Surfaces are what Biswas sees, and at no point does Naipaul suggest that there are other realities beneath them. The eye is caught by the distress, but ultimately it is passively detached: it records, stores and moves on. One needs information from outside the novel to know that this sector of Port of Spain was also the area out of which steelband sprang, where calypso was nurtured and where the African heritage of Black people in Trinidad was kept alive in the cult of Shango and the syncretic Afro-Christian worship of the Shouters.¹⁰

Within the framework of what he was attempting and within the coherent, naturalistic portrayal of Biswas as a man obsessed with the material precariousness of his life, this concentration on subjective, individual experience can clearly be justified, as V.S. Naipaul did when he defended the novel from George Lamming's criticism of its limitations of perspective. Lamming had argued:

The novel raises one crucial doubt about the range of Naipaul's interpretation. Trinidad is the most cosmopolitan of the islands. Chinese, Indians, Negroes, Portuguese—all natives of the soil — are involved in a constant interplay of total forces. But Mr Naipaul's world leaves us with the impression of one race surviving in isolation, insulated, as it were, within an unfamiliar landscape. One feels that he is particularly careful to avoid the total encounter which is the experience of any Trinidadian, whatever his race may be...

In many respects the criticism is unfair, as Naipaul points out, though he fails to respond to Lamming's underlying argument, firstly, that a portrayal of Trinidadian society needs to go beyond

individual, subjective experience, if it is to be truthful to the wider social experience, and secondly that it is necessary for the writer to examine his own way of seeing if he is to move beyond his own ethnic biases. Naipaul, in his response, refers to 'my' childhood and 'to me' as if, as far as he was concerned, the world of his personal experience was a sufficient basis for the novelist's vision:

The confrontation of different communities, he said, was the fundamental West Indian experience. So indeed it is, and increasingly. But to see the attenuation of the culture of my childhood as the result of a dramatic confrontation of opposed worlds would be to distort the reality. To me the worlds were juxtaposed and mutually exclusive.!

That subjective approach works triumphantly in A House For Mr Biswas, but in The Middle Passage, where Naipaul is forced into responding directly to a world outside his immediate experience, it produces confusions, inconsistencies, disingenuities and down-right ignorant mistakes, such as I have outlined above.

Naipaul also, I believe, (either consciously or unconsciously) evades examining his own way of seeing by inventing two personas in the writing of The Middle Passage. He plays on the one hand a deliberately naive and ingenuous observer who cannot help seeing reality as it confronts him, and on the other an irritated Freudian or Trollopian traveller who judges other societies from a belief in his own elite, civilized criteria. In this guise Naipaul adopts an assertive, orotund rhetorical voice, which attempts to convey gross generalisations as if they were unarguable truths. In particular, as I have argued in Chapter Fourteen, Naipaul approaches the main theme in his travelogue, 'the Negro's desire to assert himself', as if he was a Trollopian Englishman rather than an Indo-Trinidadian whose attitudes towards Trinidadian blacks had specific cultural roots. That Indo-Trinidadian position has its own inbuilt contradiction which Naipaul does not appear to recognise. On the one hand, the assertion of Negro racial pride is seen as long overdue;

on the other it is viewed with alarm as, 'all that was barren in Negro racialism'.

Naipaul never specifically tackles the issue of how he has seen black assertion but, in a new edition of The Middle Passage, he appears to acknowledge some of the confusions in the book:

A New Zealand writer, reviewing another book of mine, said that I was writing about the problems of a client culture and a client economy. I wish those precise words had occurred to me when I was writing The Middle Passage. They would have made many things 'more clear. The book might have had more shape;...'

In his second travel book, An Area of Darkness (1964), Naipaul begins to address himself to the deeper question of how his point of view has been constructed. He is careful, for instance, to document the changes which took place in his conceptual framework as a commentary on his experiences of and reactions to India, the journey which had broken his life in two. Most crucially Naipaul had begun to understand the formation of his point of view and had become sharply aware that all perception is subjectively relative.

The journey to India provoked him to investigate the personal and broader social significance of his childhood experiences growing up in a rapidly disintegrating extended Hindu family in Trinidad. He indicates that he had always felt no sense of belonging to that world; it eludes his tastes as a person with a 'lack of belief and distrust for ritual' and a 'metaphysical incapacity'. However, in India, Naipaul discovers in himself ingrained vestiges of the dead world. He finds in himself, 'a sense of difference of people...a vaguer sense of caste, and a horror of the unclean.' and admits that this sense of caste 'was capable on occasions of influencing my attitudes to others.' He discovers too, despite his metaphysical incapacity, feelings of outrage over the loss of old customs and a sense of their continued human propriety. Yet being in India also makes Naipaul aware how much he had been 'made by Trinidad and England

(p.43)

Whereas for his older relatives there was but a 'dim, unexpressed awareness of the world within, and the world without', Naipaul recognises that because of his involvement in the Creole world he had 'learned to see, I could not deny what I saw.' (p.213)

This reflection on the formation of his perceptual framework is related to his realisation that all perception is historically and culturally relative. There are the changes in 'ways of thinking and seeing' between his generation and that of older members of the family and there are the huge differences that he believes exist between his perceptions of India and those of most Indians. There are the ubiquitous defecators whom, Naipaul concludes, other Indians simply do not see. He senses too, in India, the persistence of a profoundly different medieval mental framework which views history as cyclical and not linear and accepts the fantasies of a legendary ancient Indian world which boasted aeroplanes, atomic bombs and telephones. He recognises that 'ways of thinking and seeing' are not just part of a passive, reflective process, but actively determine human action. He believes that had Indians been 'A people with a sense of history [they] might have ordered matters differently.' (p.202)

Crucially, Naipaul discovers in himself, whilst in India, the capacity and the discomfort of being able to inhabit different ways of seeing. Initially he recognises that he sees India as an outsider, like Gandhi (with his South African experience) who saw the squalor of India with the directness of vision which Indians, who had not been outside the country, could not achieve. But Naipaul also found himself slipping into an 'Indian' consciousness, the 'ability to retreat, not to see what was obvious' which leads, Naipaul thinks, to a philosophy of 'passivity and acceptance.' (p.193)

The shedding of the estranged Trinidadian/European self leads to a brief moment of 'exaltation' when Naipaul visits his ancestral village and sees the familiar images on the shrines, old family

photographs taken in Trinidad and hears a song remembered from his boyhood. Time for an instant is 'dissolved'. But such moments are brief and sharing another person's way of seeing proves painful and precarious. When Naipaul joins a pilgrimage to the Himalayas, the pure mythical India of his childhood's imagination, he shares the pilgrims' joy but reports, 'It was mine, but it was something I had lost, something on which I would soon have to turn my back again'. (p.167) On another occasion Naipaul falls in with a Sikh who is tormented by the human dereliction he sees around him, a man who had been to Europe and 'had learned to look at India and himself. He knew what Europe required'. (p.228) For a time Naipaul feels that the Sikh's attitudes to India 'appeared like mine' and the similarity between the Sikh's 'aryan' contempt for the 'South Indian monkeys' ('niggers' and 'blackies') and chauvinist Indo-Trinidadian attitudes to Black people in Trinidad cannot have escaped Naipaul, though he makes no comment on it. Eventually, though, Naipaul finds the Sikh's hysteria alien. He can neither share it nor the detachment which allows Indians to survive psychically:

In a year I had not found acceptance. I had learned my separateness from India, and was content to be a colonial without a past, without ancestors. (p.252)

Being in India gives Naipaul a further experience which was to become one of the new, organising themes of The Mimic Men. For the first time 'one of the crowd', the absence of any kind of special recognition, the 'special quality of response' such as he has been accustomed to receive in both Trinidad and Britain, makes Naipaul aware of how much 'difference' is a part of his identity. The absence of alien witness makes him feel as if he was 'being denied part of my reality'. (p.43).

This recognition, that a person's identity is formed in the eyes of significant others, leads Naipaul to a paradox which is a source of constant tension in his subsequent fiction. The witness of others is both necessary and painful, for Naipaul also sees in it an art of violation

That violation is particularly acute when the witness is alien. Naipaul recalls, for instance, the behaviour of the enclosed Indian community of his boyhood: 'The moment intercourse threatened, we scented violation and withdrew'.^(p. 31) Yet in his subsequent life the witness of the ethnic other has come to seem normal and even necessary. The experience of India changes all that. At first, indeed, on his arrival, Naipaul had felt threatened as 'a whole human being' both by the response which denies him his difference and by his own feeling that he is now a part of a crowd whose humanity is deformed and diminished by poverty and disease. But by the end of his visit Naipaul has come to see Indians as a peculiarly whole people and himself as fragmented. He considers that, 'Out of all its squalor....Nowhere were people so heightened, rounded and individualised'.^(p. 21-3) Unfortunately, at no time in An Area of Darkness does Naipaul discuss what he means by individual wholeness.

At the same time as Naipaul was involved in exploring the construction of his way of seeing, he was also evidently rethinking his ideas about the nature of fiction. In An Area of Darkness, discussing what he thinks is the incapacity of most of Indian writers to handle the form of the novel, he argues that the novel is a Western aesthetic form which demands an involvement both with the 'here and now' and with 'what-could-be' and therefore with the possibility of rebellion. Indian culture is, according to Naipaul, concerned with 'the unseen', is incapable of looking closely at the here-and-now and is rooted in an attitude of acceptance. Thus,

according to Naipaul, the fiction of a writer such as R.K.Narayan is inimitably sui generis because form (and its implicit concerns) and Indian attitudes are contradictory. However, those Indian writers, who have more directly mimicked the concerns of Western fiction, seem, to Naipaul, capable only of a fiction of statement:

Other writers quickly fatigued me with their assertions that poverty was sad and death was sad. (p.216)

The only Indian writer whom Naipaul believes can impose on society 'a vision which is an acceptable type of comment' is R.Prawer Jhabvala, who is European by birth and Indian by marriage.

There is not space here to indicate the unfairness of Naipaul's assessment of Indian fiction, but it is clear that his own ideas about fiction, as a form which has a duty to go beyond appearances, have enlarged. He makes this even clearer in 'The Documentary Heresy', an article published in 1964, which attacks the documentary recording of things as they appear to be as an abandonment of responsibility by the writer:

The artist who, for political or humanitarian reasons, seeks only to record abandons half his responsibility. He becomes a participant; he becomes anonymous. He does not impose a vision on the world. He accepts... he invariably ends by assessing men at their own valuation.¹⁵

Naipaul argues that the artist's duty is to shape a 'larger vision' in which such distortions of humanity are 'set correctly in the scheme of things'. Whilst this formulation is open to criticism for its idealism, its ahistoricity and its unargued assumption of some human essence hidden in the metaphysical notion of 'a scheme of things', it nevertheless signals a new depth of concern in Naipaul's work and constitutes, I believe, a self-criticism of the implicit philosophical foundations of his earlier work. It contrasts sharply, for instance, with Naipaul's self-image in The Middle Passage as the passive but naively honest observer who cannot help but see the truth. The experience of India brought a whole series of unexamined assumptions into the open and rendered some of them

untenable. For instance, in India, Naipaul had seen where the philosophy of retreat, despair and acceptance, which had been his before the visit, actually led.

Naipaul also evidently began to read and think more deeply about the ethnically plural societies of the Caribbean. Whether he read M.G. Smith's The Plural Society in the British West Indies, which was published in 1965 during the writing of The Mimic Men I do not know, but after the consensual paradigm of the early novels and the confused paradigm in The Middle Passage, he turns in The Mimic Men (1967) to the cultural pluralist model, most notably advanced by Smith. This thesis, discussed more fully in Chapter Sixteen,¹⁶ argues that there are certain societies which, as the result of the artificial assemblage of their populations in the service of European economic imperialism, lack consensus, legitimated institutions, values or cultural practices other than those imposed by the colonial power. In such societies the different ethnic groups have little contact, being separately integrated on the basis of their own sub-cultural values. Such societies survive as unitary states only as long as the external ruling power remains, or when the dominant ethnic group takes over from the imperial power and suppresses other groups. The range of prognosis for such societies runs from containable levels of inter-ethnic competition, racial disorders, civil war, genocide or ultimately the fission of the society into separate states. Although examples can be found for most of these predictions, the weakness of the thesis is that it is essentially static, deterministic and single-dimensional. It does not really take into account economic and technological changes which might alter the relationship of different ethnic groups. It fails to leave room for the possibility of principled political change either on the basis of national or class objectives and most seriously it does not allow for the

fact that an ethnic identity and a national loyalty are not necessarily incompatible.

Nevertheless, it is a social model of genuine complexity which has a good deal of explanatory capacity to account for the racial conflicts which boiled over in British Guiana and simmered in Trinidad. It forced social scientists (and politicians) to question some of the myths of consensus ('all o' we is one') and recognise that national unity after independence could not be assumed. The model also supported Naipaul's increasingly pessimistic feelings about the essential isolation of the individual in atomised societies and provided him with a structure which supported his growing involvement with the connections between the individual, the social and the historical. Whatever its limitations, the cultural pluralist model gave Naipaul a new clarity and cutting edge in his portrayal of Caribbean society.

The fruits of these new ideas, self-knowledge and conception of the function of the writer are found in The Mimic Men, a novel in which Naipaul makes several formal innovations in the way he handles the strategies of fictional composition. None of these are innovations per se - Naipaul is an aesthetic conservative who rarely experiments with form for the sake of it - but they enable Naipaul to express more clearly the new depth and complexity of his ideas. The most important of these formal decisions is bringing into the foreground the role of the novel's narrator and principal character, R.K.Singh. The use of fictive narrators in Miguel Street and The Mystic Masseur is relatively unproblematic, but in The Mimic Men, the relationship between Singh's point of view and the story he tells is calculatedly more complex.

That complexity warns us not to identify Singh's world-vision as Naipaul's. There are several ways in which Naipaul carefully prevents attempts to see the novel as a clear and unambiguous

statement of his own views. He frequently emphasises that Singh's perceptions of Isabella are peculiar to his situation and psychological orientation. He has Singh tell us:

Understand the language I use. I am describing a failure, a deficiency; and these things can be so private.¹⁷

And he makes Singh undermine any claim to objectivity in his historical project by admitting:

I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. (p.32)

In the very structure of the novel, the distribution of time sequences in it, which always return to the image of the writing narrator, Naipaul reinforces the point that it is Singh's subjective shaping and selection of events which is being presented. Thus, by stressing Singh's biases, moral flaws and the subjectivity of his enterprise, Naipaul implicitly invites the reader to wonder if there might not be an alternative to Singh's point of view. It is an approach which is very different from the solid congruence between the point of view of the major character and of the novel as a whole in A House For Mr Biswas.

Yet, no alternative to Singh's perspective is ever stated. It is almost too obvious to say that it is Naipaul who creates the agenda of the novel, that there are many aspects of Singh's way of seeing which are familiar from Naipaul's non-fictional work, and that the events of the novel and the characteristics of the island of Isabella constantly reinforce Singh's vision. Indeed, sometimes the events of the novel would seem to support 'ideas' which Singh feels equivocal about and which it is highly unlikely that Naipaul would wish to propose for serious consideration in any of his non-fiction. For instance, Old Deschampneufs tries to convert Singh to his racialist theory of human types; the short-visioned African, the medium-visioned European and the long-visioned Indian Absurd as they are, the events of the novel appear to confirm the old

man's ideas. The fate of Brōwne's movement too obviously confirms the judgement on 'our Afric brethren' who 'can't look ahead'; Singh himself typifies the 'long-visioned' type who 'give up too easily'; whilst the Deschampneufs are indeed the medium-visioned, the 'doers, the survivors' (p.172)

Thus, on the one hand the novel stresses the impossibility of Singh's position (his irresponsibility; his untenable unwillingness to share distress) and on the other, it powerfully urges that there can be no other position, no other conclusions to be drawn. In the end, I believe one is justified in taking the tension between those incompatible positions as the statement of Naipaul's world view in the novel. At the very moment when his analyses of Caribbean society have become deeper and more considered, his certainties have been undermined by a corresponding awareness of the biases (which are often Singh's biases) which structure his way of seeing. It is the fine balance between incisive social comment and self-questioning uncertainty which is new in Naipaul's work in The Mimic Men, and which, in my view, he has not subsequently achieved with such success.

Naipaul's second personal innovation in the novel is the invention of an imaginary society which exists outside the narrator's subjective experience. As Lamming had done in Of Age and Innocence, Naipaul creates a society with an extensive dramatis personae and a history. Naipaul's Isabella, like Lamming's San Christobal, is a composite of Caribbean societies and cultures, though both most resemble countries such as Trinidad and Guyana by having roughly equal numbers of citizens of African and Indian origins. There are, though, instructive differences between the histories which Lamming and Naipaul create for their respective fictional territories

Lamming's is an autochthonous history preserved in the legend of the Tribe Boys and in the oral history of Ma Shephard¹⁵. It is a history which celebrates resistance and native resilience. Naipaul's histories are all records of conquest or abandonment by Europe. For instance, he appropriates and adds an episode to Froude's The English in the West Indies (1888), to give context to the presence of the Indians in *Isabella*, conscripted from the start into the struggle between the Blacks and the Whites:

The only hope for *Isabella*, he said, ... lay in the large scale settlement of Asiatics who 'to the not inconsiderable merits of picturesqueness and civilisation add the virtues of thrift and industry'. (p. 77)

He invents an episode in Stendhal's Le Rouge et Le Noir whose point is to bracket off the life of *Isabella* as an insignificant appendix to the real life of Europe. There is also a quotation from an invented book, The Missionary Martyr of Isabella, a parody of S.E. Morton's, John Morton of Trinidad (1916), which emphasises the dead weight of past history on *Isabella*, defines another moment of conquest, the missionary imposition of self-contempt on the heathen convert, and illustrates one of the novel's main themes: the subjectivity of perception. R.K. Singh notes that the *Isabella* of the missionary's description ('an almost Biblical land, full of symbols and portents and marks of God's glory') was 'not an island I recognised.' (p. 87)

In addition to these printed histories, Naipaul makes many analogous references to the Trinidadian and Caribbean past. There are parallels between the history of the Deschampneuf's family in the novel and an actual French Creole family of the nineteenth century, the Rostants. The Tamango of the novel is clearly based upon the Daaga of history; *Isabella Imperial* is closely based on Queen's Royal College and there are looser connections between the Gurudeva episode and such social movements as the Butlerites in Trinidad or the Bedwardite sect in Jamaica; between the fictional Browne and

Singh and the real Dr Eric Williams and members of the Mahabir family, between Singh's political exile and those of real Trinidadian politicians such as Albert Gomes or R.R. Capildeo. The race riots which occur in Isabella echo those in British Guiana between 1962-64. However, it must be stressed that there is no element of roman a clef about The Mimic Men. It presents a complete and imaginatively fictionalised world as a powerfully intricate model by which to examine and criticise the real Caribbean world. Yet there are limitations and absences in the fictional model. In particular, the Black world is viewed only through Singh's abhorrence of its distress, and what he feels is its suffocating preoccupation with race, whilst the rural Indian world appears only in the reports of the race riots which Singh cannot bear to hear.

Perception, both in a fundamental epistemological sense and in the sense of a habitual way of seeing, forms a central concern in the novel. In its treatment of Singh's habitual feeling that there is an unbridgeable distance between himself and the object of his perceptions, the novel is deliberately equivocal. At times Singh's solipsism is presented as if it was a particular incapacity, at times as if it is a more general truth about the human condition. At the height of his success as a property developer Singh experiences sharply that sense of futility felt by men, 'because they feel the lack of sympathy between man and the earth he walks on and know that, whatever they do, this gap will remain.' (p.76) Fixed in this alienated relationship, perception comes in two distorted forms. As in Lamming's Of Age and Innocence (1960),¹⁹ the perceiver either experiences the external world wholly passively, or the objects of perception are flooded by the perceiver's subjective partiality or even delusions. For instance, when Singh arrives in London and the city fails to live up to his expectations, he expresses his disappointment in a way which denotes that the failure was the city's, not one brought by his own failure to see.

He does not say 'My eyes were veiled', but 'the god was veiled'.

(p.19) Consequently, not only is the total reality of the objective world fragmented by the perceiver's subjectivity, but the perceiver's own wholeness is broken. Of the experience of being a foreign student in the metropolitan city, Singh writes:

And, in this growing dissociation between ourselves and the city in which we walked, scores of separate meetings, not linked even by ourselves, who became nothing more than perceivers; every one reduced, reciprocally, to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments. (p.27)

Since for Naipaul society is only an aggregation of individuals, it is but a short step to seeing the subjectivity of perception as peculiarly problematic in an ethnically and culturally plural society. This leads to two far reaching questions. How can a society exist coherently if its different ethnic groups perceive its reality in subjectively disparate ways? And, if a person's sense of self depends on the witness of others, how can he be whole if that witness includes the ethnic other who perceives in such different ways?

Even though we are only offered brief glimpses of ways of seeing other than Singh's, those glimpses exert a powerful and inhibiting limitation on Singh's capacity not only to see the world of Isabella whole, but even to see it at all. Exposed to the alien world-visions of the Deschampneufs family and of Browne, Singh realises that their Isabella is not his, and feels that their prior perceptions of the island leave no room for his own. The Deschampneufs descendents of slave owners, but involved in blood and language with the descendents of slaves, see Isabella as an island which witnesses their past power. They have their elegant colonial house and a sensuous love of the island's tropical nature which makes old Deschampneufs feel that 'This place is paradise.' Theirs is an active, idealising, softening vision which recreates the slave-made landscapes of Isabella as pastoral:

You know, you are born in a place and you grow up there. You get to know the trees and plants. You will never know any other trees and plants like that. You grow up watching a guava tree, say. You know that brownish-green bark peeling like old paint. You try to climb that tree. You know that after you climb it a few times the bark gets smooth-smooth and so slippery you can't get a grip on it. You get that ticklish feeling in your foot. Nobody has to teach you what the guava is. You go away. You ask, 'What is that tree?' Somebody will tell you, 'An elm'. You see another tree. Somebody will tell you, 'That is an oak.' Good; you know them. But it isn't the same. Here you wait for the poui to flower one week in the year and you don't even know you are waiting. All right, you go away. But you will come back. Where you born, man, you born. And this island is a paradise you will discover. (p.172)

But if Deschampsneufs's vision appears one of unalienated innocence its reality is much darker. For example, young Deschampsneufs, Singh's boyhood contemporary, with the confidence of his position, jokingly perpetuates the calculating vision of the slave-master:

He loved, for instance, to put a price on a boy; but only he could have got away with it. Only he would have been allowed to say, of a boy he didn't like, 'He wouldn't fetch three dollars.' (p.137)

On the other hand, Browne's Isabella is a nightmare which forces itself on his passive, tormented eyes, an island peopled by the ghosts of the slave past. It is a vision which denies all possibility of a paradise regained, though Singh's account suggests, rather ambivalently, that Browne's is not the total view:

I had been able at certain moments to think of Isabella as deserted and awaiting discovery. Browne showed me that its tropical appearance was contrived; there was history in the vegetation we considered most natural and characteristic. About the bread-fruit and Captain Bligh we all knew. He told me about the coconut, which fringes our beaches, about the sugar-cane, the bamboo and mango...The war was bringing us visitors, who saw more clearly than we did; we learned to see with them, and we were only seeing like visitors. In the heart of the city he showed me a clump of old fruit trees: the site of a slave provision ground. From this point look above the roofs of the city; and imagine! Our landscape was as manufactured as that of any great French or English park. But we walked in a garden of hell, among trees, some still without popular names, whose seeds had sometimes been brought to our island in the intestines of slaves. (pp 146-147)

Whilst the Deschampsneufs' vision of the island is whole but fraudulent, Browne's vision is fragmented by the harsh data of

oppression:

I felt I had had a glimpse of the prison of the spirit in which Browne lived, to which he awakened every day. In those rooms he collected his facts, out of which he could make no pattern. (p.150)

Between the paradise and the hell of master and slave, Singh can see no island of his own. Confronted by yet another incident in the old warfare between Black and White, Singh comments, 'I felt choked. I wanted fresh air.' (p.179) Similarly, when Singh has a brief affair with Lady Stella in London, he can envy and for a moment enjoy her 'limpid direct vision of the world', but it cannot authentically be his. She had found a way of:

looking at the city and being in it, a way of appearing to manage it and organise it for a series of separate, perfect pleasures.... It was a creation, of the city I had once sought: an unexpected fulfilment. (p.231)

When he returns to London in exile, he simply imposes his solipsistic pessimism on his perception of the city and destroys the sense of connection he has momentarily grasped:

I had dissected and destroyed the glamour of this city; I had seen it as made up of individuals; I had ceased to see (p223)

The theme of perception has a further application in the novel. From an early stage in his life Singh begins to understand that a person's identity is dependent on the witness of others. As a boy at Isabella Imperial he adopts the persona of the sportsman and discovers a general and a personal truth:

The discovery that many were willing to take me for what I said I was was pure joy. It was like a revelation of wholeness. (p.114)

The idea is taken a stage further during his student days in London. There he tries out a variety of roles and settles on that of 'the dandy, the extravagant colonial'. However, looking back, Singh realizes that the role has been created for him by the 'suggestion and flattery' of Lieni, his fellow flatdweller. 'We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others', (p.20) he comments.

However, Singh also makes the parallel and, for him, painful

discovery that the sense of identity to be found in the eye of the other can scarcely be had without some involvement with the needs of the other. For instance, when Singh's reputation is vicariously enhanced by his father's leadership of the dock strike, and by his successful fight with Deschamneufs, he feels his schoolmates admiration as a violation:

It was hideous and diminishing this devotion, this assumption that I was one of them. I felt threatened. (p133)

Naipaul explores this double-bind, of the need for the other's witness and the revulsion from the other's need, not only as an aspect of Singh's personal incapacity, but also as the cause of a more general fragility of identity in ethnically plural societies and the mutually destructive relationships between ethnic groups.

Singh, for instance, feels horror at the mention of the very word 'intimacy', though he admits it 'a failure, a deficiency'. Witness without involvement can only be achieved by keeping the other passive and anonymous, like the succession of girls Singh seduces in London in his student days. This personal incapacity is complicated both by the history of Isabella and its ethnic complexity. Where Singh might have sought his identity in the witness and reflection of himself in his own ethnic group, he sees only a shameful reflection of a humiliating past. His dreams of Asiatic purity, his bleached Aryan vision of the 'Central Asian horsemen, among whom I am one, riding below a sky threatening show', cannot survive the reality of Asia in Isabella. On a drive through an Indian area, the whiteness of the inner fantasy ('tall bare mountains with snow at their peaks') contrasts with the darkness of the swamp area and the squalor of its people:

It was a rainy day, grey, the sky low and oppressive, the water in the ditches thick and black, people everywhere were semi-naked, working barefooted in the mud which discoloured the bodies and faces and their working rags. (p.98)

The workers he sees bear, in their occupation, the shame of servitude, a shame, Singh believes, which belongs to the descendants of 'generations of idlers and failures, and an unbroken line of the imaginative, unenterprising and oppressed...' (p.83)

Later, at the end of his political career Singh demonstrates just how little common identity he feels with his fellow Indians. During the sugar negotiations in London, he refers to the workers as 'My people' and is immediately disgusted with himself. It is not merely the hypocrisy of the phrase but the fact that he sees it as an 'example of derangement and coarsening'.

Yet Singh is constantly torn between the need for witness and flight from violation. After Sandra, his English wife, has left him, he is drawn to resume his 'special relationship' with Browne. What Browne offers him is an image of himself as a 'total person':

He remembered phrases, ideas, incidents. They formed a whole. He presented me with a picture of myself which it reassured me to study. (p.154)

However, the cost of this regard is that Singh is conscripted into sharing Browne's black distress, being 'committed to a whole new mythology, dark and alien, committed to a series of interiors I never wanted to enter'.

This sense of violation constantly provokes Singh into a withdrawal from contact even though it involves a shrivelling of his identity. The only moment of contact which leaves him feeling undefiled is, significantly, his quasi-incestuous relationship with his cousin Sally:

...nothing again was to equal that sudden understanding, that shared feeling of self-violation, which was for me security and purity. I could not conceive of myself with a girl or woman of another community or even of families like my own. Here for me was security, understanding, the relationship based on perfect knowledge, in which body of one flesh joined to body of the same flesh, and all external threat was diminished. (p.155)

Later he tries to reduce this feeling of threat by seeking the company of those who have no strong sense of identity: the

decultured Indo-Saxon young who cluster round his cousin Cecil and later the 'neutral, fluid group' of expatriates he and Sandra join. It is part of her attraction to Singh that 'she had no community, no group...'. Singh even draws comfort from the thought that he belongs to a disappearing race, 'the genes passive, capable of disappearing in two generations... What a release to be the last of one's line'. (p.57) Ultimately, his fear of violation leads him to withdraw from all contact. At first he continues to engage in action whilst building around his feelings a 'walled, impregnable field' within which there is 'a centre of stillness ... a centre of detachment'. But then he withdraws to the neutral territory of a London hotel and the act of writing his memoirs. In this activity, he himself supplies the role of the other. In the solitary hotel rooms there is the Singh who has had experiences and the Singh who writes. He even revises his earlier view of how the personality is formed:

I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others. The personality hangs together. It is one and indivisible. (p.183)

It is a shift from a social to a wholly solipsistic view. Naipaul makes it very clear that this is a personal incapacity of Singh's. There are others whose wholeness is maintained in social contact. For instance, the white Creole, Deschampneufs, is so sure of his identity that he mixes freely with any race or class: whether in the eyes of kin or the eyes of others, he sees confirmation that he is one of the lords of the earth. Yet Naipaul also suggests that Singh's personal incapacity is part of a more general instability of personal identity in ethnically plural societies. In this respect Naipaul portrays both similarities and differences between the positions of Indians and Blacks. For instance, Singh's uncle's tormented response to the miserable poverty he sees in the drive through the Indian swamp area is not much different from Browne's and Eden's shame in their blackness. At first Singh's

uncle refers sentimentally to the Indians they see as 'My people', but when he is cursed by two labourers when there is nearly an accident between his car and their lorry, he breaks down:

He howled and slapped his forehead. 'They make me shame. They make me shame'. (p.100)

Though an 'Isabella millionaire' and a nominated member of the Legislative Council, Singh's uncle has seen himself in the eyes of the loaders as simply another ragged coolie like themselves: 'A man was what he saw of himself in others.' (p.100). Similarly, Eden, the black comic of Singh's class at Isabella Imperial, tells his friends that he wants to join the Japanese army and travel Asia with them. Naipaul uses Deschampneufs's comment to draw attention to Eden's need for alien witness: 'To see, or to be seen', he enquires. It is the humiliating self-image he gets from his own race which makes Eden, like Singh, desire racial extinction:

His deepest wish was for the Negro race to be abolished... his intermediate dream was of a remote land where he, the solitary Negro among an alien pretty people, ruled as a sort of sexual king. (p.151)

The same impulse is suggested in Browne's constant seeking of the company of other races. As the supposedly radical Chief Minister in the first nationalist government, he returns from an audience with the Governor 'like a man socially graced' (p.200). Singh concludes: 'It might be that he required alien witness to prove his own reality'. (p.186) Naipaul had, of course, made the same comment about his own life in An Area of Darkness.

But The Mimic Men is much more than an extensive portrayal of an individual incapacity. Naipaul constantly moves between the levels of the individual psyche, of social relationships and social order. Above all, Naipaul tackles the subject of the complex social realities of an ethnically plural society. However, he does so from the perspective of an intensive subjectivity and, as noted above, within the framework of the cultural pluralist model. Both positions

have, I believe, both positive and negative consequences for the novel.

Naipaul puts a simplified but essentially standard exposition of the pluralist thesis into Singh's mouth. He accounts for the racial disorders of Isabella as the result of:

...the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors.(p.32)

In the early days of self-government Singh discovers just how fragmented and lacking in consensus his society is:

I had never thought of obedience as a problem. Now it seemed to me the miracle of society. Given our situation, anarchy was endless, unless we acted right away. But on power and the consolidation of passing power we wasted our energies, until the bigger truth came: that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power, and that no power was real which did not come from the outside.
(p.206)

In the novel the external power appears in the mediated form of institutions such as Isabella Imperial. It is only when Singh becomes a minister and meets Lord Stockwell in the sugar negotiations that he meets that power directly. Until the colonial power begins to withdraw, Isabella Imperial is shown to have been remarkably effective in recruiting a necessary minority of the ablest Isabellan children to its values. At the school, Singh anglicises his name whilst Browne goes through the double metamorphosis of pretending to be a White pretending to be a Black in his cooning performance; ('His biggest hit was a song called, "Oh I'm a happy little nigger".') (p.92) The fantasy is created that the island outside the school does not exist. Boys who make the mistake of mentioning something local are ridiculed: 'The laughter denied our knowledge of these things to which after the hours of school we were to return'. (p.95) When school and island come into contact there is racial embarrassment and distress, as when Hok, a boy of mixed

race is discovered to have a mother who is 'a Negro woman of the people'. His accidental encounter with her in the street is a betrayal of the 'private hemisphere of fantasy where lay his true life'. (p.97) However, the imposed order of the school is as vulnerable to the pressures of racial consciousness and political discontent as society as a whole. There are the incidents when Browne bangs his desk lid in protest over Major Grant's tasteless joke at Singh's father's expense and walks out over yet another instance of his unconscious racialism. However, in The Mimic Men, such changes do nothing to bring a colonised people to any closer awareness of their common interests. When the cordon sanitaire of the school is breached, the resulting contacts bring 'the twinge of tribal alarm'. (p.189) When Browne visits Singh's house he suffers the humiliation of being sent packing by Singh's mother because she sees him only as a street urchin come to mock the family. Singh's attempt to amend the offence by returning the visit leads only to further mutual distress. Catching Browne in his home environment, hearing the home names which are slave names, the struggle between pride and self-contempt, and even smelling the different odours of the house, forces Singh into seeing Browne as a Negro for the first time. He is surprised, for instance, to discover that Browne's hair will not grow long. Finding in Browne these 'attributes of his race and class' (pp 148-150) destroys Singh's illusion, fostered by Isabella Imperial, that they have anything in common.

The only two occasions in the novel, when the possibility of contact between Indians and Blacks is raised, are created, it seems, only to deny the possibility.

The first is the bizarre episode when Singh's father, up to then an ineffectual figure, fighting a petty battle against the crassness of his wife's Indo-Saxon family, the bottlers of the

island's coca-cola, suddenly breaks in on a dispirited meeting of striking dockworkers and tells them his own story. He tells them of his abandonment by the missionaries who had converted him and 'the years of darkness' which followed. He tells them of his decision, made whilst he is speaking, to turn his back on this darkness. What Kripalsingh (who renames himself Gurudeva) offers the men is a vision of withdrawal from the order of the slave-owner and the recreation of a lost ancestral world;

Once, he told them, after the abolition of slavery, the ex-slaves had abandoned the foreign city and withdrawn to the forests to rediscover the glory and a way of looking at the world. (p.126)

It answers temporarily the mood of the dockworkers, their unwillingness to face the 'totality of defeat' of a collapsing strike. However, within six weeks the Blacks who had taken to the hills with Gurudeva have returned to the city. For each the meaning of the event has been different. For the Blacks, the exodus has been part of the maroon tradition and part of the twentieth century pattern of millenerian political protest. For Gurudeva, the leaving of the city has not been so much of an exodus (with its Biblical connotations) as an act of Hindu withdrawal, and he adopts the robe of the Hindu mendicant, the sanyasi. What Gurudeva offers and what his black followers take are only tangentially related:

He offered something to many people; but it was his example and his presence rather than his teaching which mattered. His movement spread like fire. Fire was the word. Sugar-cane fields burned in his path. Calm in the hills, he offered disorder and drama.... (p.129)

The dissonance is further revealed in the Tamango incident. For his followers the killing of the horse is an act of colonial rebellion, a punishment of the former slave masters, the Deschamneufs, for provocatively naming the horse after the leader of an unsuccessful slave revolt. 'The killing becomes the rallying point of "righteous underground emotion".' (p.139) Singh cannot decide whether his father has simply adopted the form of the awesome

sacrifice to the ends of political protest, or whether the sacrifice has been made as an act of personal redemption and reverence to the lost Hindu past: 'an attempt at the awesome sacrifice, the challenge to Nemesis, performed by a shipwrecked man on a desert island.' Whatever his father's motives, Singh feels that the ancient horse-sacrifice of Asvamedha ('a thing of beauty, speaking of the youth of the world, of untrodden forests and unsullied streams') has been polluted by its association with political protest and the island struggle between master and slave. Again, far from uniting Indian and Black, the reverberations of the act seem to Singh to reveal only that society rests on the slender basis of consent and 'teaches, dangerously to the future of all, that consent can be withdrawn.' (p.142)

By contrast, in George Lamming's Of Age And Innocence, it is at the very point when Africans and Indians rebel against the colonial order that they discover their commonality. But then, Lamming's and Naipaul's treatments of the concept of order are very different. In Lamming's novel the very idea of order itself (The 'Law' as Lamming calls it) is shown to repress the people's creativity. In Naipaul's, order is what all men seek. Nevertheless in The Mimic Men, the only images of order belong to the past, and are no longer recoverable or authentic. Thus Singh dreams that at the end of his political career he will retire to an old cocoa estate playing the paternalistic planter watching the labourers at 'their undemanding tasks'. It is a longing for an impossible wholeness and order, even more fantastic than Singh's vision of the Aryan horsemen because it is not his own, and has never existed. The reality is the 'run down former slave plantations', which Singh inherits and uses in his career as property developer, a derelict citrus plantation where the 'fruit rots before it ripens, hanging soft and blanched like disease, in a pestilential smell'. (p.58) The poison from the slave past links to the disorder of the present. When Singh flees from his destructive house-warming party to the peace of

the 'ruins of the famous old slave plantation' he has to leave the spot rapidly when he recalls that it is the haunt of rapists and 'others seeking social revenge'. (p.75) The most ironic comment on the image of order in the past comes when Singh describes himself, in his last days on the island, enjoying the same elegant planter's breakfast which has been part of his fantasy of retirement:

- avocados, fried plantains, cinnamon-scented chocolate, white tablecloth, ironed white napkin, a small bowl of fresh flowers... (p.241)

It is an almost word-for-word restatement of his dream, but its context is wholly different: the imitation Roman house and the daily news that his fellow Asiatics are being slaughtered as Isabella collapses into racial disorder.

The problem, as Singh/Naipaul identifies it, is that:

the order to which the colonial politician succeeds is not his order. It is something he is compelled to destroy... So the legitimate desire for succession is neutralised; and the drama ensues. (p.36)

When the 'new' politics of the pre-independence era take root in Isabella, it exposes even more fully the absence of consent. It is at this point in the novel, I feel, that the one-sidedness of Naipaul's approach to the relationship between the individual and the social leads him to treat the politics of the era in a distorted and unsatisfactory way. Naipaul's apparent conviction that social movements can be described in terms of individual psychological states leads him to divorce social action from the actual material interests of the actors and the environment which sets limits to what they can do. Politics becomes a branch of psychopathology, (the politician is someone with, 'some little hurt, some little incompleteness' (p.37), though Naipaul does not apply the approach consistently. There are, for instance, significant differences between the way he portrays Black and Indian roles in the creation

of the island's disorder. Black politics are described in the novel in terms of the pathological states of fantasy and paranoia, whilst the action of the Indian workers is portrayed as the rational pursuit of real material interests.

The black supporters of the party are described as 'men without talent or achievement... unproductive, uncreative men who pushed themselves into prominence by an excess of that bitterness which every untalented clerk secretes.' (p.191) There are no policies, no commitment to nationalism, 'only the negative frenzy of deep violation' (p.205) and the twisted illogic of racial distress. The wild men of the Party promise both intermarriage and to 'kick the whites into the sea and send the Asiatics back to Asia.' (p.199) All the movement produces is disorder and nihilistic chaos. Singh becomes increasingly fearful that the movement, in seeking the support of the Black urban proletariat, has brought into being a monster it cannot control:

I saw that in our situation the mob, without skills, was unproductive, offered nothing, and was in the end without power. The mob might burn down the city.... frenzy alone, the vision of a world going up in flames: it was the only expiation. (p.205)

By contrast the Indians of Isabella remain uninvolved. When the Party visits the sugar areas they meet 'Asiatics, not willing to share distress, unaroused, polite only because of my name.' (p.194) This is, of course, a projection onto the social scale of the individual feelings Singh has about his relationships to Deschampneufs and Browne. With both he feels that he is being invited to take part in a racial struggle which has nothing to do with him 'the late intruder, the picturesque Asiatic, linked to neither'. (p.78)

After independence, however, it is the Indians who pose the first real threat to Browne's government. Whereas the Government's revolution materialises as the 'spectacle of the blackman served

by the white' (the English permanent secretaries who continue to exercise real influence), The Indians, use their 'true strength' to attempt to force better conditions from the absentee owners of the sugar plantations. (Naipaul's perspective here is markedly Indian, contrasting sharply with the Afro-Caribbean view of the Indians as politically backward and conservative.) Naipaul perceives acutely how, in a plural society, even national goals can become racially divisive. In an attempt to win over and destroy the 'suddenly displayed strength' of the Indians the Government reactivates its pledge to nationalise sugar. The slogans assert that nationalisation is in the cause of racial unity and social justice, but in reality the very concept of nationalisation becomes precarious and ambiguous:

Nationalisation had become a word. It had no meaning. It held only Asiatic threat and Asiatic hope; to some it was a word of fulfilment and to others a word of revenge (p.220)

It is Singh's advocacy of nationalisation which precipitates his political disgrace since his black colleagues see it only as an attempt to benefit his fellow 'Asiatics'.

As the imposed colonial order is withdrawn, and the Government and its supporters discover how little they can change the society they have inherited, Isabella breaks down into racial violence. As Singh contemplates his withdrawal from the island, he is brought the 'tales of Asiatic distress, of women and children assaulted, of hackings, of families "burnt alive in wooden houses"...' Such events occurred in British Guiana, though Naipaul creates no parallel in the novel to the Indian violence and Indian racial chauvinism which were also part of those tragic events.

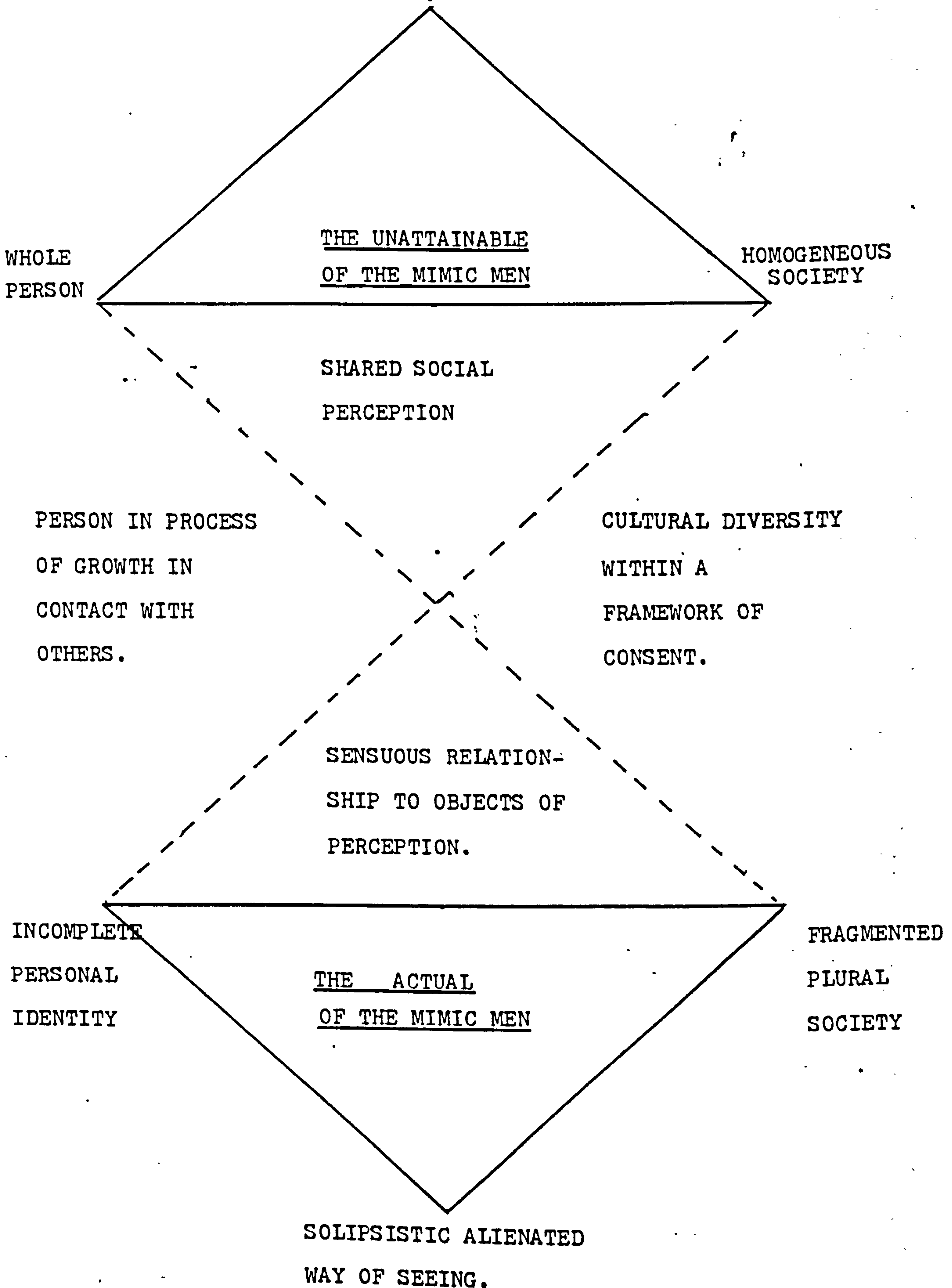
However, if Naipaul's portrayal of the surface level of plural conflict is acute, the explanations offered are far less persuasive. In particular, his handling of the roots of black animosity towards the Indians has more to do with the elaboration of a pet psycho-

political thesis than with any objective portrayal of the material relationships between the two groups. His thesis, discussed more fully in Chapter Fourteen, argues the complicity of white and black, master and slave, in an endless cycle of contempt and guilt, hatred and submissive desire. It is a private quarrel which, like that between a sado-masochistic couple, turns violently upon anyone who interrupts it. This, of course, is the point of the acidly ironical tale, 'The Niger and the Seine', which tells of the Negro desire to be white and the guilty white desire to be humiliated. The Indians, late arrivals in a world already defined by the quarrel, suffer the usual fate of interlopers:

...it became clear that...order was breaking down. And of course it was the intruders, those who stood between the mutual and complete comprehension of master and slave, who were to suffer. (p.214)

This is not to deny that the interaction of Black and White is a part of the total dynamic of Black attitudes towards the Indians, but Naipaul's psychological thesis is distorted by its failure to take into account such real material factors as competition for scarce resources, actual differences of interest between those engaged in industry and agriculture, actual cultural differences and the exploitation of ethnic solidarity by groups protecting their class interests. This is more than just a quibble over details. Such material factors pose very serious problems, but cannot be regarded as politically insoluble. The thesis of the novel, because it rests on the premise that Black attitudes are pathological, is static and as such unwarrantably pessimistic. Individual experience is elevated, without any intervening mediation, to serve as explanations of social movements. It could be argued that this is an inevitable consequence of Singh's role as narrator, but I believe that there is corroborating evidence, in his other works of fiction, that this approach to the relationship between the

WAYS OF SEEING WHICH
UNITE SUBJECT AND OBJECT.



individual and the social is ~~Naipaul's~~²¹ own.

Despite these reservations, it remains my view that no Caribbean novel poses more searchingly the problems created by ethnic plurality as a constraint on the making of just, coherent and materially secure societies in the Caribbean. Again, if I have argued that the intensive subjectivity of Naipaul's approach prevents him from dealing with society in a social way, as the nexus of the interactions of individuals, groups and institutional structures, it is also undoubtedly from that intensive subjectivity that the novel derives much of its aesthetic power. Yet the novel does deal with ideas, and in his treatment of the three crucial concepts of a way of seeing, personal identity and social order, I believe that Naipaul both raises fundamental issues and sets inhibiting limits to their exploration. In each case Naipaul has, I believe, in opposing harsh realities to utopian, unrealisable ideals, created a series of false dichotomies. The relationship between the polarities of each concept can best, I think, be represented graphically (see facing page). Naipaul's oppositions suggest that if the ideals remain eternally unattainable, so too the imperfect or fallen state is itself equally fixed or permanent. However, it can be argued that each of the ideals is not only illusory but reactionary. For instance, the notion of the 'complete' person denies both the human capacity for continuing growth and change and the human need to be completed in relationships with others. Secondly, the notion of a way of seeing which unites subject and object poses the problem in wholly idealistic (Hegelian) terms. As such it misconceives the issue. The separation of the subjective perceiver and the objectified world of perceptions must be held to be a condition of man's being on the earth. The state of alienation - whether between man and man or man and the earth

he walks on - is a state in which the objective world (of other people, man's own productions and the earth itself) exists in deformed and not yet fully humanised or socialised forms. Such forms are historically specific, the products of human making and as such must be logically open to further human intervention and movement towards a completer humanisation. If the descendents of slaves and indentured labourers are alienated from the land, it is because they continue to see the land in ideologically conditioned ways. Most crucially it is because the land is still, in its mode of use, materially alien to them, and will remain so as long as it is owned and controlled by foreign interests or the ruling national elite. Both the sense of alienation and the objective condition which gives rise to it can be changed, but to seek to re-unite subject and object is an attempt to re-enter Eden and, as the book shows, an impossibility. What The Mimic Men does not do is to enquire on what basis man may, as subject, enter into a fulfilling relationship with the objective world, or with other people. To pose the question in these terms is not, of course, to achieve what is sought, but it does at least recognise that the issue is still open.

Finally, the ideal of social homogeneity, which is the implied opposite to the divisions within Isabellan society, seems to me equally delusive. The plural societies of the Caribbean are undoubtedly extreme cases of the heterogeneity of all societies which have to any extent a division of labour and hence conflicts of interests and values. But, I think, it may be questioned whether there are in reality any societies which can accurately be described as homogeneous. Moreover, to desire cultural homogeneity as an ideal seems to me both to deny the dynamics of adaptation and change of human societies and ultimately threaten human liberty. The Mimic Men very honestly conveys Naipaul's own pain and his

pessimism over the future of societies where personal identities are unstable, where different groups perceive society in competing ways and where there is social disorder. His vision is powerfully expressed and, within the context of debate over its conceptual framework, a salutary portrayal of the symptoms of the disease. However, to leave Naipaul's conceptual assumptions unchallenged would be to submit to his morbidity. It would be a denial of the possibility and the necessity of creating societies in the plural Caribbean in which diversity flourishes within a framework of consent.

Chapter EighteenHalf-Dialectical, Half-Metaphysical : A Discussion of Wilson Harris's novel The Far Journey of Oudin

The Far Journey of Oudin (1961) is, in some respects, one of the most pellucid of Wilson Harris's novels. It is quite easy, for instance, to recover the novel's linear plot from the cyclical structure of the narrative.

It begins with Oudin's death into a new freedom of the spirit and his impact on those he has left behind. His wife, Beti, at first exhibits only the signs of her continuing dependence and inability to escape from the material circumstances of her life. However, when she discovers that Oudin's death has mocked the power of the local, grasping money-lender, Ram, she derives a strength to scorn him, when the latter comes to try and enforce the covenant he has made with Oudin, that her unborn child should become his property and heir. We learn that Oudin, a man of uncertain race, had appeared in the district some thirteen years ago as if from nowhere, and that his appearance had provoked very different responses. Ram sees in him a willing slave who will execute his wish to extend his power over Mohammed, head of a once powerful land-owning peasant clan; Mohammed and Rajah, his cousin, are stricken by guilt over Oudin's appearance for they see in him a reminder of the half-brother the clan had murdered in order to keep the family property under their control; Rajah's daughter, Beti, however, sees in Oudin both a symbol of guiltless suffering and an omen of freedom. We learn that already two of Mohammed's brothers have died in sudden circumstances after the murder, and Mohammed in particular is plagued by a sense that there is some spiritual reality beyond the material certainties he has built his life on. When Rajah is killed by a flash of lightning, Mohammed begins to disintegrate even more rapidly and Ram seizes his opportunity to

prey on his weakness. Ram's most daring blow is the planned abduction of Mohammed's niece, Beti; for powerful as he is the money-lender is impotent and beset by fears that he lacks an heir. Ram sends Oudin to abduct Beti, but acting in accordance with his buried god-like nature Oudin (Odin) throws off his servility and runs away with Beti himself. Mohammed pursues them and, rejecting the forest's intimations of spiritual grace, blindly stumbles to his death. In his impotence Ram sees the pointlessness of having Beti for himself, and instead plans to bargain with Oudin that Beti's child will be his. The novel 'ends' at the point just before Oudin's death.

However, if there is little difficulty in extracting the novel's narrative scaffolding, its total meaning is much more elusive. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a core of critical claims made about the significance of Harris's work around which this discussion will be based.

Firstly, he has been concerned with questions of ontology and epistemology, not as philosophical abstractions but as part of his rigorous enquiry into how man represents his experiences on the earth. In this enquiry, Harris challenges our fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality. Secondly, Harris's work has consistently criticised all attempts to circumscribe human personality with racial and political stereotypes. Thirdly, Harris has advanced a positive view of Caribbean possibilities, seeing its ethnic diversity as part of a submerged American tradition of 'the melting pot' and as possessing an 'enormous heritage' for a new reconciliation of 'the broken parts'. Fourthly, Harris advances in his work a dialectical vision of change absent from the mainstream of Caribbean fiction, historiography or sociology. In particular, Harris has criticised those apparently 'radical' forms of political discourse which in protesting against oppression have accepted its framework

and made an 'idol of the present degrading form.'² Finally, with the exception of Dennis Williams, Harris has been the most technically innovative of Caribbean novelists. He has argued that radical innovations in the form of the novel are necessary in order, for instance, to avoid the 'consolidation of popular character' of the conventional novel, and to convey the discontinuities³ of Caribbean experience.

What this chapter attempts is an investigation of these claims in relationship to Harris's portrayal of the East Indian peasant world in The Far Journey of Oudin, and in particular whether the novel offers a genuinely radical perspective for understanding and learning to overcome the Caribbean's divisive legacy of historical oppression and cultural pluralism.

Fiction and criticism as original and as challenging as I believe Harris's to be has inevitably provoked diverse critical responses. There are those such as Reshard Gool⁴ and Sylvia Wynter,⁵ who whilst noting Harris's prodigious verbal gifts, have been so out of sympathy with the philosophical idealism which is at the heart of his work that they have dismissed his work as escapist and irrelevant. Sylvia Wynter, for instance, writes of Harris's 'free fall of obfuscation' and 'unrelated individual imagination'. At the other extreme there are critics such as Michael Gilkes⁶ who have enthusiastically embraced the esoteric idealism present in Harris's work as a support for his own determination to erect a barrier between literature and the materialist concerns of sociology and politics. But whilst Gilkes is undoubtedly right in stressing Harris's concern with the theme of the psychic journey of the soul and has valuably provided the uninitiated reader with guidance to the more esoteric allusions in Harris's fiction, he tends to treat the 'realistic' elements of recoverable plot, characterisation, moral and social concerns as mere materia trivialis to be dispensed

with quickly by the initiated reader before he reaches the arcana below. In the process of reiterating the alchemical theme, however, Gilkes makes the novels sound far more ponderously portentous than they ever in fact become. For instance, the reduction of characters to the tria prima of the alchemical process (Donne, Mariella and the Dreamer; Ram, Beti and Oudin; or Stevenson, Petra or Da Silva) suggests a flat inner sameness which is frequently disavowed by the actual vitality of characterisation and the creation of the characters interaction with the materially evoked world of time and place. In both the case of Wynter and Gilkes, politics of different varieties seem to get in the way of recognising the breadth of Harris's concerns

However, I am unable to agree with the critic who is perhaps Harris's most genuinely sympathetic interpreter, Hena Maes-Jelinek, who goes beyond recognising that Harris's fiction does contain both political and spiritual elements, to arguing that in his work the material and the spiritual exist in inter-relation and inter-penetration. In her discussion of The Far Journey of Oudin, Maes-Jelinek argues:

Oudin's spiritual freedom is not attained by denying the material world but by recognising and breaking through its apparently permanent or monolithic forms.⁸

Similarly, Maes-Jelinek writes of Harris's treatment of the 'duality of existence' and how Oudin's 'far-seeing' eye 'unites the physical world with its immaterial counterpart.'⁹ I believe that this reading may well be consistent with Harris's intentions, that as Arthur Ravenscroft has argued, the 'last thing he (Harris) wants is that a new spiritual dogmatism should merely replace the old material dogmatism.'¹⁰ However, if the idea of inter-penetration has to do with a genuine mutuality between the spiritual and the material, then I must indicate my reservations about the extent to which the language and imagery Harris employs actually communicates it. My own reading of Harris's fiction leads me to see an underlying assumption that an authentic reality is to be found only in the

life of the spirit after it has shed its material accretions, though intimations of that freedom may be found within material existence. Again, critics such as Maes-Jelinek and Ravenscroft have tended to stress Harris's use of death in the novel as chiefly metaphorical, signifying that before the emergence of a new spiritually refined person, the old person must die." Whilst I don't think this interpretation is in anyway illegitimate, it does evade what I am sure is also Harris's literal meaning, that physical extinction is a necessary precondition for full spiritual liberation. My support for this assertion follows in the detailed discussion of The Far Journey of Oudin, but if one compares the phrases Harris uses to describe, for instance, Oudin's escape through death from the 'flimsy scaffolding of the world'¹² with the image of the 'freedom of a soul, pacing heaven' or the state of Kaiser and Hassan still 'smarting and conscious of themselves in their pinching material shell' (p.69), or the way death makes Oudin see his life as a 'cruel dream of nothingness', then it starts to become apparent that Harris's treatment of the spiritual-material 'duality' is hardly without rhetorical bias. However, it should be noted that Harris deliberately makes Oudin's death both ambiguous and comic.¹³ On the one hand Oudin has been 'reaped and he lay staring and dead as a naked cliff' (p.11); on the other, the 'corpse' gets up and finishes off the bottle of rum he has shared with Ram, much to the latter's consternation when he discovers the bottle is empty. Nevertheless, my suspicions about how far Maes-Jelinek is committed to the equality of the spiritual and the material in Harris's work tend to be confirmed by paraphrases such as the following:

Kaiser too awakes after death to time as a mysterious dimension harmonising all its parts but still longs to return to the world of appearances. [My emphasis.]

As I have indicated in Chapter Sixteen, my own response to Harris's fiction and criticism is very mixed. On the one hand, Harris seems to me to offer an imaginative and dialectical perspective for the

fulfilment of human potential, and on the other an escapist assortment of irrationalist, idealist philosophies deriving from the more eccentric metapsychology of Jung and other varieties of transcendental mysticism.¹⁵ The former is, I believe, much limited by the latter. Again, my engagement as a reader with the texture of Harris's novels is marked by alternating responses of excitement and frustration. I admit something about my own limitations and biases as a reader, but remain convinced that the ambivalence I feel is not wholly in the reading, but is a response to an actual unresolved tension in Harris's work.

Like Lamming and Naipaul, Harris questions the illusory simplicities of empiricist theories of perception. However, the way he uses the distinction between 'appearance' and 'reality', though it shares some points of contact with theirs, is also very different. Here too I feel there are both liberating and evasive elements in Harris's treatment of the theme. On the one hand, he communicates a radical awareness of how the social position of a character can obstruct the perception of reality. For instance, in portraying Beti's response to Oudin's death, Harris makes a number of points which have both interpersonal and social relevance. He contrasts her sentimentality ('folly of grief') with Oudin's new, detached 'transparency and compassion' (p.13) and notes how her failure to see beyond her immediate situation leads her merely to a spirit of protest, ('advertising a mournful need'). Similarly, Harris contrasts Oudin's new, active perception ('the first real mystery and power of apprehension he possessed' (p.12)) with Beti's continuing vulnerability to appearances, as one who waits passively for 'something to happen and fall into her hands' (p.13). However, though the distinction between appearance and reality does have a psychological and a social dimension, as for instance the moment when Mohammed suddenly perceives the historical character of his

true lack of freedom ('the ground and source of all musing contending powers, and of every mystique and political and economic programme exercising the minds of others for centuries past'), its main dimension is the contrast between the 'appearance' of the material world and the 'reality' of the immaterial, spiritual world. As I shall argue below, this metaphysical distinction leads to the blurring of Harris's radical critique of inauthentic and self-mutilating forms of material existence and to an ambivalence between seeing a marriage between a 'secret' spiritual understanding and a 'technical' understanding of matter as a human ideal and seeing all material activity as a diversion from the pursuit of spiritual fulfilment. Moreover, the antithetical distinction between true spiritual and false material perception leads, it seems to me, to certain crudities in the portrayal of character. For instance, Harris merely caricatures the nature of empiricism in portraying Mohammed as a Gradgrind of the peasant world who insists: 'there was nothing to reckon with in this world save hard facts. No one fought today with idle nothings.' (p.129). There is an irritatingly platitudinous air of moralization in the treatment of the theme at this point.

This bias, which I feel exists in Harris's work, has paradoxical effects on Harris's treatment of the East Indian presence and the Indian peasant characters in the novel. On the one hand, Harris's objective of portraying characters in terms of fulfilment (by which I take him to mean the capacity for change, development and responsibility) undoubtedly grows from his religious vision of the divine potentiality of the human person. On the other hand, the spiritual element in Harris's work seems to me to have two negative consequences. Firstly, the religious perception that this human potential is not fully attainable in the material world of human relationships seems to me to limit Harris, to prevent him from exploring in a concrete way the full depths, contradictoriness and potential richness of

actual human existence. Secondly, though Harris for much of the novel avoids the 'conventional distinctions' and static social stereotypes which he criticises in the conventional realist novel, there are times when the Indian peasant characters lose their rich potentiality and become emblematic figures, exemplars of particular spiritual tendencies. For example, though Harris's éso¹⁶teric supporters perhaps do him a disservice in overemphasising these elements, I cannot help feeling that the building-up of characters around zodiacal types or Jungian archetypes is as reductive as the building-up of character in terms of traits which Harris so rightly criticises.

Harris's metaphysical perspective on the person is matched by an equally metaphysical approach to human cultures, with similarly mixed consequences. From it derives his very positive commitment to the underlying universality of all cultures and hence the absurdity of distinctions based on racial and cultural stereotypes. However, it also produces an approach to the culture of the East Indians in Guyana which is limitingly one-sided. Moreover, as I shall argue, this spiritual bias interacts with Harris's own 'ethnic' orientation to the Indian presence in a way that further limits his approach. As I argued in Chapter Sixteen, Harris approaches the Indian presence from a cultural point of view which has variously been categorised as the 'melting pot' thesis or the 'mulatto culturalist' orientation.¹⁷ This is the vision of the blending together of different cultural streams into some new dynamic whole. In Chapter Sixteen, I argued that this framework led Dennis Williams, for instance, to dismiss the Indian cultural presence as irrelevant in so far as Indians try to preserve a distinctive cultural identity, and a barrier to the development of the Syncretic New World Culture he envisaged.

Harris has quoted Williams approvingly,¹⁸ though he has in his own fiction and cultural criticism expressed great reservations about pushing any cultural model to prescriptive lengths. This has

been based both on a salutary anxiety about the creation of new orthodoxies and an idealistic spiritual reservation about any kind of cultural identity. In the first case, for instance, in The Secret Ladder (1963), Harris has the surveyor, Fenwick, expressing a concern that in his pride in his mixed racial origin he can 'discern a curious narcissistic humour and evasive reality in the family myth'¹⁹ and in History, Fable and Myth (1970), Harris's cultural model places greater stress on diversity, on the need for a 'treaty of sensibility between alien cultures...a new variable imagination steeped in caveats of the necessary diversity and necessary unity of man.'²⁰ It is possible that this latter perspective owes something to an awareness that in Guyana the Burnham regime had begun the premature and culturally insensitive process of trying to force the creation of a Guyanese culture which largely ignored Indian sensibilities.

However, in the period before the publication of The Far Journey of Oudin, Guyanese politics had a very different complexion. As I outlined in Chapters Six and Fifteen, the years between 1955 - 1961 saw the breakdown of the once united P.P.P.; the departure of the mulatto intellectuals from the party in response both to Dr. Jagan's Stalinism and its attempt to capture the support of the Indian business class and the wealthier rice farmers; four years of P.P.P. government when economic development largely favoured the Indian-dominated agricultural sector and finally, in 1961, the outbreak of racial violence. Harris was not in Guyana during this period, but the evidence of his comments certainly indicates that he continued to follow the pattern of events. As I will argue below, I believe this political context had some effect on Harris's point of view and ultimately some contributory effect on the way he portrayed the Indian presence in the novel.

In 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', (1964) Harris had referred to the peculiar reality of societies where:

minorities (frail in historical origin or present purpose) may exist, and where comparatively new immigrant and racial cells sometimes find themselves placed within a dangerous misconception and upon a reactionary treadmill.²¹

I suspect that Harris refers here in the first instance to the Amerindians and in the second to the East Indians. The contrast between the two groups is one that is expanded below, but Harris's point seems to be that the policies of the Jagan Government were, in their monopolization of resources and concentration of development on the coastal strip, unwittingly repeating the policies of the old sugar plantocracy. This point is made clearer in Harris's comment in History, Fable and Myth:

Some people have said that Dr. Jagan's Marxist party in Guyana - radical and far thinking as it once was - eventually became dominated by the self-interest of an Indian peasantry who built up a wall in the face of that 'very old heritage of Negro Slavery', and this, in fact is no denigration of the Indian peasantry because they are as much trapped as any other group in the Caribbean.²²

Harris has no intention of scape-goating the East Indians, but there are several indications that he sees the Indians as a particularly exclusive and culturally self-sufficient group, and therefore reluctant to allow themselves to become part of the 'melting-pot' in which:

...parts act on each other in a manner which fulfils in the person the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being an independent spirit....²³

Harris's perception of the separateness of the East Indians is reflected in a number of ways in his fiction. For instance, in Palace of The Peacock (1960), the crew travelling upstream progress from quarrelling division to becoming a community of souls. Kenneth Ramchand describes them as part of a 'complicated and incestuous family tree... the descendants and mixtures of peoples - Europeans, Africans, Portuguese, Indians, - belonging historically to different centuries and successive waves of immigrants'.²⁴ Similarly, Hena

Maes-Jelinek asserts that, 'Each member of the crew represents one of the races of Guyana and the spirit within each racial strain and mixture...they stand for...the latent possibilities of the Guyanese people'.²⁵ Both these summaries are inaccurate on one significant score: the crew does not contain any East Indian member. One makes the point quite simply that Harris reflects the dominant 'facts' in not including the East Indians as part of the 'incestuous family tree' and by writing about them separately in The Far Journey of Oudin.

Again, though Harris is very obviously anxious not to stereotype any ethnic group, there are occasions when his use of particular groups as images of particular cultural oppositions leads him towards this danger. There are, as I have hinted, revealing contrasts between his portrayals of the Amerindian figures in several of his novels and the East Indians. Because of their virtual social and racial extinction, Harris sees the Amerindians as the least assertive of the racial fragments and therefore nearest, perhaps, to the primordial condition. The old Arawak woman who acts as guide to the crew in Palace of The Peacock is presented as an example to them of a necessary resignation from an assertive cultural identity:

There was almost an air of crumpled pointlessness in her expression, the air of wisdom that a millenium was past, a long timeless journey was finished without appearing to have begun, and no show of malice, enmity and overt desire to overcome oppression and evil mattered any longer. She belonged to a race that neither forgave nor forgot. That was legend. In reality the legend and consciousness of race had come to mean for her - patience, the unfathomable patience of a god in whom all is changed into wisdom when the grandiloquence of history and civilization was past.

Similarly, in the story, 'Yurokon' in The Sleepers of Roraima (1970), the disintegration of Amerindian cultures is portrayed as the necessary threshold to the 'Catholic native'. Yurokon himself is described as the 'last Carib and the first native'. What Harris means is made clearer later in the story when the Caribs contemplate their likely extinction:

They ceased to fret about names since namelessness was a sea of names. They ceased, too, to care about dwindling numbers since numberlessness was native to heaven, stars beyond reckoning.¹⁷

In 'The Mind of Awakaipu' the tendency of men to identify with their ancestral cultures is characterised as 'synonymous with insensibility' and 'a pathetic gloss upon immortality - upon the multifarious¹⁸ address of inner creative life'.

Within such a perspective on the nature of cultural identity, it is scarcely surprising that in The Far Journey of Oudin, the East Indian peasantry should be seen negatively as a materially and racially assertive presence. Their material assertion takes the form of the entrepreneurial spirit with which Mohammed and his brothers confront their uprooted condition: 'a disfiguring and vulgar quest for new ways of making money...the acquisition of sordid power'. (p.52) Theirs is a 'labouring, bargaining world' with no room for any social graces. As Mohammed rather defensively asserts, 'At least nobody pretending they is anybody high-schooled and polite 'cept they got hard cash to rule.' (p.44) Their lives are described in such a way that they appear to mimic the corrupt dynamism of the metropolitan sugar enterprise of two and a half centuries ago. Thus Ram mimics the speculative merchant of the eighteenth century who, in return for capital-loans to the planters, in time took over the ownership of the estates. Ram 'wished to corner and possess...every acre of land he acquired from his tenants who had mortgaged their labour and world to him'. Mohammed plays the absentee landlord; he is involved in the diversification of the bus-company and leaves the under-capitalised estate in the hands of his cousin, Rajah. And Oudin, until he acts in accordance with his divinity (Odin), plays the role of Ram's ever-willing slave. The staleness of their mimicry is expressed in the pettiness of Mohammed's visions of empire. His desire is to build a palace for himself 'in five or ten years time... when 'a lot of old-fashioned

overseers frames would be going dirt-cheap then for anyone who saw himself becoming a new kind of ruler'. (p.38)

It is obviously not Harris's intention that the portrayal of these East Indian peasant characters be interpreted as an invidious reflection on the characteristics of a particular ethnic group, or even as a sociologically exact representation. He uses these characters both to illustrate certain universal spiritual themes and as examples of a more general Caribbean inability to escape from the prisons of the past. Ram, for instance, is a universal figure of evil because he seeks constantly to thwart the freedom of others and build his empire on their enslavement. Similarly, the image of Mohammed's failure to break from his narrow peasant conception of the world is a metaphor both for a human failure to match an inner spiritual growth with external material expansion and a Caribbean political failure to do more than take over the colonial inheritance. Although Mohammed dreams of building ever bigger houses, yet:

the family lived in the same illusion of dark space they had always occupied and rented. They had the same room or rooms, as in the cottage where they were at present, while the remainder of the dreaming mansion of the future was bare and un-lived in, and as unoccupied as ever....(p39-40)

The image is also one of a more general Guyanese reluctance to move away from the narrow coastal strip and escape from the imprisoning heritage of slavery, by exploiting the possibilities of the uninhabited interior. It is a general Guyanese failure of imagination, but one which Harris appears to identify particularly with the Indian presence. For instance, in The Secret Ladder (1963), there is an opposition between the maroon negro tribe of Poseidon which inhabits the interior and the East Indians of the Corentyne Savannah. Poseidon's tribe are in revolt against a plan to flood a basin of land in the interior, the region which supports their precarious freedom, to provide irrigation for the coastal strip. They fear that 'the crafty East Indian man...going to get what they lose'. Here Harris does no more than report how two different

kinds of interest clash; but running through this and other of Harris's novels is the identification of the heartland with an 'inner scale of values' and the coastland with a shallow materialistic approach to life. Thus the maroon negro revolt of the heartland represents 'liberal germs of the past' and the potential 'authority and psyche of freedom', whilst the authorial mouthpiece of the novel, Fenwick, expresses his fears about whether the 'East Indian workers and rice farmers...will be able to reconcile their emergence with what I would like to call the liberal germs of the past'³⁰. In Tumatumari (1968), this economic/spiritual metaphor, expressed in Henry Tenby's blueprint for the development of the interior, reflects in an allusive manner on the East Indian economic role. Tenby recognises that so far:

The possibilities of transubstantiation and far-flung development roles (irrigation, drainage, drought as well as flood) inherent in such a wilderness of design had eluded the grasp of settlement-ghetto and arbitrary reservoir of self-interest. It called for the abandonment of non-reciprocal formula, status quo of self-sufficient polder, and the emergence of a genuine open dialogue with truncated figures, half-man, half-earth, half-river, half-sky, half-history, half-myth stretching into the heartland of the continent. [My emphasis.]³¹

The emphasis on 'self-sufficiency' is central to the whole of Harris's work, and again he clearly sees it as a universal failing rather than specifically an East Indian one. By self-sufficiency, Harris means both the one-sided 'satisfaction' of human needs through purely material development and the way cultures regard themselves as complete, put up barriers against other cultures and succumb to 'monolithic callouses and complacencies in the name of virtue or purity'³². In Ascent To Omai (1970) the relationship between cultural self-containment and aggressive racialism is seen as axiomatic and described in universal terms as 'world-historical racialism, the highest brute rationalisation - in the name of ideal self-sufficiency'.³³

In The Far Journey of Oudin, in focussing on the relationship

between Mohammed and his clan and the murdered half-brother and then Oudin, Harris is, I am sure, primarily concerned with universal spiritual and moral issues. He presents an ethical critique of all kinds of 'moral' justifications for wicked deeds done in the name of self-righteous family or ethnic loyalty and 'sound' commercial judgements. It is also, in a Guyanese setting, a reinvestigation of the parable of the husbandmen who kill the true heir, which poses the question of who shall inherit the Kingdom of God. However, because the novel is set in Guyana, and written in such a concrete way, it is impossible to avoid reading it as also being a reflection on Guyanese race-relations from the perspective of a person of mixed race who espouses a 'raceless' orientation. This is suggested in the way that Mohammed, seeking to justify the murder of the half-brother, claims that he is not even their father's son by his 'outside' woman, but the son of a 'black-skin coolie man'. Later in the novel Mohammed is angered by the way the negro wood-cutter, who appears to be a metamorphosis of Kaiser, has 'taken' Kaiser's name: 'No one knew where that black, artificial beggar had got that relative name from'. There are other, more ethno-centric images of the Indian presence. There are certainly continuities between the image of Ram as the grasping money-lender and the kind of crudely stereotyped figures which surface with monotonous regularity in some of the inferior fiction discussed in Chapter Six. Again, the image of Mohammed as the profiteering bus proprietor, 'plying his drunken commerce and traffic in the road' (until his greed in overloading with passengers causes him to lose his licence) is part of a set of stock characters which includes Indian waterers of milk and profiteering rice-farmers, figures illustrative of creole fears of Indian economic energy and enterprise.

By contrast, Oudin the raceless man of untraceable ancestry seems invested with the historical consciousness of the ethnically-mixed group Harris himself comes from, a group which was being

squeezed between the rival assertions of Indians and Blacks. Oudin defines his task during a momentary loss of faith in the purpose of his abduction of Beti:

How could he hope to plant and invent a human brain and cosmopolis - of subjugation as well as nerves - and to ingrain it into the fibre of a race whose darkest crime and brightest destiny had long since ceased to count as something one must clearly discharge and accept for the relative fantasy it was. Yet if he was unable to do this, how then was he to arise from the grave of a world. (p.112)

Yet if Mohammed and his clan behave as if they belonged to a whole world whose integrity must be defended, this is very far from the truth. No less than V.S.Naipaul, Harris sees the Indian world in a state of disintegration; but whereas Naipaul's novels suggest no exit from this state, Harris explores the possibilities of creative personal and cultural renewal starting from the point of fracture and decay.

The decay of a past wholeness is suggested in various ways: the mixture of Hindu, Christian and Muslim names in the clan, their abandonment of a traditional relationship to the land and their new entrepreneurial spirit and the ways in which family relationships have broken down. The ties of mutual, ethically-derived support which once gave the extended family coherence have disappeared to be replaced by purely economic links. Mohammed's children are all 'relative servants in [his] eye, the servants of his blood', (p.34) and Rajah, the brother's first cousin, is described as an 'invaluable conspirator and member of the clan'. (p.42) Similarly, the loss of family decency is evident in the black farce of Hassan's and Mohammed's behaviour at their father's death-bed. Fearing that the will the old man has under his pillow will disinherit them, they break the dying man's spectacles so that they can safely substitute a blank will in its place. Thus, the death of the father symbolizes the death of 'a certain page and time in the book of the world' (p.52) but it also allows the poss-

ibility of a fresh start. This is one of the ironies which Harris plays with in the theme of the 'misconception of inheritance'. Thus, though the brothers inevitably regard their father's decision to disinherit them as made 'out of a kind of malice, to show how far we falling from grace' (p.46), in the ironic perspective of the novel his bequest is really a beneficent one because it gives them the opportunity to break from a decaying past. Even the new entrepreneurial spirit can be seen as sowing the seeds of a fresh start, bestowing the brothers with a 'seed of inquiry', a 'turning towards a wider changing window and world', a 'beginning in themselves'. (p52) These new possibilities, because they involve the break-up of the old world are painful, and Harris portrays the brothers as frequently denying the actual heterogeneity of their culture. There is an ironic scene, for instance, when Ram, the nominal Hindu is trying to persuade Mohammed, the nominal Muslim, to send his cattle to the butcher:

'Ah don't want to hear 'pout butcher,' Mohammed raged. 'You brain going soft or what man? Is you religion or what? This country so mix up, one never know who is Christian, Hindu, Moslem or what, black man, white man's fable or red. Sometimes is all the same it seem but it got a technical difference. Tek me word for it? He smiled his notorious, corrupt simple smile. 'Look it. You got to treasure the worst of two worlds...' (p.93)

There is much that is salutary in Harris's perspective on the past and on change. He warns against a reactionary and sentimental attachment to the past, indicating that though there may once have been a 'unity of faith and family' which enabled the people to 'withstand a sameness and misery in life, and an unchanging role in experience akin to the acceptance of holy poverty', the past must be recognised as irrecoverable: 'something small and secure had been broken beyond repair'.^(p.51) Again, the 'holy poverty' of the past appears to have both literal and ironic meanings. On the one hand it is contrasted with the new 'disfiguring and vulgar quest for new ways of making money', on the other with the 'sameness and misery in life'.

However, it seems to me that Harris's perspectives on change are blurred by his spiritual biases. For instance, his satiric portrayal of the 'reactionary treadmill' that Mohammed and his clan are trapped on in their mimicry of the plantation capitalism of the past becomes at times an abstractly metaphysical assault on their participation in the very processes of transforming nature to their needs. Harris recognises that the motive for their economic drive is their anxiety to escape from poverty and insecurity. Undoubtedly, there is compassion in his urge to show how their one-sided material quest impoverishes their spiritual lives, so that Rajah has come to feel 'an extension of his own oxen' and 'believed in nothing save filling his belly'. (p.79) But how is this impoverishment to be overcome? Not, evidently, through political and social change to end their material insecurities. It is Rajah's preoccupation with the material ('the devil of comfort which had become the object of his life' (p.83)) which makes him prepared to murder the half-brother and keeps him from spiritual grace. It is 'the weakness and procrastination that kept him chained to his daily task like a man idling and brooding on the millenium'. Again, in the description of Mohammed 'who converted his substance into running and driving cars and buses' (p.28), there are both literal and figurative meanings. Literally, he has converted his capital, previously based on land, into his new activity; figuratively, he has converted his essential self into material activity. By contrast, Oudin has true 'far-sightedness' in not having any material commitments: 'Oudin was as indifferent as ever to the absurd contrivances of creation and life' (p.126) . For the brothers, the 'promised land of plenteous return' is always out of reach. The other-worldly location of the promised land is made clear when Harris writes of the 'still greater sacrifice [which] had to be endured before they could free themselves from bondage.' (p.59) This sacrifice involves, of course, the deaths and purgatorial after-existences of the brothers.

However, the economic drive of the Indian peasant world is not the only false option pursued on the break-up of the traditional Indian past. In the portrayal of Hassan and Kaiser, Harris comments on what appear to be two diametrically opposed cultural choices for Indians in the Caribbean: a retreat into an imaginary past or total racial and cultural assimilation into the Creole world. As elsewhere in the novel, Harris uses a social issue as the metaphor for an underlying spiritual choice. The effect of this connection has, in my view, both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the splitting of Hassan and Kaiser into opposites enables Harris to express a tentative dialectical resolution of the tension between the spiritual and the material, but on the other it leads him to caricature Indian cultural choices and portray Kaiser and Hassan as emblematic 'types'.

In his lifetime Hassan has been the most traditional of the brothers and is sometimes 'mistaken for a rather outlandish Indian priest' who wears the garments of the pundit which, in the present, have become 'impractical and filthy', their whiteness perpetually stained by curry. After an intuition of his death, Hassan begs his brothers to burn his corpse on a pyre 'in the ancient way of his ancestors, before they dreamed to cross the ocean to Demerara'. (p.56) Though elsewhere Harris writes of the desire to explore ancestral roots as contributing to the discovery of 'original rhythms within the Caribbean,³⁵ he also warns that as an obsessive regard it can become yet another historical prison. Moreover, within a spiritual framework the urge to preserve a cultural identity can, of course, only be seen as 'a pathetic gloss upon immortality'. Thus, the occasion of Hassan's cremation becomes an ambivalent symbol of both a longing for a primordial racial unity (the flames 'gathering the heart of every witness into an undivided longing whole', (p.58) and a vain attempt to atone for his crime by the

recovery of an ancient ritual.

The hopelessness of Hassan's desire to return to the ancestral womb is pointed out to him by Kaiser when the two of them meet as 'light reflective beggars' after their deaths:

If he returned he would be looked upon as an outcast and an untouchable ghost. What language had he save the darkest and frailest outline of an ancient style and tongue? Not a blasted thing more. Remember too how much he had forgotten, Kaiser scolded him. The ceremonies and sacraments he fitfully observed were not a patch on the real thing. It was a dim hope, dimmer than their father's childhood and adolescence. (p.72-73)

Hassan's answer is to become more thoroughly 'Indian' than ever before. He declares to Kaiser that he 'was a follower of Siva and Vishnu. He had read with glimmering enthusiasm of the avatars and descent of the God, but the ultimate intention of all was the ascetic Gautama'. Spiritually, Harris characterises Hassan's posture as sterile and life denying, since in his desire to avoid the corruptions of material he tells Kaiser it is:

Better to return to a sacred place and abstain from life altogether. Only the empty one, who no longer dreamt and sketched the vaguest desire, could kill the devil. (p75)

Here, at least, Harris conveys what he sees to be the need for an inter-penetration of the material and the spiritual. Opposed to Hassan's 'esoteric yearning for the mother's shell and womb' is Kaiser's 'technical longing for the mined and subject earth'. (p.74) Kaiser is portrayed as opposing action to Hassan's passivity. The form his action takes is both political and racial in its implications. For the cause of Kaiser's break with Mohammed is not only his anger with his brother's mismanagement of the estate, but also his frustration at living within the Hindu family, that 'intimate history and shell'. Kaiser regrets that he is unable to love whom and what he wished' - a reference to the school-lady whom he has apparently been prevented from marrying. But Kaiser's attempt to break from the past derives also from his intuitive awareness that the world is not as it has always seemed to him. For instance,

startled by the way in which the habitues of the rum shop regard his and Mohammed's rumoured complicity in the death of their half-brother with a mixture of horror, envy and admiration, Kaiser becomes aware that:

he had never seen the people in this fierce inner light and contradiction before. He had been blind to their alarming incongruity and had accepted an inborn and humourless condition of things. Now, it dawned on him, he was losing his fixed unreflective submersion and participation in all. (p.63)

But despite his openness to the intuitions which invade his consciousness, Kaiser's rebellion is portrayed by Harris as following another false option. He declares his intention of abandoning his Indian identity and becoming totally assimilated to an Afro-creole life style:

I am giving up rice and sugar for gold and diamond. I can pass as a negro pork-knocker and I shall take passage to the gold fields of Cuyuni and Mazaruni. I shall steal into Venezuela and swim across oil. (p.73)

The declaration mimics, in fact, one form that Afro-Guyanese economic activity took after the failure of the free-villages to provide an adequate basis for life. The pork-knocker, or diamond seeker, is a symbolic figure in Guyanese folk-lore, a creole archetype of independence from the colonial order of the sugar plantation.³⁶ The activity of the pork-knocker in exploring the 'spiritual' heartlands of Guyana also stands for Harris as a reverberation of all that the quest for the mythical Eldorado has meant: the mingling of a heroic spiritual vision with a squalid greed for conquest and gold.

Kaiser's decision to turn creole is, however, paralleled and commented on in the later short story, 'Couvade', where the hunted Carib boy suggests wearily to his grandfather, '...shall we shed our skins and take the name of our enemies. Then perhaps we shall have come home at last.'³⁷ But the story shows this to be an illusory escape, for when the boy and his grandfather take on the disguise of their pursuers, they find themselves hunted again but this time by members of their own tribe. In other words, Harris suggests, to

exchange one identity for another is simply to exchange racial prisons. The only real escape offered by Harris exists only within the dreaming imagination, as in 'Couvade' where the boy dreams of crossing the BRIDGE OF NAMES (a symbol of death) and at last taking on a true disguise from his enemies: 'the camouflage' of nothing'³⁸ - immateriality.

Kaiser is also portrayed as making the mistake of seeing his struggle in material terms. He epitomises 'the mysterious abandon and unity in the life of everyman and age who still left all and followed literally nothing.'^(p.118) In his revolt against Mohammed's capitalist mismanagement, and the various injustices which he feels afflict him, Kaiser is described as being possessed by a 'spirit of incurable pride and oppression,' and being a 'romantic mixture... a kind of inferior Christian romantic...' (p.121-122) What Harris intends in his portrayal of Kaiser is I think made clearer by a comparison with the characterisation of Jennings, the 'primitive republican boxer' in Palace of the Peacock (1961), who asserts both his rationalist materialism and his political radicalism in opposition to the superstition of the older crewman, Cameron:

I is my own fucking revolution, equal to all, understand?
I can stand pon the rotten ground face to face with the
devil...³⁹

The rather obvious irony of 'rotten' ground prepares us for the fact that Jennings will be made to pay for his stance. Indeed, as the journey continues, his 'lust and soul of rebellion' shrivels until he begins to appear to the other crew members as 'the abstraction of a shell afloat over a propeller and a machine with the consistency of duty rather than of a desire and a spirit.'⁴⁰ Like Jennings, Kaiser belongs to that tradition of radical Caribbean protest which Harris has charged with lacking a true revolutionary consciousness because its thought is confined within the same socio-historical parameters as the ideology of the oppressor it seeks to overturn. Harris also

criticises in Kaiser the tendency of the spirit of social protest to a deterministic denial of self-responsibility and the placing of agency always on some external force. It is Kaiser's habit, in his guise as the negro woodcutter, 'to make the simplest story into something of far reaching dramatic significance, like a kind of memorial excuse for human failure'. (p.122) Thus, though Kaiser has made a break, 'living no longer in the loyal conspiratorial past but in the ubiquitous shoe and trespass of the future' (p.67) his new role simply imitates another equally trapped condition. He has discovered the hollowness of his 'creole' adventure as a pork-knocker:

...As fast as Ah cut me way and mek a red cent, Ah spend it...

As he attempts to explain to Beti, he is condemned to the restless pursuit of a secret he has not yet found:

'There is something in this world...that comes before every rich diamond, and a man need it to make himself a millionaire and a king.' 'What you meaning?' Beti said, not understanding clearly again. 'I mean the ink that running in everyman's veins,' he said passionately like a man who had drawn an image all his life when he set out on the trail of a lost love. 'I mean the ink of the spirit. Is something you can't buy but if you can bleed it out of you life it can change you luck.' (p.118)

But because Kaiser is still committed to overthrowing his oppression within a material, economic-political context, he is a symbol for Harris, of the dangers inherent in the desire for revolutionary change carried out through concrete social activity. Such desires, according to Harris, result only in totalitarianism. As Beti looks at the wood-cutter / Kaiser she feels in him:

the spirit of incurable pride and oppression and thwarted romance that counted and sold everyone, and even wished to pursue and enslave the world with the best of mistaken intentions. (p.119)

However, it is in this section of the novel that Harris comes closest to suggesting that a dialectical integration of the tendencies represented by Kaiser and Hassan could lead to genuine social

renewal. However, there seems to me a deliberate and perhaps inevitable ambivalence in the manner in which the synthesis is expressed. Put in indirect speech in Kaiser's mouth it can be seen on the one hand as an attempt to give his material biases some spiritual justification, yet it is also written very positively and without evident irony as if it represented a more validated view. Kaiser, moreover, is evidently 'inspired' in his speech at this point:

He recalled the rare drop of precious liquor he had swallowed that day, making him as light as a feather. It was the elixir of blood in the yoke of the egg and the sun. The warmth drew him to desire to counsel Hassan. There was an esoteric yearning for the mother's shell and womb, and there was a technical longing for the mined and subject earth. It was this secret and this technical understanding, whose marriage could make life new and desirable again. (p.74)

Such a perspective for social renewal is, it seems to me, the nearest Harris comes to overcoming the idealistic biases of the novel. Yet when he compares Kaiser's position to that of 'an obdurate child still playing in a kingdom he had a long way to go to begin to learn to build',^(p.75) is Harris stressing the inadequacy of Kaiser's political attempts to remake the world so far, or is he suggesting that Kaiser's efforts are wholly misplaced because he mistakes the kingdom of the world for the kingdom of heaven?

In a critical discussion of The Far Journey of Oudin, the Jamaican novelist, John Hearne, has charged Harris with robing his 'innocent and uncaring people in philosophical vestments which they wear about as comfortably as would a navy dressed in a duke's full coronation regalia'.⁴¹ Harris can, of course, be defended against Hearne's patronising, naturalistic attitude towards the East-Indian peasant world by recognising the poetic truth of his invention of hidden inner lives. In reality, Harris's portrayal is socially authentic. In my own small acquaintance with Indo-Guyanese peasants and sugar workers, I met many persons whose minds were every bit as full of ideas as Harris's characters, people who brought together in their creolese tongue the languages of rude common-sense; of

Marxist class-consciousness and Hindu speculation.

It is in his perception and inventive treatment of the role of language in these peasant lives that Harris is at his most convincing in suggesting a renewal of possibilities in the breaking up of the traditional Indian world. Mohammed reminds his brothers of the 'strict unfathomable way' their father had of looking at them, 'like if he grieving for a language. Is ancient scorn and habit at the hard careless words we does use. But is who fault if the only language we got is a breaking-up or making-up language'. (p.44) At one level the characters' awkwardnesses of speech and their illiteracy is part of the confusion which marks, for instance, Mohammed's 'ill-educated overburdened psychic mechanism', or Beti's inability to make sense of her condition:

The script of the newspaper made no sense to her, as usual. There was a greyness and a confusion here she would never pierce as long as she lived, and for which she must supply her own half-free, half-reactionary, uncomprehending, primitive maternal shell and symbol. (p.127)

It is in the fact that she must supply her own meanings that there are the seeds of possibility; just as it is in the breaking-up and making-up nature of the brothers' language that they are able to some extent to escape from a solid and illusorily complete construction of the world which a more fixed and settled language might suggest. Because of the fluidity of the medium, the speaker of Creole, perhaps inarticulate in standard English, may be led to mean other than what he literally speaks. As Mohammed says, 'Is parable we meaning all the time everytime we can't help twisting we tongues'. (p.44) Again, the psychic origin of Kaiser's revolt from Mohammed's 'repetitive logic' is portrayed as deriving from his fortuitous interpretation of a phrase ('a cancer in the body politic') he comes across in the ill-written, ill-printed local press where 'Nothing he had harvested and gained was the reporter's intention or fault.' (p.61) The anagogical interpretation of the word is portrayed as akin to the 'inspired' speech of the sha man or

prophet. For instance, when Kaiser argues with Mohammed in the rum-shop just before his death in the fire, he begins speaking as if possessed 'by the wild insane voices that came from within.' It is in this vatic trance that Kaiser prophesies Beti's bid for freedom and Oudin's role as the shamanistic inspirer, of a new vision of freedom, 'the real dreadful beggar who can teach she what she never see.' (p.66-67)

Harris's rationale for this treatment of language is two-fold. Firstly, he very properly does not equate inarticulacy with the absence of inner thought. Beti, for instance, is prompted beyond the confines of articulated language to an attraction to the out-caste figure of Oudin:

She could neither read nor write nor draw, and yet her mind was often besieged by a word and a line and a face she dreamed she had sketched and made. She dreaded Oudin because of this obscure and terrible recurring spirit and reason, but she was drawn to him as to the ultimate heir and bridegroom to fire one's freedom and imagination in the midst of one's pitiful shell and dowry and fate.(p55)

Secondly, Harris's treatment of language is strongly influenced by the privileged role of the unconscious in his ideas, treated at times as if it was divinely inspired.⁴²

No character is immune to the intuitive promptings of inner consciousness, though only Oudin, the man without racial or material commitments is able to respond fully. The penalties for failing to respond are disorientation, spiritual sterility and a terrified dread of both life and death. Mohammed is as open to the promptings of his conscience/consciousness as any other character. When, for instance, Oudin arrives on his estate, Mohammed feels that he is:

an essential link in the chain and plot directed at his heart's ambition and lust ... a recurring and unwelcome vision he seemed unable to interpret and stop, of subversion and opulence, misery and well-being resting in no-one and nothing. (p.38)

This new feeling that he exists in a world of chance begins to subvert Mohammed's former assurance that material rewards are the

just deserts of those who work for them and his naively rationalistic conviction (which Harris describes with rather heavy-handed irony) that 'there was a simple natural explanation for everything he knew'. (p.51) He is left suspended between 'half-material hope, half-spiritual despair' and in this state becomes Ram's pliant victim. He blurts out to Ram his fearful sense of disorientation:

'Is like something circulating me.' He paused.
 'What you mean?' Ram was involved and interested.
 'I don't know exactly how to explain. But time itself change since he [Oudin] come. Is like I starting to grow conscious after a long time, that time itself is the forerunner to something. But ah learning me lesson so late, is like it is a curse, and things that could have gone smooth now cracking up in haste around me. I so bewilder I can't place nothing no more.' (p.91)

But like Ram who 'could not yet accept the evolution and change in experience', Mohammed cannot respond to these intimations of immortality. His inability to respond is a consequence of his continuing belief in the solidity of the material world. Blundering through the forest in pursuit of Oudin and Beti, Mohammed attempts to convince himself of the reality of the world as he has known it. In the marvellously described, shifting landscape of the forest, portrayed as a great bird which has the capacity to hatch out the egg of his growing new conception, Mohammed, however, grows 'impatient for the clear obstinate land'. The possibility of redemption is clearly not infinite:

The wings of the forested hen shook its fluid feathers from him like a bird taking flight over his head. The twittering ceased, and a silence, the silence of death, rather than the discernment of love and self-sacrifice, darkened the infested lanes of space on the ground.
 He had cracked the premature egg of his dying time and he stood face to face now with the prospect of himself alone with terror and with nothingness. (p.130)

However, if the portrayal of Mohammed illustrates the novel's moralistic biases, it is within the character of Oudin that its creative contradictions are most acute. At times, the duality of the figure of Oudin conveys what is genuinely revolutionary in

Harris's vision. He is both the victim of the novel, a humble, lowly slave of a man, yet he is at the same time capable of destroying Ram's power and discovering a freedom that no other character finds. However, if Oudin is a revolutionary figure, he is one of a very ambiguous kind, for in portraying Oudin's death as synonymous with his freedom, Harris seems to draw on two traditions. One seems to me revolutionary, the other, in its separation of spirit from the world, quietistic.

The revolutionary equation of freedom and death is explored fictively in Lamming's Of Age and Innocence and in Martin Carter's lecture series, Man and Making - Victim and Vehicle, (1971) Both recognise the 'freely chosen death' as the inextinguishable expression of human freedom, exemplified in the Caribbean tradition by the slave who committed suicide rather than become or remain another's commodity, or who rebelled in a situation whose outcome was most likely a cruel death. Carter locates this terrible option in Caribbean history as when 'the only choice available to the slave was the choice of a way to die. Thus the slave gained identity in the manner of his death.'⁴³

Harris's portrayal of Oudin echoes, in some respects, this desperate choice for the active human spirit. In his lifetime, Oudin's reaction to Ram has exhibited the revolutionary duplicity of the slave, seeming to be utterly obedient and loyal, yet being the first to strike a blow against Ram's power by abducting Beti as his own wife. Ram, in a moment of sudden intuition sees Oudin in this insurrectionary role 'with a flaming revolutionary brand in his hand.' (p.99) By his death, like the slave suicide, Oudin ceases to be Ram's property, breaking Ram's hold over him and leaving his former master a broken, impotent man because the death also breaks the covenant which would have provided Ram with the heir he seeks. Thus in death Oudin becomes a more powerful figure than in

life, for Ram 'a presence whose apparent nothingness was more real and penetrating....' (p.18) The sight of Oudin's body leaves Ram feeling 'chained to the ground where Oudin had overpowered him', (p.14) and fearful that 'the husband of silence might crush him'. Harris goes on to compare the dead Oudin's 'timeless, spirit' with the live Ram's 'fading personality'. (p.25) In this context Harris's portrayal of Oudin's death not only conveys metaphorically the necessary death of the old subservient personality before the new free person may be born, but also serves as a powerful reminder of the capacity of the oppressed to change their condition.

In addition, Harris reminds us that the power of the oppressor rests on the compliance of the weak. Without Oudin, Ram is nothing and in this fact lies his vulnerability, 'the insecurity and violence in his soul. He needed Oudin.' (p.133)

However, the 'timeless spirit' which Oudin's death releases is in other respects very far from being an image of revolt. The death is also portrayed, in the other-worldly transcendentalism which pervades the novel, as a release from the meaningless prison of material existence. For instance, when Beti sees the death of her father, Rajah, Harris writes that it was a 'feast of freedom from travail and pain...fracture of a cruel bond within him....She felt the rain and the sky sheltering him in a land that was nowhere, and yet where she herself wanted to go.' (p.89) And as we have already seen it is not through any idea of change in his enslaved material condition that Oudin loses his fears of Mohammed and Ram, but out of his acceptance of his own 'immateriality and nothingness'. (p.105) This strikes me as a spiritual perspective analogous to the missionary teaching of a docile resignation to slavery in return for the promise of bliss in the hereafter.

.. Again, whereas the 'freely chosen death' of the slave was both an individual and a social act, the death of Oudin is portrayed as

purely an inner process of individuation ('consumation of his being') which far from being a social process, involves the conscious breaking of social relationships within the individual's lifetime. Thus Oudin becomes aware of 'the dreadful nature in every compassionate alliance' (because they are obstacles to self-realization) and the necessity to break such alliances 'in order to emerge into one's ruling constructive self.' (p.101) This process of self-isolation/self-realization, the far journey outward that begins on the day of Oudin's death, is prefigured in the events of the journey he undertakes with Beti in flight from Mohammed. During this journey Oudin's attitude to Beti is one of pity for her slavish condition, and though he takes her sexually ('not to have done it would have been less than animal') he nevertheless feels that 'he was betraying himself in doing this.' The sense of betrayal arises from his feeling that the act has been a diversion, though an unavoidable one given his human nature, from his true spiritual purpose.

Though Oudin possessed her with all the lust in the world, he had not been able to pierce the veil that divided him from the spiritual existence he wished to have, and the brightness that he had seen before that had faded. It was as if he had suddenly been let down by a curious fantastic falsehood in every naked truth, and by an equally private truth in every process of crumbling discipline and falsehood. (p110-111)

After the enterprise of the escape is over Oudin 'was free to follow the ensuing years in their freedom from the enigma of childlike lust and loveliness alike,' and the next thirteen years he spends with Beti is passed over as a kind of interregnum before the real destiny of his far journey. As the dead Oudin reflects, 'They had never known each other as far back as they knew.' (p.13) Similarly, Ram is made to see Oudin's and Beti's wedding as 'the dream and reflection of misery' whereas their separation by Oudin's death is 'the launching and freedom of a release in time'.

Yet it would be false to suggest that Harris portrays Oudin's existence as utterly isolated and without significance for others. Throughout the novel he appears to others, in various guises, as the mediator of a vision of spiritual liberation. He appears to Beti as 'the desperate image and author of freedom'; (p.35) to Mohammed's wife Muhra as 'a ghost of a chance - to convert and restore her life into the warmth and protective meaning it should have had'; (p.37) and to Kaiser as 'a real dreadful beggar who can teach she Beti what she never see.' (p.66) His role is akin to that of the shaman, and Oudin is ironically described as:

...always acting out some extreme folly, and those who took him seriously were obviously unable to make mature judgements and distinctions. ...And yet there was no saying. The world sometimes went mad to restore what had been amputated and stricken. (p.108)

Harris's conception of the shaman is as a prophetic artist, the vehicle and interpreter of the messages of the irrational unconscious performing 'an indispensable creative attempt to see through or break through a hangover of the past...and to make of every inner divergence, every subtle omen of change - subsistence of meaning to feed imagination in the future'.⁴⁴ Harris's conception undoubtedly contains the germ of a dialectic of change. Yet it is a partial and one-sided one because his vision continually recoils from the role of practical activity in actually bringing about change. For, in historical reality, the shaman, can at best play an intermediary role prior to the organisation of conscious practical activity, and may even operate as the agent of a false consciousness which prevents the reaching of that practical stage.⁴⁵

One function of the shamanistic persona Harris draws for Oudin is that it enables him to bypass the problem of Oudin's awareness of the role he plays. Thus the source of Oudin's awareness of the feeling of the surviving brothers and their families that he is in some sense a re-embodiment of their murdered half-brother is left carefully vague:

Whether Ram whispered this to him where he stood in the reflection of fire - or whether he had gleaned the idea from scaps and mounds of debris - was a mystery to him. He simply accepted what he knew as one drinks in the stifling brooding atmosphere of a dream. (p.54-55)

However, Harris's attempt to reconcile the two personas of Oudin - the oppressed slave and the 'god-like inheritor of the kingdom' - in a single integrated conception seems to me not only philosophically but artistically unsatisfactory. The attempt leads Harris into making a rather portentous analogy between Oudin's intuitive awareness of his destiny - and the necessary actions through which the destiny must be accomplished - and the kind of supernatural self-awareness ascribed to Christ in the gospels:

It was this foresight and incipient universal compassion, lighting up the near future - as though each dark year ahead was alive with brilliant possibilities - that had fired Oudin into becoming the slave of Ram, and the labourer of Mohammed; and later the husband of Beti, and the father of one child and another one still unborn. (p.101)

And although Harris describes Oudin's inspiration as internal in genesis, its mystic vagueness suggests some kind of external agency. This suspicion is reinforced by Harris's more precisely formulated objective idealism expressed in the later novel Ascent to Omai. In what might obviously be taken as a reference to a character like Oudin, Harris writes in that novel:

It was a question of agencies. Agents - all of whom, however misguided, however perverse - were instruments beyond themselves, subconscious, involuntary perhaps, invoking a light of compassion within the abyss of history. ⁴⁶

This dialectical but idealistic formulation looks uncannily like Hegel's spirit of history, albeit spirit has moved inwards as 'daemon of the heart and, daemon of internality' ⁴⁷ but nevertheless remains an agency outside of man's conscious activity.

However, the novel does not arrive at any static state of final transcendence. On the contrary, the future is to be found very much in the uncertainty of the social world, in the continuing tension between the rapaciousness of the old order (Ram) and the

vision of freedom in the frail hands of Beti, 'the daughter of the race'. (p.136)

For though the capacity for choice and freedom had been lit in Beti by Oudin during their flight, yet on her marriage she relapses into her old acceptance of servitude. Thus when she discovers that Oudin is dead her 'age-old' cry, her relish in 'advertising a mournful need' mark her with 'the stamp of timeless slavery, rather than selection and freedom, and of belonging to someone and something living and dead, like a commodity everybody instantly recognised.' (p.14). Nevertheless, Beti's realisation, when Ram comes to enquire about the whereabouts of the covenant, that Oudin's death has mocked his power encourages her 'contempt for him that conceived an indifference to his power and possessions.' (p.20)

Yet there is also an ambiguous tension expressed in the impasse, for though Beti disdains Ram's power, she also evades the potentialities of the covenant, because it 'was pointless in her eyes... Oudin's dead business and desire, not hers'. This is a relief for Ram, frustrated though he is by not being able to enforce the contract on his terms, because he fears that Oudin, even after his death, is intent on 'overthrowing every misconception and inferior relationship in their contract.' Yet Ram himself feels an attraction to the possibility of a change in the relationship, for he is as much a prisoner of it as Oudin ever was. He feels both 'gratitude and horror' at the possibility, though the latter predominates because Ram is 'afraid of becoming something other than he had always known himself to be'. (p.25)

Harris seems to want us to see the contradictions in Beti's response as a consequence of her uncertainty about the materiality/immateriality of her presence in the world. Her resistance lies in her feeling of being beyond material consequence, 'beyond a touch where no material impact could break it, vulnerable as it

looked'. (p.23) On the contrary, her continuing servile condition derives from her feelings that she suffers injustice in a materially solid world. When Oudin and Beti meet the Kaiser/wood-cutter figure during their flight, she is strongly attracted to his burning sense of having suffered a wrong. Harris comments:

It was as if she had not yet learned to choose and reject a suitor because she was still part of a uniform lust and power and old estate... (p.111)

Harris makes clear the religious dimensions of his meaning a few pages later when he comments on Beti's attachment to her material life: she 'wanted to keep one foot in the corner of the ruling past', because of her unwillingness to 'meet the last dreadful enemy'. (p.114) Nevertheless, if the novel's tension remains unresolved, we are left with the abiding images of the capacity in Beti, in the sociological present an illiterate, ignorant peasant woman, to make 'a true distinction and choice' and to 'annul Ram's command and certificate of values in the end.' (p.136)

It has certainly not been my intention to argue that Harris's fiction should be any other than it irretrievably is; it has been an attempt to investigate my feelings that on the one hand Harris offers a powerful vision of the possibilities for change and renewal in the ethnically plural societies of Caribbean and a salutary warning against accepting any kind of reactionary stasis and racial stereotype, but that on the other, far from showing the spiritual and the material in necessary interpenetration, the radical import of the novel is frequently undermined by its elements of idealism and irrationalism. As I have argued, such a position can possess the corrective, subversive function of the dream, but like the dream remain only a partial and limited vision of reality.

Nevertheless, The Far Journey of Oudin has a lasting value because of its passionate concern for human freedom and its confidence that even under the badge of slavery, there is a 'secret

longing and notion to be free". (p.14) In this novel Harris also, triumphantly fulfils his conception of the duty of the artist to articulate the inner promptings of the inarticulate, 'in a world where the inarticulate person is continuously frozen or legislated for in mass, and a genuine experience of his distress, the instinct of distress, sinks into a void'.⁴⁸ Few novels have pushed the creole of the Caribbean masses further as a vehicle for describing the processes of the intellect, and few non-Indian authors have explored the position of the East Indians in their relationship to Caribbean history and society so penetratingly.

Chapter NineteenRace, Class and Perception in George Lamming's Of Age and Innocence.

In his essay, 'Tradition and The West Indian Novel', Wilson Harris has given an interesting but, I think, misconceived recognition of the difference between George Lamming's fiction and that of most other Caribbean novelists. He argues that Of Age and Innocence is written within the framework of the conventional novel's concern with the 'realism of classes and classifications', which Harris sees as limiting and untruthful in comparison to a 'profound, poetic and scientific scale of values'. Nevertheless, Harris feels that Lamming 'may well be restless within the framework'. His statement seems to suggest that Lamming's restlessness is an inconsistency and subversive of his commitment to 'realism'. Lamming's fiction indeed expresses a restless but highly conscious exploration of oppressive forms of class relations and classifications, and his mode of representation is coherently ordered towards that end. Of Age and Innocence is highly critical of ways of seeing which regard temporary 'realities' as fixed, and of views of the person which, in Harris's words, 'consolidate one's preconception of humanity'. In this Lamming and Harris share the same goal. The difference is that Lamming roots such possibilities within existing history and human society and thus his novels simultaneously persuade us of the reality of the structures within which his characters act and persuade us that those structures can be remade.

Harris also argues that the novel is marred by 'a diffusion of energies within the entire work', and that it fails to keep 'to its inherent design'.² This seems to me another misconception of what Lamming is attempting. Harris is, however, not alone in charging Lamming with a self-indulgent 'verbal sophistication', as if it were a tedious ornament to his work. There is sometimes a 'parsonical' tone in Lamming's style, as Mittelholzer once asserted;³ a tendency to tell the reader what a fictional situation has already shown. But this seems to me less a desire for ornament than an over-anxiety that the reader

should not overlook anything the fictional situation suggests. On my first reading of the novel I had felt that the introduction of the metropolitans (Mark, Marcia, Penelope and Bill) was a distraction from the essential theme of the novel: the rise and fall of the movement led by Shephard, Singh and Lee. Better acquaintance with the novel shows that their presence is an essential part of its structure.

Of Age and Innocence was published in 1960. Since then Caribbean reality has constantly mimicked it. In Trinidad in 1975, the labour movement came together in an Afro-Indian united front and then dissolved again; and in Jamaica in 1980, an old people's home was burned down in the middle of a bitter election campaign. These are no mere coincidences, but evidence of Lamming's profound insight into the pains of decolonization and the corruptions which lie in wait for those who seek political power.

Lamming's San Christobal is an imaginatively constructed composite of the most crucial features of Caribbean reality in the period immediately before the achievement of political independence. Lamming shows its present to be deeply shaped by its past, an historical consciousness he shares with V.S. Naipaul and Wilson Harris. However, whereas for Naipaul the history of his Isabella in The Mimic Men has written off the possibilities of the present, and whereas for Harris history is only another kind of fiction which can be freely rewritten, for Lamming history is the transforming activities of people within an objective world made by people in the past.

One of the most crucial legacies history bequeathes San Christobal is that it is an island where 'Africa and India shakes hands with China', but where each 'still pursues all its separate parts'. This separate-⁴ness has held back the anti-colonial movement and allows opportunist petit-bourgeois politicians like Parvecino to strut the stage. However, Lamming goes well beyond the usual radical Creole position of seeing the Indian presence as a problem which obstructs the class struggle. Instead, it is seen as a vital cultural resource for the Caribbean.

In The Pleasures of Exile (1960), he had described the arrival of the Indians as one of the three most important events in the history of the Caribbean,⁵ and in a speech delivered in 1965 he had argued that in the very difference of the Indians' cultural heritage lay 'a most desirable extension of the West Indian reality'. He spoke of the Indians as 'perhaps, our only jewels of a true native thrift and industry. They have taught us by example the value of money; for they respect money as only people with a high sense of communal solidarity can'.⁶ It is, of course, an evaluation which is diametrically opposed to that of Wilson Harris.⁷ Lamming sees societies being created out of sweat and toil and social solidarity; Harris portrays those qualities in The Far Journey of Oudin as deformities of the free human spirit. In Of Age and Innocence that sense of communal solidarity is portrayed in a genuinely dialectical way. In its sectional and exclusive form it is destructive, but Lamming sees that within it lies the precursive form of a true and inclusive sense of community. At a multitude of levels in the novel, both personal and political, the idea of the Indian presence as that desirable extension of reality is strongly emphasised.

There are, however, certain deficiencies in Lamming's treatment of the Indian presence, some of which may be due to the fact that he grew up in Barbados. To some extent he idealizes the reality of Afro-Indian relationships and displays an absence of familiarity with the inner Indian world. For instance, though he deals with Indian communal solidarity he portrays it as a matter of primordial bond rather than as a shared perception of common interest; and as a matter of individual psychology rather than an involvement in the kind of socio-religious institutions to which many Indians in Trinidad and Guyana gave their loyalty. Although he stresses the Indian 'difference' as a positive value, he also appears to underestimate the extent to which Indians maintained a level of cultural distinctiveness. For instance, Ma Shephard tells the boys how the Indians had come to the island and 'time take whatever memory come with them 'cross the sea, an' their habit

make a home right here'. (p 69)

Thus, whereas the social and ethnic roots of Shephard's or Crabbe's or Butterfield's feelings are acutely drawn, both Baboo and Singh exist in isolation from the socio-cultural forces which must have shaped them. Thus Baboo's murder of Shephard can only be seen in psychological terms, and perhaps because he cannot, or is unwilling, to ground Baboo's motives in the social or economic roots of Indian communalism, Lamming is forced to conceal Baboo's motives, by various narrative subterfuges, until the showdown on the beach. And, by failing to portray Singh's social roots more adequately, Lamming reduces the persuasiveness of the relationship between Shephard and Singh as a symbolic manifestation of the wider possibilities of Afro-Indian contact.

However, I believe that, as a whole, Of Age and Innocence rises above these flaws, and that one must grant the possibility that Lamming wished to emphasize that ways of seeing are structured by processes of perception which lie at a deeper level than the more mutable shapings of the person's cultural environment.

In the form of the novel, Lamming makes an imaginative attempt to represent a world in which subjective realities exist in abnormally fragmented and partial forms. The apparently overpowering nature of these subjective divisions is conveyed by a number of means. Frequent use is made of free indirect speech so that the reflections of individual characters are not bracketed off but become part of the narrative texture of the novel. Other more obvious devices which are used to present conflicting subjectivities include the diaries of Mark and Penelope and the putting of characters in situations where they are drawn towards inner soliloquy. Above all, Lamming makes use of his very considerable rhetorical skills to make convincing points of view which, we know from other evidence, are very definitely not his own. Ma Shephard's resigned acceptance of the colonial order, with its roots in her Christian quietism and her belief that 'This ain't my kingdom...

this nor no corner on the earth', ^(p. 243) is so vigorously presented that at times the reader might be led to suppose that it represents the novel's overall meaning. Even with Crabbe, Lamming tries to make his way of seeing convincing and persuasive in terms of his role as Chief-Inspector. The persuasiveness of these individual ways of seeing is reinforced by Lamming's apparent withdrawal from the surface of the text as omniscient narrator. Indeed, at a moment when Lamming feels it necessary to direct the reader's response, he does so directly, in a way which implies that his voice is only another strand in the counterpoint which weaves through the novel. One such instance occurs when, evidently aware of how persuasive he has made Ma Shephard's voice in the novel, Lamming intervenes to tell us that ^(p. 289) '...she could not see beyond her faith'. There are, though, occasions when Lamming uses a character such as Penelope as a reliable commentator. Such interventions are in some respects unnecessary and perhaps reveal Lamming's anxiety that the reader might fail to grasp that the reality of San Christobal is more than the aggregation of these subjective voices. His portrayal of the diversity of ways of seeing should not obscure the fact that Lamming all the time implies an objective core of events, actions and consequences which constitute the fictive reality of the novel. That reality is also presented in its overall thematic patterning. In the novel Lamming creates the fictive illusion of an objectively real world since that is the only ontological basis on which meaningful action can be predicated. San Christobal's inhabitants sometimes grasp its reality, sometimes not.

These aspects of the novel's composition have been discussed at some length because it seems to me that Lamming deserves more credit than he has yet been given for the originality of this work in which he creates a conceptually profound and aesthetically persuasive representation of a fragmented world. It also seems to me part of the novel's merit that he does this within the accessibility of realistic

conventions. It has become an unjustifiable orthodoxy of modernist aesthetics that works which challenge the everyday, conventional conceptions of the real must necessarily be anti-mimetic.⁷

For Lamming, the form these subjectivities of perception take is shaped by the particularity of social reality. Shephard, for instance, sees his own psychic division as intimately related to San Christobal's ethnic segmentation:

I know San Christobal. It is mine, me, divided in a harmony that still pursues all its separate parts... No new country, but an old land inhabiting new forms of men who can never resurrect their roots and do not know their nature. (p.50)

The personal and public actions of the novel's principal characters are shaped by the same material-historical forces. For instance, Mark Kennedy's failure to commit himself to the nationalist movement or to his relationship with Marcia, has the same roots. Similarly, Crabbe's treatment of his black mistresses parallels the expression of his public power. Thief spies him in the woman's shack:

But I could see Crabbe change colour while he wage the war, pouncin' and paradin' like he was a whole army invadin' fresh country. (p.235)

Lamming's emphasis on the links between personal and public relates to his view that 'what a person thinks is very much determined by the way that person sees'.⁸ The peculiar emphasis Lamming gives this statement in The Pleasures of Exile is matched by the emphasis on modes of perception in the novel. As a complementary idea, Lamming stresses that the individual's idea of himself is shaped by his awareness of how he is regarded by others. This reciprocity is summed up by Thief when he reprooves Rockey for his naivety:

'How my actions innocent I know,' said Rockey, 'like I know my face.'

'But it ain't matter what you know,' said Thief, ' 'tis what the next man don't see.'

'I can talk,' said Rockey, 'innocence can talk.'

'It ain't got no language,' said Thief, 'unless the next man lend you his belief.' (p.370)

This consciousness is for Lamming the key to the colonial relationship: the colonised person knows that not only have the material conditions of life been determined by the colonizing power, but that he

exists in a certain way in the mind of the colonizer. Lamming also shows how a parallel, inhibiting awareness of the 'regard of the other' can structure the relationships between the different ethnic sections of the colonised group.

Shephard and Mark Kennedy both return to San Christobal as stigmatised persons. Both feel that they are always judged 'in spite of' their colour and colonial status. Both are driven by this constant reservation towards forms of madness. As Penelope observes of Shephard, it is 'the reservation which separates him from himself'. Shephard himself tells Mark:

Of all the senses that serve our knowledge of those around us, it is the eye I could not encounter in peace. It is as though my body defined all of me... So that the eye of the other became for me a kind of public prosecutor... And there were times when I have felt my presence utterly burnt up by the glance which another had given me... (p.151)

Whereas Shephard's sanity is threatened by his acute vulnerability, Mark has evolved defensive mechanisms. When, for instance, Marcia tells him that she feels ashamed that their friends have seen her neglect, Mark's 'disinclination' becomes even more pronounced:

He brought his foot down from the chair and shoved her hand away... Whenever Marcia mentioned anyone else in order to sharpen her rebuke he would withdraw. He became resentful at the thought that his life was a spectacle which others were observing, and took refuge in his silence. (p.112)

Though there is nothing crudely schematic about the way the contrasts between Shephard and Kennedy emerge in the course of the novel, Lamming uses the contrast to reveal his conception of the relationship between experience, ways of seeing and action. Shephard and Kennedy are two sides of the same coin, two polar extremes of subjective ways of seeing. Shephard acts as if his own vision annihilates the real world; Kennedy's passivity annihilates his being in the face of the material object. However, between the two extremes, there is no mistaking where Lamming sees the possibilities. He implies a very fine dividing line between the refusal to accept reality as fixed and Shephard's denial of a reality separate from his will. The novel repeatedly stresses that rebellion, action, struggle are essential to human-

kind's true nature. The anonymous black policeman, one of Crabbe's favourites, explains to his colleague why he is going to betray him:

Jesus who try to redeem was a coward, an' Lucifer who make us w'at we is was a fool, a courageous and rebellious fool ...nature an' animal life was God's doin', but Lucifer fashion the spirit you call human. (p.297)

Shephard's story in the novel is his effort to confront his neurosis through the situation which has fashioned it. His starting point is a rigorous self-analysis of what the regard of the other has done to him. As he tells Penelope on Bird Island:

I discovered that until then...I had always lived in the shadow of a meaning which others had placed on my presence in the world, and I had played no part at all in the making of that meaning. (p.203)

His response, the opposite of Kennedy's evasion, is to confront that regard by living through the definition which it has imposed on him, the definition of his blackness and colonial status. Although Shephard wants to be a man without exterior definition, he sees the necessity of travelling through that imposed identity:

Similarly, I accept me as the meaning I speak of has fashioned me....But from now on I deny that meaning its authority. When it suits my purpose I shall use it, when it doesn't I shall be hostile. I am at war...What I may succeed in doing is changing that conception of me. But I cannot ignore it. (p.204)

His method is to offer up his vulnerability to an inevitably searching exposure as a man upon whom all eyes are fixed. 'I went into politics in order to redefine myself through action', he says. However, Lamming shows that Shephard's politics are not merely the means of healing a private neurosis. As Shephard says, the meaning imposed on him 'applies equally to millions'. Marcia sees Shephard's attractiveness to the masses as understandable since the colonial authorities 'have created a wholly mad situation', whilst a woman in the crowd responds to the rumour of Shephard's madness with the retort, '...but if 'tis mad, 'tis madness we been waitin for'. (p.77)

Yet ultimately Shephard's extreme subjectivity must be seen as a dangerous corruption. Mark has seen the disorder even in their shared boyhood when he had observed Shephard mimicking his millenarian preach-

er father. Mark has watched Shephard preaching to the empty chairs of his father's chapel and had the disquieting feeling that the boy Shephard did 'not seem to see any real difference between a boy's play and what is real....If he were a man I would say he was mad'. (p.110)

On the night of the elections in which he is assured of victory, the night of his assassination, Shephard's 'sense of power beyond control' destroys his last links with the real world existing outside his fantasy. 'He seemed to see the world concede its worth to his touch', Lamming defines, in one of his overt intrusions. Shephard now feels himself completely invulnerable:

Tonight or any night, the hand that raise to murder me will perish before any action take place. Many, many are called my dear Kennedy, but few, very few are chosen. And every man chosen moves in a charmed life. (p.314)

His delusions of power are grand but terrifying; as he declares:

I shall hold this land in the palm of my hand, and bend it like a wheel to meet my intention...
...You remember it? ...My wooden children waiting my words...
Can you see them now? My wooden children waiting my words...
...you remember how they kneel at my bidding? And how they stand in silence to respect my prayer. Tomorrow it will come to pass again. (p.316)

Lamming appears to portray the corrupting power of millenarian dreams in a way that anticipates V.S. Naipaul's treatment of Black politics in The Mimic Men and Guerrillas.⁹ Again, however, Lamming's treatment is dialectical whereas Naipaul's is not. Naipaul appears to see such dreams as a specific corruption of the personality of the Caribbean Negro and as an absolute bar to the Negro's capacity to change the real oppressions of his world. Lamming, though he sees such religious dreams as a form of false consciousness which distracts from the business of understanding reality, also sees in such longings the genuine motive force of the will to change an oppressive reality. History would seem to be on Lamming's side. Genuine revolutionary movements have often been preceded by millenarian ones.

Lamming's dialectical treatment of Shephard's delusions is brought out strongly in the way they are contrasted with Kennedy's. In their

last meeting before his murder, Shephard pledges his 'eternal alliance' to Mark, 'Comrade of my golden days'. Kennedy is, however, planning suicide and has contemplated betraying Shephard to the authorities. The irony of Shephard's pledge is, though, double-edged, because they are in a real sense an alliance of opposites. Both, as the quotation from Djuna Barnes which prefaces the novel suggests, are equally dangerous in their effects on others. When Marcia attempts suicide after reading the diary Mark has left lying around, the doctor reproaches:

And you didn't think of the damage you might have done by letting her know how she existed in your mind. (p.261)

Mark's relationship to Marcia echoes the colonial relationship, which Lamming sees archetypally expressed in the relationship of Prospero to Caliban in which:

...the real sin is not hatred, which implies an involvement, but the calculated and habitual annihilation of the person whose presence you ignore but never exclude."

Mark's way of seeing is expressed in his inaction, his failure to exercise positive choice. In his diary he recalls a moment which epitomises his disease. He remembers sitting on a beach observing 'a pebble, a piece of iron and a dead crab'. What disturbs him is the absence of any sensuous relationship between himself and the objects. In this absence 'a certain lack of connection had endowed the pebble with a formidable and determined power of its presence'. This oppressed sense of the power of the object makes him incapable of reaching out to touch them. The resulting feeling of 'disinclination' (the word that defines Mark as 'conviction' defines Shephard) paradoxically has the same consequences as Shephard's inverse relationship to things:

This feeling of disinclination surrounds me like space. It enters me like air... I can feel it like a clutch around my throat, an annihilation of things about me, a sudden and natural dislocation of meaning. And it is no force other than me which moves me. It is me. (p.72)

Mark's mode of perception has its logical conclusion in his feeling that the objects around him 'watch him with a silent and unerring contempt'. Feeling that his life has become 'identical with death', Mark

feels that suicide is the only action that can give meaning to his life. His model is the 'human will complete' of the Tribe boys of San Christobal's legend who jumped to their death rather than submit to servitude under the Bandit kings. But Lamming's critique of the intellectual who cannot commit himself to his people is not complete, for Mark feels in the end that:

He had become superfluous to life, unfit to die...he thought that he could not even summon the will which had formerly urged him to redeem the meaning of his life by freely choosing its end... (p. 311)

However, unlike V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men, where K.K. Singh's isolated alienation from the earth and his fellow man is portrayed as an inevitable part of the human condition, ¹² Of Age and Innocence shows Mark's condition to be a specific disease of colonialism and its fracturing effects on human relationships. Human community, the novel shows, is complex and painful to realise, but a necessary and possible human goal.

I have examined this treatment of the relationship between perception and action in Shephard and Kennedy at some length, because it is central to the novel's meaning and structure, and not elsewhere so explicitly expressed. It is in the context of these two key frameworks of 'ways of seeing' and 'the regard of the other' that Lamming portrays the relationship between Indians and Africans.

When Shephard returns to San Christobal his vision of change really only includes the Blacks who 'are like an instinct which some voice, my voice, shall exercise' (p. 58). As Parvecino sourly comments on Shephard's past: '...he had something to do with a Youth Movement. And there weren't any Indians in that' (p. 159). However, after recovering from his attack of madness, Shephard joins Aly Singh's Indian Freedom Movement, and together with the Chinese shopkeeper, Lee, they form the People's Communal Movement. It is perhaps a deficiency that Lamming does not show the process whereby Shephard moves from a Black political base to the united movement, but I think that Lamming wants the reader to see the change as the product of Shephard's realisation that his psychic div-

ision is linked to San Christobal's ethnic division between Indians and Africans. Shephard's speeches on the meaning and necessity of the alliance bring a sense of possibility to the people of San Christobal who feel isolated and marooned within their separate enclaves. Crabbe reluctantly admits the imaginative insight that Shephard brings:

For a moment I thought he was mad to bring up all this business about India and Africa. The racial thing was bad enough already and to make people think in these terms was crazy... ..He wanted each group to get an idea of who they are and that must include where they originally came from. When he had planted that idea in their heads once and for all, what did he do next? He showed them that there was no difference between them, Indian Negro or Chinese or what you like, in their relation to people like me.. whatever difference there was between them, they had one thing in common: a colonial past with all that implies. (p. 167)

Popular consciousness changes rapidly. Thief, a Negro, jibes his old adversary Baboo, an Indian prison warder, that 'we goin' lie down in the same future...' An onlooker comments to Penelope and Marcia:

A time ago the Indians in this crowd won't let Thief plague the warder the way he do without trouble... 'tis strange how the Indians on the sand here rejoice too how Thief talk. When I was a boy, would be like a blasphemy to mix the two in any kind of commotion. (p. 82)

Nevertheless, though the onlooker confirms that Thief 'ain't making no malice there', Baboo's irritated reply and Thief's joking response take on a dramatic irony in view of what follows:

'Go Dead,' the Indian said sharply...
'Lord be with us, said Thief, 'Indian man always meditatin' murder.' (p. 84)

Baboo's ethnically defensive way of seeing is shown to be related to the same deformations of perception which typify Kennedy. Both perceive passively, oppressed by their sense of an unchangeable fixed order of things, from which they seek escape in secretiveness and deliberate self-isolation. Baboo typifies also the way ethnic groups may be driven to tight exclusive loyalties as a means of evading the meaning of the other's way of seeing. Although Lamming does not explore in the novel the historical background to the suspicions between Africans and Indians, he suggests a parallel in the relationship of Mark, Marcia, Bill and Penelope. They are people who have shown that their differences could draw them together. On the plane bringing them to San Christ-

obal, Mark describes them as a 'little world, made by four people whose happiness...no argument can deny'.^(p.30) But their experience of the social fragmentation wrought by colonialism in San Christobal drives them apart. Mark becomes guilty and isolated because he can neither explain to his three white friends his attraction towards Shephard's movement, nor tell anyone his reason for withdrawing from the movement as a consequence of his fearful hallucination at the mass meeting. Marcia is destroyed by her knowledge of how she exists in Mark's mind. Bill enters the society a fastidious liberal and leaves it 'no longer averse to the ways of Crabbe', Penelope learns what it means to exist in another's mind always qualified by the label 'in spite of'. When she is drawn to Marcia's distress, she feels sexual desire for the other woman. She knows that were she to confess her desire, she would become stigmatised in the same way that Shephard feels his blackness stigmatises him in the eye of the other. She learns that for the Black or the homosexual, 'it is not their difference which is disturbing. It is the way their difference is regarded which makes for their isolation'.^(p.151) The secrets that each of the four retreat into become a cancer in their relationship. An acute series of misunderstandings occurs, until they lapse into 'solitary and different worlds of understanding'.^(p.183)

A parallel process occurs in the relationship of Africans and Indians after Shephard's death, the arrests of Singh and Lee and the crushing of the People's Communal Movement after metropolitan troops arrive to reimpose order. Each group retreats into isolation to nurse its sense of defeat. Time, which could once have become 'new', first becomes suspect ('the public clocks looked silly and false') and finally confused, reflecting the movement's disintegration. ('All the clocks were contradicting each other'.)¹³ Indians and Negroes return to the stifling security of self-imposed stereotype. The Blacks revert to the nihilistic sullenness of the slave:

... sat heavy, large, indolent, unwilling and destructive. They rebuked all possessions by a show of indifference. They killed time with their hands. Their labour was irrelevant

and misplaced.

The Indians recoil to the image of the indentured immigrant, clannish, temporary and rootless, saving every last cent waiting for the passage home:

The Indians worked furiously with small push carts, hurrying up and down along the pier. They were cruel with labour to their bodies, and their faces were strained with secrecy and spite and expectation. They were going to rob the future of what was left. (p. 385)

However, Lamming's novel does not allow a realistic portrayal of a defeat to support a philosophy of despair. There are ways out from these apparent dead ends. In the political and personal alliance of Shephard, Singh and Lee, and in the secret society of the boys, Lamming shows that possibilities exist. The pathway is learning an open vulnerability to the other's way of seeing. Here Lamming and Harris echo each other. Harris, though, suggests that the breaking down of existing ethnic identities is necessary if that open vulnerability is to occur; Lamming indicates that existing identities can enter into the open relationship and enrich it. In particular, he suggests a number of complementarities in the values of Africans and Indians which make their involvement a mutually 'desirable extension of reality'. For instance, Lamming suggests the supposed Indian attitude to land as a corrective to a Black aversion to it. Ma Shephard explains to the boys why the slaves burned down the cane:

The men who make that fire fret how their labour went robbed in a lan' which refuse to make them brother an' ister, or feed them with a right reward for the sweat they drip night and day. The lan' come to look like a tyrant in their eye, an' they decide to burn whatever memory hol' them to the plough. (p. 69)

Her belief that 'lan' is not reliable relates to her memories of fire and flood, a 'Black' antipathy and her Christian other-worldliness. By contrast, Singh's son tells his friends:

My father say education is losin' all the time, ... An' he tell me is safer to stay with the lan'. He is for education too, but he say you must never swap the lan' for education. Hurricane or whatever hell have can come, but hol' to the lan', hol' to the lan' ... (p. 119)

His father's commitment to the land is the basis of his psychological

independence from the white world. This too is portrayed as a necessary corrective to Shephard's involvement with that world through the process of colonial education. As Lamming argues elsewhere, the educated colonial is made absolutely dependent 'on the values implicit in the language of the colonizer'.¹⁴ Whereas Shephard's mind is one where 'the two worlds ... met in the same chaos',^(p.54) Singh has a wholeness and clear-sightedness unavailable to Shephard. Thus although Singh is vividly aware of what the white world thinks of him, his independence from its values enable him to treat its demeaning regard as an insult to be resented and punished, but not allowed to become a threat to his self-esteem. Singh recalls, for instance, how as a boy he had overheard the estate manager telling the visiting expatriate landlord that Indians did not mind living in squalor. His accumulated resentment is shown in his confrontation with Crabbe on the beach, when Singh believes him to responsible for Shephard's murder:

Not a year nor a day...but a lifetime I been waiting for this...how I feel you will never know. Never. 'Tis the first time I ever look you clean and straight in the eye. (p.373)

Fanon's comment on the role of violence is apt:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.¹⁵

Singh's demeanor when he confronts Crabbe is a vindication of the manhood that Crabbe's authority would attempt to deny. Singh is 'decisive and grim, suddenly equipped with a terror which made every suggestion an order...'. (p.374)

There are also, for the reader of The Pleasures of Exile, rather obvious parallels between the relationship of Shephard and Singh and that between L'Ouverture and Dessalines which Lamming draws attention to in his summary of James's The Black Jacobins. Lamming follows James in seeing Toussaint, the educated man, as having become at a crucial stage in the revolt confused and hesitant about his objectives because his loyalty to the ideal of French civilisation conflicted with the revolutionary demands of the mass of the black slaves. Dessalines,

the ex-field slave, narrower in outlook and uninvolved with the white world, had always known precisely what has to be done. (Harris, characteristically, sees in Toussaint's wavering a 'groping towards an alternative to conventional statehood, a conception of wider possibilities'¹⁶.) Singh's revolutionary clarity is shown when the leaders of the People's Communal Movement are deciding whether to accept an invitation from the Governor to discuss ways of ending the strikes which are paralysing the island. Shephard wants to go. He knows that 'of course they cannot mean well, but we can learn from their own deceit. That is it. We cannot afford to dismiss their tricks...'. Shephard clearly rationalises, and it is significant that V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men includes a parallel scene in which the 'revolutionary' leader, Browne, returns from a meeting with the Governor 'socially graced'. Singh, by contrast, wants to have nothing to do with their adversaries:

I am completely above board with them... Everything is clear to me. They want to appear as though they are helping. They are not against us. When we win, you will hear that... I have nothing to do with that game. The time for separating has come. (p. 245)

Singh's wholeness of personality is suggested in a number of ways: his knowledge is described as 'physical, integral as a root to the branch and body of the tree... There was no difference between the thing he knew and the man he was. He was his knowledge'^(p. 244). This certitude, the 'concentration, purpose and will' that Shephard in particular sees in Singh, is a source of strength for Shephard who feels that 'he would not hesitate to go with them, for he [Singh] was like the road itself which said there was only one way'. (p. 250)

But the relationship is very much a reciprocal one. As Singh tells Crabbe why he will have no qualms about killing him (believing him to have ordered Shephard's murder) :

There never was a man who make me feel more deep than Shephard... He expose himself to me in a way I never learn to do to any friends however near. An' through him I learn for the first time what it could mean to feel loyal, not only to the cause but loyal to the person too. I come as near to lovin' Shephard as any man come to lovin' a next, and it was his murder twist my heart like it was my own son dying in front of my face. (p. 379)

Lamming never suggests that deliberate, vulnerable exposure is easy or painless. When Shephard, Singh and Lee are discussing their differences and private misgivings, the labour of breaking silence is very powerfully conveyed in the rhythms of Lamming's prose. Such moments also expose the fact that they speak in a borrowed tongue, one whose syllables at crucial moments split from the meanings of the speaker:

It had happened again: the frenzied argument, then the sudden pause like a frozen breath separating the sound of a voice from the echo you expected. A gradual tremor, like light and air fighting to occupy the corners of the ceiling, agitated their hearing until the room itself became an omen which made them nervous, impatient and suspicious. Then each would know it was his duty to break the spell of what had not yet been said. Each knew it was the moment to explode the motive which nursed this pause; and each, uncertain and yet determined, tried; so that the pause flared into a clatter of voices which left something unsaid. Then the tremor would begin, a moment after the voices had retreated into a tired procession of syllables, noiseless as petals fallen into silence. It was the second time in the last hour that this silence had come upon them; and now they looked like animals, trapped by their own fury, ignorant, speechless and outraged. (p.241)

The pain and hesitancy also come from their awareness that despite their personal closeness there are still deep differences between their respective ethnic followings and that their relationship is seen as a cynical alliance by their enemies. As Singh says of their followers:

no change o' simple circumstance can alter what each understand an' accept. It is that recollection harden me today, harden me an' at the same time, for certain reasons scare my purpose and my faith.

Singh fears that if they cannot achieve absolute openness and trust, then Parvecino's allegation that 'this union is false' and that 'the surface friendship is going to spell misery for one group or the other' ^(p.242) will become the truth.

These pressures erupt when there is a knock at the door of their private room. Singh thinks it is Baboo who has arrived at his invitation and feels guilty over this breach of trust. When the caller turns out to be Bill Butterfield asking to see Shephard, Singh's guilt changes to relieved accusation. His agitation springs from his failure to tell Shephard that he knows that the latter has been seeing the white woman, Penelope Butterfield. Her husband's arrival confirms his suspicions.

Shephard for his part, though he is innocent of any subterfuge, becomes defensively violent and is deliberately rude to Butterfield, 'summoning prejudice like a dagger to save what existed between himself and Singh'. For a moment Shephard fears that 'already we have lost...everything was threatened and the real thing between us finished' (p.253). But it is not, for the real strength of their feeling reasserts itself, 'their bond, articulate and unequivocal'. Singh confesses that he has been thinking the best but fearing the worst, and this recovery of openness makes them know 'for the first time what really existed between them'. Lamming also shows how such a close-knit group can become as isolated and suspicious of contact with others as Kennedy or an ethnic group at its most inward. Lee thinks regretfully that 'there was no other place to turn, no-one else they might consult', and their response to Butterfield is a symptom of the tensions of their isolation. Later, when Shephard learns that Butterfield had come to warn him of Crabbe's murderous plans, he is mortified by guilt. As he tells the boys, 'Do not suspect too much. Suspicion is the end. It will rot everywhere, everything we do'. (p.287)

'Suspicion', in the novel, is frequently the symptom of an 'innocent' way of seeing. Lamming shows it to be less a product of deviousness than of an unthinking, perceptually passive, response to the 'obvious'. Lamming's paradoxical treatment of the nature of innocence is particularly revealed in his portrayal of Baboo. When Baboo brings his murder of Shephard as an offering to Singh and is shocked by Singh's horrified rejection, Lamming describes Baboo's voice as being 'almost innocent in its cry of sad and despairing solicitude'. The 'innocence' of Baboo's act lies partly in its inception as the day-dreaming fantasy of a child:

...was only for you, Singh, was only for you I do it...from infancy I dream to see someone like myself, some Indian with your achievement rule San Christobal. My only mistake was to wish it for you Singh, was only for you I do what I do... (p.304)

Partly his innocence lies also in the way that his way of seeing is naive and unreflective like that of a very young child, and passively

dependent on a fixed outer reality. This passivity, like Kennedy's, makes Baboo a victim of the obvious:

There was no trace of guile in his eyes. Cold and melancholy they seemed to restrict attention to the dark enclosure of their sockets. Passion was now forbidden. His glances seemed effortless, incurious and without intention, as though some instinct of dumb and bored credulity had defined their function. His eyes revealed no possibility of doubt; no tendency for surprise or expectation was entertained. His eyes were casual, unhurried, almost reluctant, as though they had refused to trespass beyond those objects that interrupted the ordinary line of vision. He did not look. His attention had to be seduced. It surrendered to the thing which it could not avoid, lingered for a moment, and then withdrew, innocent, without calculation, impartial. ... He did not look. But he saw. Baboo saw everything. That look of innocent renunciation was the mask which neutralised his motive. His treachery was faceless, transparent, freed from any form of visible intrigue or cunning. (p. 390 - 391)

Lamming has traced the destructiveness of seeing but not looking in the personal life of Kennedy. In the case of Baboo, he does not need to spell out all the implications of the dangerous nihilism of his way of seeing in a society where the most obvious 'fact' has been the difference of the ethnic other.

It is in this context that Lamming explores the similarly paradoxical concept of loyalty. Baboo, for instance, is only half-ironically described in his posture of dismay when Singh rejects his deed as 'a saint whose martyrdom served no purpose. His loyalty had betrayed him'.^(p. 394) The last phrase emphasises the paradox that the motives for racial chauvinism are not to be found in malice and hatred, but in loyalty which is part of an innocence of seeing. However, Lamming does not explore the notion of loyalty only as a psychological process. In a society divided by class interests, loyalty becomes politically ambivalent. For instance, when Crabbe's favourite black policeman explains to his colleague why he is going to betray his superior, he subverts the conventional meaning of the metaphor he uses:

Last night I went through my last supper with Crabbe... My sympathy was always for poor Judas who r'ally believe he was a crook. (p. 297)

After these two have delivered Crabbe to his death, the colleague feels guilty both about his desertion of 'The Law' and the deceit they have

practised on Crabbe 'who hold you loyal'; but the other is clear about his choices in a colonised society:

We had to serve two masters, an' I decide which I would suffer....An I was loyal in my fashion - I can do it again, till Crabbe learn not to take this face for granted like some rock you don't care to read. My face hold a meanin' too. (p. 329)

The innocence of Baboo's way of seeing links the questions of loyalty, perception and action to the ironies of the novel's title. For it is the paradox of the novel's title that whilst Age stands for action, experience and the acceptance of responsibility, Innocence is passive and profoundly conservative. The conventional connotations are subverted. As Lamming wrote in The Pleasures of Exile, 'To be innocent is to be eternally dead'¹⁷, and as the young black boy, Bob, thinks, 'Age is nothing if there ain't no doing'^(p. 116). In failing to see the ironies in Lamming's use of 'Age' and 'Innocence' in the novel, certain critics seem to me to have misread the role of the four boys, Bob, Singh, Lee and Rowley. Their importance in the novel is commonly seen as Lamming's attempt to portray the germ of a true human community which not only unites the divided ranks of the colonised, but also includes the children of the former ruling whites who have climbed down from their ladder of privilege.¹⁸ This may be so, but it has also been assumed that the 'secret society' of the four boys is the Innocence of the novel's title. Mervyn Morris, for instance, quotes from The Pleasures of Exile of 'the distance which separates Age which apprehends, from Innocence which can only see', but shows that he has failed to understand what Lamming means when he comments: 'Yet in this novel, Innocence seems in the end to see more accurately than Age'.¹⁹ This failure to come to grips with what Lamming has to say about ways of seeing in the novel is related to the inability to see not only in what respects the boys are different from their elders, but in what respects they are the same. Not to have seen how the same problems of relationship affect the boys is not to apprehend the true depth of their tragedy. The misreading begins by not seeing how much the boys have changed in the course of the novel.

We are introduced to them, it is true, with a slightly sentimental picture of their lack of racial bias. As they listen to the altercation on the sea-shore between Thief and Baboo, Bob's and Singh's race is stressed but, we are told, 'they showed no awareness of this difference as they listened', ^(p. 10) In addition, Lamming uses quite 'deliberate cultural stereotypes to stress their difference. Singh has 'an assured persistence', an ability to keep going and an aloof indifference to pain; Lee seems as if he were trained for waiting; whilst the negro Bob, is 'frank, easy and talkative', restless and wanting change. Each has been to a certain extent shaped by his father's preferences: Singh's to the land and Bob's to the professions via education. The same kind of contrast which Lamming portrays in Shephard and the elder Singh, is suggested by Penelope's perception of Bob's face as 'irregular, problematic, unfinished', and Singh's as 'tidy, precise'. (p. 187)

There is a genuine acceptance of difference among the boys, and Lamming indicates the way they have developed a common perception of the island's past in their 'easy co-ordination' in telling the legend of the Tribe Boys and the Bandit Kings. However, their smug feeling that they had surpassed their elders' who were 'whining and shouting about San Christobal and the future as though it had always been an impossible journey'; their easy confidence that they were transforming 'the myth of the political meetings into some reality which no one could question', and their self-congratulation in feeling that 'the others would have to catch up on what they had already accomplished', ^(p. 112) ought to warn us that there is an irony at work. It ought to remind the reader of the moment recorded in Kennedy's diary of the 'little world...which no force can annihilate - four people whose happiness ^(p. 35) in this moment no argument can deny'. Lamming makes this sense of smug, innocent overconfidence in the boys very clear when he describes them as seeing themselves as 'a flattering example of the wish which Shephard and his colleagues had made', ^(p. 118) The boys' growth towards experience begins when they accept Rowley Crabbe as one of the Little Society.

They have been drawn to Rowley, after an initial reluctance, by his 'open and vulnerable display of longing' when he begs Ma Shephard, 'Can I call you Ma, too?' Bob contrasts the way in which their elders are held imprisoned by the past ('Tis 'cause they live so long before, ... that the future look so hard to reach...') with the way that Rowley, like them, 'take the future in his own han' ^(p.120). He contrasts the way of innocence which accepts, with the way of Age which takes responsibility for its own actions. The tragic experience of the Little Society of the boys is twofold: they must learn the painful nature of responsibility for action and its consequences and they must suffer as historically aware persons, knowing that they had sought to create a genuine vision of community at a moment when as the elder Singh says, 'The time for separating has come'. ^(p.246)

The seeds of disquiet are sown in the complacent soil of the boys' minds as they become more aware of their elders' warfare. They play a game of hide-and seek in the woods which involves disclosing what they have been thinking about when they have been found. Separated from each other the boys' sense of oneness is subverted by their private knowledge. Singh knows his father's bursting ambition to murder Rowley's father, Crabbe. This secret, like the secrets which poison the relationships of his elders, gives the young Singh a 'feeling like shame... a charge which, even in his innocence, he wanted to avoid' ^(p.134). When Bob catches sight of his sister masturbating in the wood, he exposes in himself an hitherto unconscious racial shame when he considers that the person to whom he could least confess what he has seen is Singh. Rowley is forced to recognise his own situation as part of a privileged racial elite. He imagines inviting Bob, Singh and Lee to his house, but 'they did not fit... the chairs would not admit their presence'. ^(p.136) Rowley has to puzzle over why his father's affection for him should be at the root of his need to 'live at a distance from Singh's father and Lee's father'. Isolated in the wood, the absence of the other boys 'made

him less certain about the society'. Later, on Bird Island, where the boys have taken Penelope on one of their 'works', and where they encounter Shephard, Rowley is divided from the other boys by his awareness that the accident with the boat will be known to his father because he is having Shephard watched. The others 'felt he knew something which they could not guess, and he was afraid'. (p.114)

Their response to these threats to their easy sense of solidarity is to turn inwards, to form, as Shephard, Singh and Lee had done, an exclusive circle which isolates them and threatens to destroy the very openness which brought them together. They begin to see themselves as a secret society taking on the rest of San Christobal when, for instance, they use the young Lee's influence to get oil for Crabbe during the power strike. In their last 'work' there is none of the creativity which informed their telling of the Tribe Boys legend to Marcia and Penelope. They too have succumbed to the temptation of power, present in Rowley's feeling that it 'was the secret society outwitting San Christobal, and their power surpassing that of his father'. (p.272)

It is the fire at the mental hospital²⁰ which finally marks their passage from innocence to experience. Rowley's death in the fire, the result of a long chain of coincidence which involves both the boys who had brought fuel oil to the hospital, and the leaders of the People's Communal Movement who have called out the guards in a token demonstration, makes them aware that responsibility is a complex matter, that though action is a human duty, the results of actions are never entirely predictable or controllable. It is one of the consequences of leaving behind innocence ('which is to be eternally dead') that Age (awareness and action) must carry the responsibilities for failure as well as achievement. The boys learn what it is to be part of a divided society, for their frustration at not being able to 'explain to anyone that they were concerned only with the game of the Secret society which proved their unity and their affection' is the experience

of ethnic groups who find themselves involved in conflict, provoked not by hatred but insecurity.

The historical tragedy for the boys lies both in their powerlessness to make anyone understand what the little society has meant and their powerlessness to save Singh's father from being unjustly hanged for the mental hospital fire. When the court refuses to hear the evidence that could have saved him, and even Ma Shephard turns against them, the boys feel that they 'had no power to persuade anyone who did not understand and could not believe what they had done'^(p.410). It is a feeling which recalls Thief's rejoinder to Rockey that innocence has no language 'unless the next man lend you his belief'. They have been initiated into a society where the regard of the other is part of the meaning of daily life. Because they have come to a profound consciousness of the basis of Shephard's revolt, their despair is profound. It is for this reason that they decide to imitate that assertion of the 'human will complete' by imitating the Tribe Boys of legend and jumping to their deaths if Singh's father is hanged. Their tragedy is the prematurity of their bid to realise the essential unity in difference of the human race. This is an expression of Lamming's historical realism. The personal friendship of Singh's and Crabbe's sons does not change the oppressive structure of a colonised society. As Thief has argued to Rockey, '...it goin' to take a terrible crime to make them meet [oppressor and oppressed] in a common place'^(p.314). Yet, as I have argued, Of Age and Innocence does not indulge in a philosophy of despair. The boys have passed beyond the innocence which sees but does not apprehend. They have seen that mysterious abstraction 'Law' for what it is, the 'mind-forg'd manacles' of the ruling class. Their passage from innocence is their passage from the bondage of obedience. At the very end of the novel they resist the curfew and we are told that 'The Law could not now enter their feeling'^(p.413). There remains also Rockey, defeated for the moment, 'but he would find a way to survive it'. It is Rockey

who expresses what I believe is Lamming's recognition of endless potentiality of people and his profound conviction that, though particular struggles may fail, it is in the process of struggle that people begin to tap those unguessed at potentialities:

Everyman hides many sources...an' there's no 'tillin' till the lids be taken off. (p.358)

Thirty years is a lot o' years for a man to struggle with life...But when my struggle was real an' help to make more life, I could struggle again an' again till the almighty call me home. A man must struggle, Thief, 'cause that is what man was fashioned for, but his struggle got to keep a clear meanin' in his head an' heart, or else. (p.313)

Chapter Twenty : Conclusion.

In Chapter One I argued that no a priori claims can be made for the capacity of the novel to represent human experience truthfully or adequately in comparison to other forms of discourse. Ultimately, that judgement can only be made in each individual case. However, there are, I feel, a number of generalisations which can be made on the basis of the fiction discussed in this study.

Firstly, the novel has the capacity to integrate different frameworks for describing and analysing human behaviour, which in other disciplines tend to remain separate. Whereas psychology, sociology and history all tend to deal with human experience at quite separate levels, the novel is capable of restoring in some measure the actual unity of the individual and society in history.

Secondly, as a narrative form, the novel brings to the description of people and society a linear dimension which is distortingly absent from psychology and sociology in particular.

Thirdly, in bringing together description and dialogue, including inner thought, the novel makes itself supremely capable of showing the interactions between individual experiences and the environments in which they occur. In particular, the novel has the capacity to bring together into a common focus the poles of society as individually experienced and society as an objective structure of relationships existing outside the individual. In his self-reflexive text, A Seventh Man (1975), John Berger discusses the difficulties of adequately representing the situation of the migrant worker. He argues that the migrant worker's experience can only be understood in the context of the world economic system, which can only be adequately described in terms of economic theory:

Yet necessarily the language of economic theory is abstract. And so, if the forces which determine the migrant's life are to be grasped and realised as part of his personal destiny, a less abstract formulation is needed. Metaphor is needed. Metaphor is temporary. It does not replace theory.

Berger deliberately makes A Seventh Man a heterogeneous pastiche of personal accounts, photographs, poems, symbolic images and the exposition of theory. In some respects he perhaps overlooks the fact that the novel has that kind of rich heterogeneity, that, as I have attempted to show, it can carry within it properly articulated concepts of the person, society and history and restore these concepts back into experience for the reader. In sum, the novel has the capacity, in the hands of its most reflective practitioners, to combine process and structure, concrete and abstract and bring objective realities and subjective perceptions of those realities into a mutually revealing interaction.

One of the rewards of reading the very wide range of Caribbean literature discussed in this study has been that it has reminded me that the absence of involvement of intellectually and artistically serious artists with the concerns of the 'everyday', with social, moral and political issues, is not a triumphant development in the purification of fiction from 'mere' sociological concerns, but a deformation of the potentiality of fiction to show people who they are and help them understand the nature of the world they live in. In some contemporary British fiction, verbal artifice and triviality of content seem sometimes to go hand in hand, whereas the novel which self-consciously deals with the issues of 'common' human life labels itself as the 'problem' novel and heads for the juvenile fiction lists. By contrast, for all the technical inadequacies, sometimes of a very basic kind of some of the fiction I have discussed, the vast majority of it displays an urgent and humane concern with exploring fundamental issues in a serious and accessible way.

The tragic irony of Caribbean writing is that the same colonial and neocolonial processes which have stimulated the commitment of novelists to use fiction to 'return a society to itself', are the processes which deny the mass of the people the skills and the economic means to become readers of that fiction. As I write this in early 1985, a recently purchased copy of Shiva Naipaul's Beyond The Dragon's Mouth sitting on my desk, I am reminded that its price, £12.50, exceeds the weekly wage of Government manual employees in Guyana. I recall being confronted on a recent visit to Guyana by an old Indian canecutter who talked to me easily for a time about his skills and experience, and then broke down and wept. Like virtually every poor Guyanese he wanted to leave his troubled country, but he was too old and his agricultural skills were not wanted in America.

It might be thought that such experiences constitute an irony subversive of the discussion of all literary matters, and so at one level they do. However, it is in the creativity of the region's imaginative literature that the potentials for change are most clearly revealed; for this reason one hopes that the exploration of this creativity is not without some value.