

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE
MILANO

**DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E
LETTERARIE
CICLO XXXII
S.S.D: L-LIN/10 LETTERATURA INGLESE**

**The Caribbean Bildungsroman in English: a
response to colonial education**

COORDINATORE: CH.MO PROF. DANTE LIANO

TESI DI DOTTORATO DI: MARTINA PEREGO

MATRICOLA: 4612233

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Dante Liano

TUTOR: CH.MO PROF. ARTURO CATTANEO

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INTRODUCTION

The present study aims to explore the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition by considering the Bildungsroman genre, its features, and history, and by pointing out the peculiarities that the genre developed within the postcolonial tradition and specifically in the anglophone Caribbean context. The first chapter establishes what is meant by “Caribbean Bildungsroman” and introduces the twelve novels selected for this study. The study then proceeds by identifying four main topics, or macro themes, each developed in a separate chapter, and by comparing the way such themes are dealt with in each of the novels.

Chapter two focuses on school, possibly the most immediately recognizable *topos* in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition. After recognizing the way the school experience, its rites and spaces, are connotated in the novels selected, the study turns to the history of education in the Caribbean and the heritage of colonialism, by focusing both on school attendance and exclusion and on the European, specifically British, perspective in teaching and learning. Despite the historical excursus, the main focus remains on the texts.

Chapter three expands on the topic of European influence by delving into the way the novels selected depict the experience of cultural alienation, as defined by Frantz Fanon. It also points to the articulate and polyphonic definitions of history in the anglophone Caribbean: specifically, by focusing on the way the novels seem to stress a duality between, on the one hand, colonial history and its physical ruins, on the other, “invisible” or oral histories, and their connection with Afro-Caribbean culture and folklore.

Chapter four deals with politics. After briefly sketching the history of decolonization in the Caribbean region, the chapter compares the novels selected based on their setting and their year of publication, looking for clues as to the link between politics and the self, especially in the way they deal with the topic of Independence. The second part of the chapter is structured in the form of a glossary, as it aims to deal with political key words that have been recognized as recurring or thematically central in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

The fifth and final chapter identifies departure as a common trope in the Caribbean Bildungsroman and aims to explore this centrality from both a historical and a literary perspective. By classifying the different departures as either real, imagined, or metaphorical

the study delves into the reasons for leaving and the way they affect different characters in different ways. The study closes on a brief reflection on the possibility of return.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE BILDUNGSROMAN, ITS HISTORY, AND THE CARIBBEAN TRADITION

Bildungsroman: definitions of a genre

The Bildungsroman, as a literary genre, is much easier to recognize than to define. Its origins are usually traced back to the late eighteenth century and made to coincide with the publication of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in 1795 – which explains the habitual use of the German term in the English language. According to Thomas Jeffers (2005: 49), the term was first coined in the 1820s by Karl Morgenstern, who used it with regard to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, but only became popular when Wilhelm Dilthey adopted it in his *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* in 1913. However, while it is relatively easy to identify a novel as a Bildungsroman, it is much more complex to agree on a comprehensive definition of the term.

According to the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, what differentiates the Bildungsroman from other types of novels is its structure:

The vast majority of novels (and subcategories of novels) know only the image of the *ready-made* hero. [...] In the majority of subcategories of the novel, the plot, composition, and entire internal structure of the novel postulate this unchanging nature, this solidity of the hero's image, this static nature of his unity. The hero is a *constant* in the novel's formula and all other quantities – the spatial environment, social position, fortune, in brief, all aspects of the hero's life and destiny – can therefore be *variables*. (1987: 20-21)

Bakhtin explains the peculiarity of the Bildungsroman by pointing out the way the genre subverts the traditional paradigm of the unchanging hero in an ever-changing world by making them susceptible to what he calls “the process of becoming”. (1987: 19) Essentially, the passing of time.

As opposed to a static unity here [in the Bildungsroman] one finds a dynamic unity in the hero's image. The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the

formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire *plot* significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. (1987: 21)

Bakhtin's starting point is the realization that the definition of Bildungsroman (or *Erziehungsroman*, "novel of education") is too encompassing, as "it contains phenomena that are too diverse, from the theoretical and even from the biographical standpoint". (1987: 20) Among others, he provides the examples of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Rousseau's *Émile*, and Dickens' *David Copperfield* – which can all be broadly considered as relating to "the image of man in the process of becoming". (1987: 19) This is the reason why Bakhtin prefers the definition of "novel of emergence" (1987: 21), which refers, as we have seen, to the emergence of the hero into the dimension of time, and, therefore, of change. Bakhtin's definition allows him to identify the different ways in which the hero "emerges" in the novels he considers, which can be condensed into five subcategories: the novel of emergence which occurs in idyllic or cyclical time; the novel in which the world is interpreted in terms of experience, or school – with fixed stages of progression; the biographical or autobiographical novel – with individual stages of progression; the didactic-pedagogical novel; and the novel in which the hero's emergence is connected to the emergence of the world they live in. (1987: 21-24)

Bakhtin's five types of novel of emergence are a means of bringing order into a genre, the Bildungsroman, which appears to elude the possibility of a comprehensive definition. Franco Moretti, in his monography dedicated to the Bildungsroman called *Il romanzo di formazione* (1999), originally published in English with the title *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), also suggests a new paradigm to better understand the different types of Bildungsroman which one can identify in European literature. Moretti distinguishes between the Bildungsroman genre as a whole – which, he says, would be better defined by the expression "novel of formation" (1999: 3, footnote 1) – and the "classical Bildungsroman", as constructed by Goethe and Austen. Furthermore, he applies Yuri Lotman's definition of the classification and transformation principles to the Bildungsroman genre, and thus identifies two types of "novels of formation". (1999: 8-9)

In the first type, the classification principle prevails over the transformation principle (both are necessary to the narrative, according to Moretti, and they are inversely proportional

to one another – so it is a matter of identifying which one is more prominent). When the classification principle prevails, as it does, Moretti writes, in the classical Bildungsroman and in the English family novel, the purpose of the novel is teleological: it strives to assign meaning to the narrative. Only one conclusion can be reached, and it is necessarily the right one. This first type of Bildungsroman identifies the hero's happiness as the ultimate goal of their journey. On the other hand, when the transformation principle prevails, as in the French tradition of the Bildungsroman, the focus is on the hero's journey and not so much on its conclusion. The end of this second type of novels, therefore, tends to be more open. The ultimate goal here, according to Moretti, is the hero's freedom, which often does not coincide with their happiness.

As it is clear from the examples provided, both Moretti's and Bakhtin's "types" of novels constitute possible answers to the issues posed by the incredible diversity represented by the genre of the Bildungsroman. As this study is not focused on the classifications and subcategories of the genre, the "types" presented here shall not be applied strictly, but they can be useful in identifying recurring themes and structures, and in painting the picture of a genre whose main characteristic seems to be its adaptability. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Brigid Lowe in her essay about the English Bildungsroman writes that "the fact that most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English novels are deeply concerned with self-development suggests that the term Bildungsroman should be considered as describing a central tendency of the English novel *sui generis*". (2012: 405) The less normative connotations of the term "tendency" can certainly help to relativize the issue of categorization, as, while it might be hard to find an inclusive definition, it is much easier to recognize a novel as belonging to or being comparable with the monumental tradition of the Bildungsroman.

For the purpose of this study, Bakhtin's observation that the Bildungsroman is characterized by its focus on "the image of man in the process of becoming" shall be accepted. For further clarity, it seems appropriate to reference Jeffers' extended definition, which is based on the aforementioned essay by Bakhtin:

Hence the breakthrough represented by the *Bildungsroman*, which was created in the second half of the eighteenth century. Its crucial theme is precisely change – physical, psychological, moral. The hero is no longer "ready-made" and, through all his shifts in fortune or social position, stable. He is what Bakhtin calls the "image of man in the process of becoming." (Jeffers 2005: 2)

Not only does Jeffers clarify that change can refer to one or more spheres of human life (“physical, psychological, moral”), he also posits that the Bildungsroman tradition originated in the late eighteenth century – as opposed to the “novel of emergence”, as defined by Bakhtin, which includes works as ancient as the *Cyropaedia* (IV century B.C.).

Another consideration that proves central in the interpretation that this study intends to adopt of the Bildungsroman tradition is expressed by Jeffers in these terms:

The development of the *Bildungsroman* coincided with that of a particular educational idea, articulated in France by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* and in Germany by Friedrich Schiller’s *Aesthetic Education*. Rousseau helped Europe realize that children were not miniature adults but creatures with their own peculiar needs and capacities, which parents and teachers had to honor. (2005: 2)

The Romantics’ discovery of childhood was indeed central in the development of the Bildungsroman as the “novel of growing-up”, in which the point of view of the child (or adolescent) protagonist has its peculiarities and, as such, is recognizably different from that of an adult. It is therefore not accidental that the Bildungsroman should originate in Germany, which was also the cradle of the Romantic movement.

This is not to say that the depiction of what Meenakshi Bharat calls “the ‘adult’ child” in Victorian fiction is necessarily realistic (2003: 4), but it does show an underlying understanding that the child’s perceptions and thoughts ought to be described in a specific way – which is a discovery of Romanticism. With regard to the English canon, Lowe (2012: 408) writes that Wordsworth’s “idea that ‘The Child is the father of the Man’ is a guiding principle of *Bildungsromane* [sic] as various as *Jane Eyre* (1847) [...] *David Copperfield* (1850) [...] and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)”. She also points out how, in describing his protagonist’s perception of the world, “Dickens claims for the *Bildungsroman* the sensuous imagistic function heretofore the territory of Romantic poetry”. (2012:408) Moretti, too, writes that youth is the “defining characteristic” of the Bildungsroman hero, while previously it had been accidental and subordinate to other, more important features. (1999: 4) While arguably implied in Bakhtin’s “man in the process of becoming” definition, the young age of the protagonists in the Bildungsroman tradition is

important enough that it should be made explicit. As there was virtually no conception of childhood being inherently different from adulthood before the Romantic period, the present study shall not consider novels or other prose works composed before this period when discussing the Bildungsroman.

While conscious of the many problems inherent in finding a workable and inclusive definition of Bildungsroman, for the reasons here presented this study shall use the term only to refer to novels composed around or after the Romantic period, which have child or adolescent protagonists that are not simply “miniature adults”. It also recognizes, with Jeffers and Bakhtin, that the main topic of the Bildungsroman is change or “the process of becoming” and that, therefore, because of its nature, the Bildungsroman deals with the struggles typical of the process of growing up. However, whether or not the protagonist reaches their goals and/or a certain level of maturity by the end of the novel is not considered to be a discerning factor.

The Caribbean Bildungsroman in English

Interestingly enough, an explicit connection between the Romantic conception of the child as “the Father of the Man” – therefore different in its thoughts and perceptions, more innocent and yet somehow wiser than the adult – and the use of the child’s point of view in postcolonial novels is recognized by Bharat in her monography *The Ultimate Colony* (2003). In it Bharat deals with the theme of childhood in different postcolonial traditions, including that of the anglophone Caribbean – which is the object of this study. She writes:

It is specifically fascinating to see how far the Romantic concentration on the child as a metaphor for a lost paradisaal state of innocence is valid in postcolonial fiction. The fiction writer, who deploys childhood, is enlisting the agency of the child in making an untainted, unbiased enquiry into the contemporary situation. His natural sensitivity to the experience of life, augmented by his non-judgmental comment, becomes the most effective critique because his innocence offsets the murkiness around. (2003: 12)

Bharat goes on to explain how the post-colonial child's innocence is counterbalanced by "a knowledge that does not seem 'child-like'". (2003: 13) The child, in fact, becomes a powerful instrument through which postcolonial writers, according to the traditional paradigm identified in the seminal work by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), can "write back" their own truth to the centre of the Empire and denounce the mystifications of colonial propaganda. This can be achieved both through the child's innocence, which "offsets the murkiness" of colonial rule, and through a wisdom that appears to be beyond their years.

The significance of the child's perspective in postcolonial fiction and its link to the Bildungsroman tradition and the Romantic movement from which it originated is particularly noticeable in Caribbean writing. "If the Caribbean novel is to be associated with the establishment of any regional tradition, – Bharat writes – it may well be the distinctive creation of the childhood novel". (2003: 66) The fortune of the Bildungsroman in the anglophone Caribbean, if it partly reflects the popularity of the genre in England and the British Isles in general, is mostly linked with the peculiar and complex history of the Caribbean. A place whose history tends to be seen in terms of loss and displacement – the extermination of the natives, the horrors of slavery and the Middle Passage, indentured servitude, all recognizable effects of European colonialism – the Caribbean do appear to be especially interested in the theme of becoming oneself, which is the main topic of the Bildungsroman – the issue being *which self*, which tradition, which history, among the many that Caribbean culture is comprised of, one should recognize and embrace as their own. "As a result of this complex heritage, – M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga (2001: 5) write in the introduction to *The Caribbean Novel in English* – the crucial project of constructing viable postcolonial cultural identities is particularly complex in the Caribbean. It is thus no surprise that subgenres, such as the bildungsroman, thematically concerned with the construction of identity, have been particularly prominent in the Caribbean novel".

On the one hand, then, the Caribbean tradition of the Bildungsroman shares the same preoccupation with childhood and its literary representation that has characterized the genre since the Romantic period. Here too the child protagonists share their fresh innocent points of view on colonial life and its struggles, while at the same time often showing a maturity that is apparently at odds with their young age. On the other hand, as is typical of the postcolonial Bildungsroman, the innocent-wise child of the Romantic tradition becomes, in Caribbean writing, the instrument of effective postcolonial critique. Bharat writes:

The open consciousness of the child privileges marginal status and ensures an oppositionality that can pose acute questions in the coming of age narrative of the postcolonial Caribbean. Inadvertently, recognizing the discursive logic of the colonisers in making the child the brunt of their controlling strategy, they [Caribbean novelists] turn it around for their own purpose. (2003: 70)

Bharat refers to the influence that British education had on young children in colonial times: they were targeted as the segment of the population that could be made to share British values more easily through the power of British-style education. This kind of education had little relevance to the children's daily life – one only needs to consider Kamau Brathwaite's considerations about Caribbean children writing poems dedicated to the falling of the snow, which they had never seen (1984) – but it was supposed to be a means of controlling and directing the children's aspirations, their perception of social issues, and thus the future of the colonial Caribbean. Studies like those of Frantz Fanon (1963, 2015) have stressed the negative effects, from a psychological and political point of view, of European education being imposed on colonial subjects, who grow up alienated from their own communities. Here, Bharat, while reflecting on a quotation from C. L. R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*, mentions how it is that very same colonial education that ironically allows children to break free from colonial constraints by supplying them “the literary ancestors they need to dismantle and challenge”. (2003: 70)

As already stated, however, what appears to be peculiar to the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition is the connection with the history of the place – and, as a consequence, with the complex bargaining of heritage and identity that was and, to a degree, still is the product of that history. This need to explore and come to terms with that history – which Derek Walcott once termed “the Medusa of the New World” (1998: 36) – can be read as response to the traditional Eurocentric view, which tended to erase Caribbean history or consider it only in connection with the *conquista* and, therefore, as marginal when compared to the history of Europe. Because of the influence of colonial education, this Eurocentric view influenced heavily the perception that Caribbean people had of their own history for the longest time. For instance, in his “sequence” titled *A Way in the World*, V. S. Naipaul writes: “I used to feel – in the way of childhood, not putting words to feelings – that the light and the heat had burnt away the history of the place”. (2011: 72) John Hearne's dire perspective on Caribbean history is also illuminating in this respect:

For nearly three centuries the West Indian thought nothing, created nothing, explored nothing. If at any time between Columbus and the Second World War the British Caribbean islands had sunk beneath the sea, the world would have lost little that enriches the imagination of mankind. (Hearne 1963: 5 in Sander 1988: 1)

When considering these long-held views, it is even clearer that discussing Caribbean history and the relationship the developing individual (and, with them, the whole of the community) could have or should strive to achieve with it is a much-needed act of subversion of the *status quo* – which also explains the extraordinary popularity of the genre in the anglophone Caribbean.

A selection of novels: from Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* to Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*

The purpose of this study is to identify the features of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition by focusing on the common themes and tropes that can be found in a number of novels belonging to or showing affinity with the genre in question. The selection of novels considered for this study is relatively diverse, including twelve novels by different authors, but it does not claim to be exhaustive. The novels selected were all published in the second half of the twentieth century, in a period comprised between 1952, the year Sam Selvon's first novel *A Brighter Sun* was published, and 1991, when Cecil Foster published *No Man in the House*. The complete list of titles and authors can be found in the Bibliography, therefore this section shall focus on briefly introducing what is arguably the main feature of each Bildungsroman, its protagonist, alongside with a few preliminary considerations on the setting and the type of narration adopted by the novelists.

If it is true that the novels considered here were written and published across almost half a century, the setting that they employ is much more clearly circumscribed from a space/time perspective. All of the novels are set in the anglophone Caribbean region – and with this term one defines not just the Caribbean archipelago, but the whole region of central America (i.e. Guyana and Belize) that, because of its shared history, is considered, from a cultural point of view, to be part of the anglophone Caribbean – between the 1940s and the

early 1960s. This can be explained by considering the biography of the authors, who often set their childhood novels in the years when they were children themselves, but also by taking into consideration the history of the Caribbean region at large – which, in the post-war period, began the process that would lead to Independence from the British Empire. The present study shall deal with the connections between colonial politics and the Caribbean Bildungsroman, but for now it shall suffice to say that setting the novels in the decades around or following WWII allows the authors to explore the central themes of identity and self-development from a perspective that cannot ignore the political upheavals of the time.

As far as narrative techniques are concerned, in *The Ultimate Colony* Bharat observes that many Caribbean childhood novels in English stem from autobiographical experiences and/or are heavily influenced by them – which would explain why a considerable portion of them are written in the first person. (2003: 71) In this regard, the selection adopted for this study includes six novels written in the first person, but only one true autobiography or memoir: *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, by Austin Clarke (1980), whose protagonist claims: “I am Tom here; or Austin Ardinel Chestefield Clarke, a Cawmere boy, a running fool”. (2003: 132) Written in the first person, Clarke’s novel is the only one among the novels selected that is openly autobiographical. George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953), however, also has considerable autobiographical elements as his protagonist and first-person narrator, known simply as G., has a lot in common with the author himself. A similar case could be made for Michael Anthony’s Francis from *The Year in San Fernando* (1965) and for Jamaica Kincaid’s Annie in *Annie John* (1983), both novels being written in the first person. (Bharat 2003: 71) In addition to the fact that a considerable number of the novel selected (at least four) show recognizable autobiographical elements, it seems relevant to stress how all of them are set in the islands or territories where the authors grew up around the time when they were children or adolescents themselves, thus connecting the works to the authors’ own biographies.

To further explore the issue of the protagonist in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition, it seems relevant to focus on the characters’ ethnic background and social class, which are essential in determining the conditions of the child’s *Bildung* in the colonial Caribbean. Among the novels selected, the majority have protagonists of Afro-Caribbean descent – which reflects the ethnic composition of the Caribbean region. Notable exceptions are Christopher (from the 1959 novel of the same title by Geoffrey Drayton), who is white and aptly named after Columbus – in the words of Jalil Sued-Badillo (1992: 604), “the symbol of the birth of White America” – and Selvon’s Tiger in *A Brighter Sun*, who comes

from an Indian family. Moreover, Michelle Cliff's Clare in *Abeng* (1984), Zee Edgell's Beka in *Beka Lamb* (1982) and, to a lesser degree, Merle Hodge's Tee in *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) all have to deal with being mixed-race and with the identity issues that come with not belonging clearly to any ethnic groups while living in a heavily racialized society. The choice of a mixed-race main character could be interpreted as an attempt to describe the typical experience of the average Caribbean child – the same way Lamming's unnamed protagonist or Drayton's Christopher stand for a condition much more comprehensive than their own life experiences.

As far as social class is concerned, most protagonists come from working class families who struggle to make ends meet. Apart from Christopher, who comes from a privileged family (which, however, is not as wealthy as it used to be because of falling sugar prices after WWII), all of the male protagonists come from working class families, while the female protagonists tend to belong to the middle classes. This observation, since most Caribbean Bildungsromans have school experiences among their main themes, could be read as a social commentary on the inadequacy of education for working class girls in the colonial Caribbean. Particularly interesting, in this respect, is the case of Hodge's Tee, who is torn between the working-class world of her paternal aunt Tantie, which is described as more authentic and rooted in Afro-Caribbean culture, and the bourgeois affectation and social privilege that characterizes the world of her maternal aunt Beatrice.

A relative uniformity can instead be discovered when considering the age of the protagonists: most of them, at the beginning of their respective novels, are aged nine-to-twelve, which means that they are in between the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school, an important moment of passage that can be interpreted as a step towards a higher degree of maturity. The point of view of the child, however, is not necessarily the only one present in the novels. It is common, in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, for the child-narrator or the child-protagonist (whose point of view tends to be the most prominent in the narration) to “lend their voice to the author”, who thus gets to express their more mature, often ironic, interpretation of the events. Lamming's G., for example, often disappears from the narrative and “frees” the author, who can then deal with other characters and storylines – such as that of Ma and Pa. Clarke's novel too, being an autobiography, is rich in this kind of juxtapositions. Consider this passage, in which Tom's mother informs him that they are moving to a different, more respectable, part of town:

‘We moving,’ she said again and burst out laughing. Those two simple words meant that all the years of ‘sufferation’, all the years of working in the Marine [hotel], had at last come to an end. And it was the end she had silently worked for.
Rule Britannia! (2003: 51)

Another interesting way that the authors have of offering a different perspective from the one of the child-protagonist is that of alternating between their storyline and what could be called a brief summary of the outside world’s events. In the case of Cliff’s *Abeng*, for instance, this happens with frequent *excursus* on the history of Jamaica and the Savage family, while Edgell mostly comments on the political struggle for Independence in Belize, and Selvon periodically updates the reader on the events of WWII, which his character is often not even aware of. Additionally, in *Growing up with Miss Milly* (1988), Sybil Seaforth occasionally alternates between the point of view of the child, Wilby, and that of his parents: this helps interpreting Wilby’s feelings and life experiences from different perspectives.

But to return to the issue of the characters’ age, Drayton’s Christopher and Hodge’s Tee are exceptions, as they are younger than average. Christopher’s age is unclear, but he seems to have just begun primary school, while Tee begins primary school in the first chapters of *Crick Crack Monkey*. The time period covered by the two novels, however, is very different, as Tee goes on to secondary school, and then moves to England to meet her father at the end of the novel, while Christopher, in the last pages of the novel, is still a child. Selvon’s protagonist, Tiger, and Beka Lamb are also exceptions in that they are older than average: Edgell’s main character is fourteen at the beginning of the novel – even though the novel itself is told retrospectively – and Tiger is sixteen and the oldest protagonist of the Bildungsromans considered for this study. *A Brighter Sun*, in fact, begins with Tiger’s wedding and his *Bildung* is markedly different from that of the other protagonists, as he, despite being very young, already has a family and has to learn to navigate adult life all on his own.

In *The Ultimate Colony*, Bharat also mentions that Caribbean children are often described in literature as being fatherless and/or illegitimate, which she interprets as a way of contrasting the colonial rules of legitimacy and control. (2003: 73) In the novels considered here, six of the protagonists are, to a degree, fatherless: Lamming’s G. and Anthony’s Francis both live with their mothers alone; Clarke mentions an absent father and a step-father; both of Howard’s parents in Foster’s *No Man in the House* have emigrated to

England (and the title of the novel itself refers to the vulnerability of a household where no head of the family is recognized by the community); Wilby's father, in Seaforth's novel, is described as mostly absent, as he is more focused on his career as a comedian and songwriter for the calypsonians; and even Hodge's Tee, whose mother has died in childbirth, has a father who has moved to England, whom she never sees. *Beka Lamb* too deals in part with the issue of legitimacy, when Beka's friend Toycie becomes pregnant and is abandoned by the boy she loved, causing her to be expelled from school and thus lose her reputation, her mental health, and ultimately her life. The fatherlessness of many of these characters should probably be interpreted, with Bharat, as a metaphorical lack of roots and rootedness, and therefore of a stable identity – which, as we saw, is the issue at the heart of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

Having briefly outlined the setting, the type of narration, and the features of the main characters in the selection of novels that shall be considered for this study, it is necessary to justify the inclusion of Earl Lovelace's *The Schoolmaster* (1968), which does not share the classic Bildungsroman structure and yet is included in this selection. Lovelace's novel, set in Trinidad in the 1940s, does not have a single protagonist, but deals with an isolated community, that of Kumaca, and, according to Kenneth Ramchand (Lovelace 2015: 5), with its "perilous passage from a state of mature (relative) innocence, to a form of social organization in which the force of man's will (in the form of institutions, economic arrangements and declared values) plays an increasingly important part". This "perilous passage" is connected, in the novel, with the opening of the first school in the village, with the issues of education and responsibility, and with the consequences of this radical change from a political, social, and personal perspective. Because of the stress on the "mature [...] innocence" of the community, which seems to evoke the innocent-wise child of the Romantic tradition, because of the novel's focus on what Bakhtin calls "man in the process of becoming", and also because it deals with many of the core themes of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition – namely school and education, politics, tradition, identity, belonging, and exile – it seemed fitting to include Lovelace's novel in the selection for this study, as it appears to share what Brigid Lowe would call the "tendency" of the Bildungsroman.

CHAPTER TWO:

SCHOOL AND LEARNING IN THE CARIBBEAN BILDUNGSROMAN

School life: rites, symbols, and spaces

An initial comparative reading of the novels selected for this study is enough to familiarize the reader with the presence of recurring themes. Among these, possibly the most prominent is the presence of school. Mentioned in almost every novel and among the main settings in the majority of them, school is central to the life and growth of the protagonists, as it shapes them and presents them with new challenges, new people, and new ideas. School is also a multifaceted experience: it is the place that has to be attended regularly in order to pass tests and get good marks; it is a set of rules and regulations; it is the schoolmasters, mistresses, and headmasters that enforce those very rules; it is a social environment and a socially-connotated space: going to a specific kind of school, excelling at school, or even just being able to attend school are all inextricably connected with the social class the protagonist belongs to; finally, school stands for the often alienating education that Caribbean children are encouraged to pursue through books and school readers in the hope of a better life. Austin Clarke visualizes this best in his autobiographical novel by having a character say: “Be careful that all this learning don’t burst your blasted brains!” (2003: 87), as if learning were something physical and measurable – a weigh for the students to carry around in their minds at all times.

Clarke’s *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack* is a good place to start talking about school life and school experiences in the Caribbean novel, as the book displays many recurring features, being centered, as it is, around the school life of the author himself. Despite being told at least partly using flashbacks, the novel starts with the protagonist being admitted to a secondary school in Barbados, Combermere school, after having attended St. Matthias Boys school. In the same way, Tom’s journey in the novel ends with him leaving Combermere for Harrison College, “the big school”, mostly attended by privileged white boys. The class divide is brought to the foreground at the very beginning, as Tom explains:

Combermere school was for middle- and lower middle-class boys. It was a second grade school. It would turn me into a civil servant, if I did well. If I didn’t do well,

it would turn me into a sanitary inspector. If I did even worse than that, into a 'bookkeeper' on one of the many sugar plantations. (2003: 6)

Tom's experience at Combermere begins, as it often does in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, with an assembly scene set in the school main hall. The focus is on the crowdedness and lack of breathing space for the boys: "I waited in the hall with the other one hundred new boys, all of us stiff in our new khaki uniforms, clean heads, new ties of blue and gold which were the school's colours, and which choked us". (2003: 7) Similar feelings we find expressed in Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, where the author, while describing the ceremony organized by Groddeck's Boys School for Empire Day, mentions that "the children were arranged in thick squads over the school yard" and how "the squads were packed close, and seen from the school porch the spectacle was that of an enormous ship whose cargo had been packed in boxes and set on the deck". (2016: 32) Considering how central the issues of memory and slavery are in Lamming's novel, comparing the children's squads with a ship's cargo appears to have some significance. In the two novels, the perspective is different, as Clarke describes the crowd scene from within, while Lamming imagines to be watching "from the school porch", but the discomfort brought about by the situation – which in Lamming is implicit in the comparison – is the same.

This is not unusual in the Caribbean novel. Merle Hodge's description of Tee's first day at the big school is very similar in tone. She mentions "the menace to life and limb constituted by the presence of hordes of other children" and "a bizarre patchwork of children in thick squares that were closely wedged together". (2015: 48) Michelle Cliff too, in *Abeng*, describes the school attended by lower class people in the country in terms of lack of space: "The school, which consisted of one class, was led by Mr. Lewis Powell [...] who had instructed all the children around and about, from six to fifteen years old, in the same small hot room, for twenty-five years." (1995: 83) While describing yet another school assembly in the main hall, Cecil Foster writes: "Standing there in the hot building with so many bodies crammed together, the fan overhead moving in slow motion and providing no relief from the stuffiness, I could feel the sweat pouring out of me." (1992: 12) It would seem, then, that one of the very first impressions that children have of school in the Caribbean coming-of-age novel is a sense of constriction and suffocation. One can read this literally, as a lack of sufficient classes to accommodate all the children – which was a reality especially in rural areas – but one can also chose to interpret this metaphorically, as a general state of

discomfort brought about by the strictness and/or foreignness of colonial education in the Caribbean.

Both of these characteristics – the almost military strictness and discipline required of school children and their sense of displacement, of belonging to two different worlds at the same time – are also common themes in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. Lamming leads the way by addressing both themes in visual and highly memorable terms in his description of Empire Day. Starting with discipline, he writes:

The teachers stepped with great dignity between the rows, inspecting the discipline of the lines, and when they stopped and shouted with military urgency ‘‘Tion!’ the boys raised their left legs and brought them down heavily on the ground beside the right heels. Their heads were slightly tilted back, and the small hands pressed earnestly against their sides. (2016: 33)

That of military culture in colonial-era Caribbean schools is another trope that recurs frequently, especially when the protagonist of the novel is male. Clarke, particularly, focuses heavily on his experience in the Cadet Corps: “The camp was like a mock army. In a mock war. Doing mock things.” (2003: 186) If somewhat more prominent in the novels set during or around WWII, military culture does not disappear from the Caribbean Bildungsroman. In fact, Cecil Foster describes a heavily militarized school life in Barbados on the verge of Independence (1963), where military discipline and physical punishments including floggings are common-place occurrences, much like in war-time schools.

Discipline is connotated differently when it comes to girls’ schools, where, however, similar feelings of suffocation are generated by the often oppressive gender expectations of appropriateness and respectability. Hodge describes the bourgeois girls at St. Ann’s as “snow-fairies” (2015: 80), while Jamaica Kincaid’s Annie feels left out on the first day at the new school because she cannot fit in with what is expected of her. She notices how similarly (and appropriately) the other girls look and behave and she thinks: “I couldn’t be sure they hadn’t all come out of the same woman’s belly, and at the same time, too” and soon afterwards: “I was sure I would never be able to tell them apart”. (1997: 35) However, military culture is not completely absent in these novels, as Hodge describes Tee’s first schoolmaster, in a mixed-gender primary school, as a former soldier whose main purpose

while teaching seemed to be “to bring the boys to a state of reverence towards [Winston Churchill’s] portrait”. (2015: 26)

As made clear by the near veneration of the Churchill portrait required by Mr. Hinds – but also by Foster’s acute description of the Queen’s and the Duke of Edinburgh’s portraits in the school hall (1992: 11) – military culture is strongly associated with the Empire, its notable figures, and its symbols. Among these, the flag occupies a central place. Once again, Lamming is responsible for a memorable description of the Union Jack and its unobtrusive message directed at the children:

The wind came in sharp spasms and the flag flew. The school wore a uniform of flags: doors, windows and partitions on all sides carried the colours of the school’s king. [...] In every corner of the school the tricolour Union Jack flew its message. The colours though three in number had by constant repetition produced something vast and terrible, a kind of pressure or presence of which everyone was a part. The children in the lower school looked with wonder. They seemed to see a mystery that was its own revelation [...] The boys in the upper school looked with triumph. They saw a fact that was its own explanation. The red and the white and the blue. How strong and deep the colours were! (2016: 33-34)

Lamming describes a sense of wonder, which in time becomes pride – as British culture and imperial values are learnt and accepted, if not completely understood, and become part of the boys’ life and world view. At the same time, there is something “vast and terrible” about the flag colours being reproduced over and over again, in every corner of the school, “a kind of pressure or presence”. The children’s sense of belonging is both directed and tested by the presence of the flag, which, in Lamming’s description, continues to inspire contrasting feelings. Zee Edgell describes a similarly coloured scene when mentioning the children’s march to Government House:

That day, the whole world seemed decorated in red, white and blue; the bleached whiteness of school uniforms reflected the foam on the sea below the lawns of Government House, her [Beka’s] sateen waist ribbon matched the cobalt blue of the sea beyond the reef, and the blood-red of the hibiscus ringing the lawns was the red of the streamers dangling and fluttering on the hats of the children marching four abreast as far as the eye could see. (2007: 54)

The red, white, and blue of the Union Jack here find their match in the charming Belizean landscape, seemingly without issue. While expressions such as “bleached” and “blood-red” do stand out as peculiarly violent – the centrality of white and whiteness especially will be dealt with later on in this section – the description seems to be one of harmony. This fits in well with the notion that the scene described is a memory from the past, from primary school, when the protagonist, Beka, used to think that “things British had nearly always been things best”. (2007:54) The Union Jack appears in Clarke’s novel too, in connection with an official school event called Speech Day – a “pressure or presence” that seems to haunt young Tom as the street he moves to, Flagstaff Road, is known precisely for hosting the village’s own Union Jack. Most interestingly, in Foster’s novel the flag and the royal portraits are contrasted with the figure of the schoolmaster, Mr Bradshaw: a well-known and controversial promoter of Barbadian Independence:

Mr. Bradshaw stepped back from the edge of the platform and unintentionally positioned himself under the big red, white and blue Union Jack. Between him and the flag were the pictures of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and her husband Philip, the one with the nose so pointed that Grandmother said it could pick chigoes from your feet. All eyes were focused on the short headmaster, standing with the tip of the listless flag a foot above his head. (1992: 263)

The symbols of the Empire are undermined and to a degree ridiculed, as the focus of attention shifts to the headmaster, whose political party has just unexpectedly won the elections. The very same assembly scene later features the school children singing the national anthem, *God Save the Queen*, for the last time, as “the next time there was a school gathering, the national anthem would be ‘In Plenty and in Time of Need’”. (1992: 2071).

School singing is another common trope in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. While sometimes associated with patriotism, on occasions when the national anthem or songs like *Rule, Britannia* are sung by the children, most often it has religious connotations, as the students are required to sing hymns and prayers. This happens in *The Schoolmaster* as well, which, as discussed, is not a traditional Bildungsroman. However, the villagers welcome father Vincent at the schoolhouse with singing, led by the new schoolmaster. The scene is described by Lovelace from the point of view of the priest, who feels embarrassed as he

takes in the affectation and hypocrisy of the scene, while the new schoolmaster seems to be in his element:

Father Vincent, before he could get over his surprise and come to himself, saw the schoolmaster lift his hands, gesturing like the conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, noticed that there was a switch in his right hand, saw the switch go up with a sharp, rather precise, yet overbearingly dramatic and somewhat graceful movement, heard the first notes of the hymn 'Come, Holy Ghost' burst upon his ears. Caught, embarrassed, Father Vincent tried not to look at the schoolmaster. (1997: 79)

If the relationship between religion and education is a recognizable feature of the Caribbean novel, this is because the West Indies have a long and complex history connected with religious schools and education. Up until 1835, the year of the Sterling report (the first government enquiry into the conditions of education in the colonial Caribbean) all schools were religious schools, administered by the different religious denominations. While in some territories, former Spanish or French colonies, the majority of the population (and of the schools) was Roman Catholic, others, like Jamaica or Barbados, were mainly Protestant – and many of their schools were too. Only afterwards, government schools were opened with the objective of reaching those areas where no schools were available.

Clearly it was not always possible to have one's children attend the school of the preferred denomination: both the Sterling and the Keenan (1869) reports acknowledge, from different perspectives, the issue of minority denominations and of the differences in the official doctrine. Keenan, for example, suggests that each school should be free to decide its own religious orientation, with the possibility for the students to opt out of denominational teaching. (Gordon 1962 B). Of course, this does not mean that children were not exposed to the official doctrine of the school they attended. One needs only to consider *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and V. S. Naipaul's description of the peculiar mix of Catholic rites and Hinduism that Mr Biswas's family develops because of the pervasive presence of the Catholic Canadian Mission, which focused on the education of Trinidadian Indians.

The relationship between the different denominations represented by the different schools is a theme heavily featured in the Caribbean Bildungsroman as well. While not particularly focused on school life and experiences, Michael Anthony's *A Year in San*

Fernando touches upon the issue of denominational and government schools. The protagonist of the novel, Francis, makes friends with the boys from the Catholic school next to the Chandles' house – a school he does not attend because he is enrolled in the government school in a different part of town. However, Francis reflects: “Joining them sometimes, I would find myself in the middle of the games and enjoying myself *as if* [emphasis added] I had fully belonged to that crowd and that school”. (1996: 49) Hodge focuses on denominational schools more, as she describes Tantie's attempt to get Tee enrolled in a primary school. They try two schools – a government school and a Roman Catholic one, both of which had no more vacancies – before finally finding a spot at Coriaca EC (English Church). As *Crick Crack Monkey* clearly shows, then, choosing a school was, at least for working class people, a matter of luck and availability more than religious faith.

Hodge also describes, through Tee's eyes, the inexplicable animosity between Anglican and Catholic children at the big school, who had recess at the same time: “EC and RC children were sworn to eternal enmity, and firmly resolved to keeping apart on the Savannah.” (2015: 57) However, as already established, going to a denominational school did not necessarily mean belonging to that denomination – a truth that does not escape Tee:

I sometimes tried to imagine what took place in a house where both EC and RC children lived. Did they not speak to each other when they came home on afternoons until they had changed their clothes? And on mornings were they friends while they brushed their teeth and washed, but stopped talking abruptly the minute they had got into their uniforms? (2015: 57)

It would seem that the usual competitiveness and rivalry between different schools was in some way heightened by their belonging to different religious denominations, which were competing themselves as they had, at least partly, different interests in the Caribbean territories. What is ironic – and made explicit here by Hodge's considerations – is the fact that the different denominations seemed to mean very little to the students themselves beyond the different colours of their uniforms.

Another consequence of the presence of both denominational and government schools in all Caribbean territories is, of course, that of jurisdiction. In his description of Groddeck's School, Lamming paints the picture of a tense relationship constantly

threatening to escalate – which is interestingly reflected in the school’s architecture, Lamming’s starting point:

The school was in another corner, a wooden building of two storeys with windows all around that opened like a yawning mouth. [...] In another corner was the church, a stone building which extended across the yard to within a few yards of the school. [...] This was not the church school as some churches were called, and the boys never really understood why these two buildings were erected within the same enclosure. The school inspector was an Englishman, and the school was supposed to be of Anglican persuasion. The supervising minister of the church was also English, but he was Presbyterian. [...] But the inspector and the minister never met in the school. The head teacher never arranged for them to meet except on special occasions like Empire Day. (2016 :32)

From an architectural point of view, Lamming’s description can be considered relatively standard, as most schools in the Caribbean were two-storey buildings with a yard and a church or chapel nearby. However, as the narrator points out, the church “was not the school church”, and its Presbyterian minister, while being somewhat involved in the life of the school – “occasionally [he] came in to give pep talks on the work of the church” (2016: 32) – was not the school’s minister. The English inspector and the Presbyterian minister are described as being constantly at odds with each other, to the point where they seldom meet. They represent the contrast between the denominations and the government, as the school inspector was a government-appointed official.

The problems connected with multiple jurisdictions and the lack of a clear hierarchy among the powers that be reflect the complex history of education in the Caribbean. Interestingly, both the supervisor and the minister are described by Lamming as Englishmen – a detail that should suggest how neither really represents the interests of Barbados. Already in 1925 Major Bain Gray in his report had pointed out that the issue of poor school administration in Guyana largely depended on jurisdiction being divided between the Board of Education and the denominations. (Gordon 1964 C) As the extract from *In the Castle of my Skin* shows, this seemed to be a problem that affected the Caribbean area at large.

Much like Lamming, who uses the school architecture to make a point about the failing educational system in Barbados, Zee Edgell also uses elements of the convent school she describes as metaphors for the strictness and lack of empathy displayed by school

officials – even when they are religious people. In *Beka Lamb*, the protagonist and her friend Toycie attend St. Cecilia’s, a Catholic school for girls. When first described in the novel, the building seems to be dominated by a statue of the Virgin:

The Virgin Mary, her arms outstretched, dominated the centre of the wide walk, lined on both sides with soaring palm trees. Behind the statue was the convent, two stories high, resembling a Spanish hacienda. The girls skirted the statue, joining the throng of students swerving to the right of the convent front door. (2007: 85)

Apart from the usual “throng of students”, the image appears to be a welcoming one as the outstretched arms of the statue could easily be construed as an embrace. However, the girls “skirted the statue”, actively avoiding it, and moved on. This would be irrelevant if the Virgin’s statue did not appear again in a very specific section of the novel, when Toycie’s pregnancy is discovered by the nuns and the girl is about to be expelled from school. The statue is different, smaller, however the pose is the same – and this time the connotations are explicitly negative: “A two-foot statue of the Virgin, her arms outstretched, her stone eyes expressionless, stood on a table beside Daddy Bill’s straight chair”. (2007: 117) The outstretched arms, here, become almost menacing especially when paired with the “expressionless” stone gaze of the statue. When considering that Toycie is about to be expelled for being pregnant, the use the author makes of the Virgin’s statue becomes clear, as it comes to represent the school’s strict and uncompromising code of conduct.

A final consideration concerning the Caribbean Bildungsroman and its depiction of school life and experiences has to do with the use of colour and its connotations. The Union Jack’s colours, their impact, and their significance have already been discussed in this section, but the focus on white and whiteness specifically is yet to be addressed. Figures of authority during school functions, for example, often wear white. Clarke recalls: “The headmaster wore white. He always wore white. He wore white as if it meant something which we boys could never aspire to.” (2003: 10) Similarly, in Edgell: “The Governor’s medals glittered against the stiff white uniform” (2007: 54), and in Lamming: “The inspector wore a white suit with a red, white and blue badge on the lapel of the jacket.” (2016 :35) Foster too describes the English superintendent as wearing a “white shirt”. (1992: 13) This does not appear to be coincidental, as the white shirt was the uniform of the plantation

superintendent in the tropics: a white man from abroad, the person in charge of the slaves and the plantation itself. If white was initially chosen to combat the heat, the colour soon took on further significance in terms of race and class, to the point where the boys in Clarke's novel seem to grasp that their (black) headmaster is trying to distance himself from them by constantly wearing white.

Cliff, in particular, appears to use the concept of lightness in order to discuss colourism and exclusion. Her novel is centered around the experience of being mixed-race, therefore colour is indeed central: “[Clare] was a lucky girl – everyone said so – she was light-skinned. [...] She lived in a world where the worst thing to be – especially if you were a girl – was to be dark.” (1995 :77) On one occasion, around the middle of the novel, Cliff describes a seemingly standard, crowded school function – which, however, Clare recalls as the moment she understood the importance of class and colour in Jamaican society, “but not in those words.” (1995: 96). The use of colour in the scene – especially the light/dark contrast – is very significant:

As all sweated under the zinc roof – the mistresses in their light cotton dresses, the girls in their heavy gabardine uniforms, waiting for an end to the hymn, a *dark* girl had an epileptic seizure. [...] Her *deep-brown* body now rolled and jerked on the gymnasium floor and the girls moved back to give her room. The headmistress sang louder, as if to convey to the girls that they must not stop [...] Finally Miss Maxwell, the tall and herself-*dark* physical education teacher, came over and knelt beside Doreen. She drew the cloth belt from her *white* tennis shorts and slid it between the girl's teeth, clamping it to make sure that Doreen did not swallow her tongue. [emphasis added] (1995: 96)

The mistresses' white uniforms seem to contrast with Doreen's dark skin colour, and because of her skin colour the girl, it is implied, does not really fit in. Her seizure is first ignored, and finally addressed by a teacher who is described as “herself-dark”. Ultimately, Doreen will see her scholarship revoked because of her condition and will be unable to attend school. Clare's understanding of the event, however, clearly stresses how class and colour affected the decision taken by the school's authorities. Whiteness, once again, becomes a symbol of exclusion.

It would seem, then, that school life, in terms of its rites, symbols, and spaces as they are described in the Caribbean Bildungsroman – the tropes connected with school curricula

and teaching will be dealt with in the following sections – tends to be connected with feelings of discomfort and/or exclusion. This has been observed while analyzing school functions, which are often described as crowded and stuffy, and while discussing military discipline and military culture in colonial schools. Even in its connection with the Empire and its symbols, school life seems to evoke mixed feelings of belonging, but also feelings of wariness and doubt, if not of outright refusal. At the same time religious faith is mostly connotated in terms of power struggles, prejudice, and division. Racism and classism also find their way into the classroom, as “big schools” for middle-class light-skinned people seem to belong to a different world – a world that, even when accessible, is described as insidious and hypocritical. Building on these observations, the following section will deal with the history of education in the Caribbean and the way it informs the depiction of school accessibility and that of inclusion/exclusion in the Caribbean Bildungsroman.

Exclusion and control: the meaning of “belonging” in Caribbean education

For although the Negroes are now under a system of limited control “apprenticeship”, which secures to a certain extent their orderly and industrious conduct, in the short space of five years from the 1st of next August their performance of the functions of a labouring class in a civilised community will depend entirely on the power over their minds of the same prudential and moral motives which govern more or less the mass of the people here. If they are not so disposed as to fulfill these functions, property will perish in the colonies for lack of human impulsion. The Whites will no longer reside there, and the liberated Negroes themselves will probably cease to be progressive. The Law having already determined and enforced their civic rights, the task of bettering their condition can be further advanced only by *Education*. [emphasis in original] (Gordon 1962 A: 146-147)

It was 1835. The British Parliament had declared the abolition of slavery in 1833 and a transition period, euphemistically termed “apprenticeship”, had begun in the Caribbean colonies. The Anglican Reverend John Sterling was chosen by the British government for his “practical acquaintance with the state of the Negro population and his knowledge of educational enquiries in Britain and in Europe” (Gordon 1962 A: 145) to investigate the current state of education in the Caribbean and recommend a course of action. The product

of the Reverend's work – the *Sterling report* – would influence the course of Caribbean education for over a century.

The extract presented here is taken from the first paragraph of the report, titled “The challenge for Negro education”. The subtitle introduces the main issue at hand: “The stability of colonial society in the West Indies will be at stake once full freedom is attained”. (Gordon 1962 A: 146) Sterling was looking ahead, towards the end of the apprenticeship period, when “full freedom” would be achieved by all black people in the Caribbean – and what he saw was chaos. Sterling feared, as many white plantation owners did, that the end of slavery would mean the end of British control over the Caribbean territories. He believed that “property will perish” and that “the Whites will no longer reside there, and the liberated Negroes themselves will cease to be progressive”. That is, unless the government intervened and provided appropriate education for the former slaves, who – Sterling believed – in order for the colonial *status quo* to be maintained, had to be taught how to perform the functions of “a labouring class in a civilised community”.

Education, then, was intended as weapon in the hands of the British élite, one that would guarantee their privileges even after the much-dreaded Emancipation. In the second half of the century, Émile Durkheim's works would contribute to disseminate the idea of education as a form of social control of the masses; for now, however, the planters remained sceptical, and Sterling struggled to convince them that the education of former slaves could be beneficial to their interests. Still, the education Sterling had in mind was far from inclusive: “This Rule however might be enforced at once, that no child shall be taught to write without paying for the instruction. Writing is an accomplishment of little value to the very poor; and is less beneficial than almost any other branch of instructions in cultivating the faculties of the child”. (Gordon 1962 A: 150) Sterling's idea of education for the masses was mainly spiritual, as he believed that school and education should work for what he called “the awakening of the moral and intelligent powers in the minds of the Negroes” (Gordon 1962 A: 147) – all with the declared objective of having the masses accept their subordinate role in society.

The Sterling report marked the beginning of the Empire's interest in matters of education in the colonial Caribbean. It was followed by several other government enquiries – most of them focusing on specific territories – which evaluated and directed the course of Caribbean education for the whole of the nineteenth century and beyond. The issues they dealt with were often the same: poor infrastructures, a lack of qualified teachers, the issue of

denominational teaching in a multi-confessional society, whether government funds should be directed to the improvement of primary or secondary education.

Compulsory education too was a common theme in the reports. The Mitchinson report (1875) cluelessly observed that the locals seemed to resist compulsory primary education, as they were “morbidly sensitive and suspicious of everything that suggests the idea of servitude ever so remotely”. (Gordon 1963 A: 37) Approximately a hundred years after the Parliament’s decision to formally abolish slavery, going to school was still a privilege. In 1931-1932, in fact, the Mayhew and Marriott report concluded that, despite the need for compulsory education, “we can see no prospect in the near future of effective and widespread compulsion without diverting funds from reforms that are necessary to make such compulsion fruitful and a public boon”. (Gordon 1964 D: 15) In other words, it was impossible to compel the families to send their children to school, if schools were unavailable in the area where they lived, if books and school uniforms were too expensive for them, and/or if the schools themselves were understaffed or overcrowded. Clearly the debated compulsion concerned primary schools, as secondary schools were only available for a fee or to a very small number of scholarship students who had to pass an examination that would effectively determine their future.

Having painted a general picture of what education looked like in the colonial Caribbean, the study will now turn to the novels selected to analyze and comment on their portrayal of school access and inclusivity in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. Of course, one remembers Cliff’s clever use of the colour white and of the contrast between light and dark to denounce the issue of colourism in Jamaican schools. The *de facto* presence of school segregation based on skin colour seems to be a prominent feature of the Caribbean Bildungsroman. As previously recalled, in *Abeng*, Clare attends St. Catherine’s as a privileged girl. This does not seem to depend on wealth, but rather on class perception and race: “These dark girls were at St. Catherine’s mostly on scholarship – but then Clare herself was a scholarship student. Boy [Clare’s father] was unable to keep up the payments; it was the only way she could stay in school.” (Cliff 1995: 96) Clare’s status in school is no different from that of the “dark girls”, as they are all scholarship students, but, as the incident with Doreen clearly shows, their right to belong in St. Catherine’s is far from equal. Moreover, the presence of school segregation in the novel is reinforced by the fact that Clare’s best friend, Zoe, is also a “dark” girl. Not having a scholarship, she attends a different school, the

country school that had been Clare's mother's school – the place lower class black people were “supposed” to attend.

Clearly class, race and wealth are shown as connected in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, but their influence on society and the way schools, as colonial institutions, react to the interplay between them, while at the same time attempting to conceal their true purpose, is often very subtle. One recalls Lamming's observations on the differences between racism in Barbados, as a British colony, and racism in the United States. Trumper, who has visited both, explains to G.:

An' take the clubs, for example. There be clubs [in Barbados] which you an' me can't go to, an' none o' my people here, no matter who they be, but they don't tell us we can't. They put up a sign, “Members Only”, knowin' full well you ain't got no chance of becoming a member. An' although we know from the start we can't go, we got the consolation we can't 'cause we ain't members. In America they don't worry with that kind o' beatin' 'bout the bush. (2016: 332)

However, if racism and colourism – as well as classism and elitism – in the British Caribbean were not as openly advertised as in the United States, they were still prominent, if partly submerged, principles on which colonial society was built. In this respect, in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, the innocent-wise child's perspective is peculiarly apt to unmask colonial pretensions of colour blindness. Consider, for example, Clarke's description of school segregation in Barbados:

There were few white boys in Combermere School in these days. The white boys went to Harrison College, “the big school”, *across the fence* from us at Combermere. Or to the Lodge School, which was *far in the country district* [...] The Lodge School was a boarding school. That added to its mystery and charm, and at the same time took it completely *out of my reach*. We had heard of two black boys who went there, and we were told that they were “very rich and very bright.” [emphasis added] (2003: 66)

Significantly, Tom chooses words connotated in terms of distance and separation when describing the schools attended by the white boys. Harrison College is “across the

fence”: visible, but unattainable. The Lodge School is “far away in the country district”, “out of my reach”, only available to a limited number of black students, who, however, have to prove they are “very rich and very bright”. Drayton’s protagonist too, the white and privileged Christopher, seems to have interesting insights as to what makes certain people “better” in terms of race, class and wealth – and why that happens. He interrogates Gip, his black nanny, about his concerns:

“What does it mean,” he asked, “when somebody’s better than somebody else?”
“That depends,” she stalled. “White people is better than black people – mostly. That’s because we work for them [...]” “I know that,” Christopher told her. “[...] But I mean white people. Are some white people better than others – when they don’t work for them I mean?” Gip hesitated. She had not thought about it. “Maybe,” she said at last, “if one lot of white people had been to school more, or...” “But Daddy left school when he was fourteen to go and work. I heard him say so. Is he still better than Granddad? Didn’t Granddad go to school?” “Yes, but Mr. Stevens’s [Christopher’s father] family is old. They came from England long time ago, before the slaves was freed. They had a lot of land and money in England.” “Where did Granddad’s family come from?” “I don’t know nothing ’bout your granddad’s family, except that they was poor and Mr. Fraser made a lot of money heself.” (1972: 47-48)

Even when race is put aside – clearly as mental exercise: it was, after all, the most effective tool of exclusion, and Gip herself “had not thought about” privilege if not in terms of race – the Caribbean colonies seem to mirror Victorian British society in valuing class over wealth and education. Mr. Stevens is “better” than Mr. Fraser, despite not having gone to school, precisely because his family is old and used to be affluent. However, as the short passage from *Christopher* makes abundantly clear, all of these characteristics – race, class, wealth and education – somehow contribute to making a person “better” (one could read this as “more privileged”) than another. Edgell, in *Beka Lamb*, seems to argue that gender plays a part too in determining the social status of an individual – and school is, once again, an effective example of selective exclusion. Bill Lamb, Beka’s father, argues with the nuns at St. Cecilia’s that Toycie should not be expelled from school for being pregnant, as “she alone is not to be blamed for this accident, and Mr. Villanueva’s son [Toycie’s boyfriend] will not be expelled from school”. (2007: 119) Emilio Villanueva is described in the book as a “pania”, or Spanish speaking person, his family is wealthy, and he is male. His belonging to

a different race, social class, and gender seems to make all the difference with regard to how his mistakes are viewed by Belizean society and the way his degree of responsibility is established. In fact, while Toycie is expelled from school, Emilio is not because he has a bright future ahead of him as he has to “go to university in Mexico”. (2007: 198)

School segregation and inequality, then, seem to be central when considering the way access to education is portrayed in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. This is true primarily in terms of race, but, as we have seen, also in terms of class, wealth (which do not always coincide), and gender. Of course, all of these features do not exist in a vacuum, as the history of the colonial Caribbean ensured the seemingly unescapable connection between race and class: however, as the examples provided show, the issue of social exclusion is much more complex than it would appear at first glance. What cannot be doubted, however, is that “informal” school segregation according to race and social class was a reality in the colonial Caribbean, and that it had a profound influence on the way children and adolescents who attended colonial schools saw themselves and their future.

From Sterling onwards, school and education in the colonial Caribbean, especially for the lower classes, were intended in terms of prevention and control: if the colonial *status quo* was to be maintained, then the purpose of school was to make sure the new generations would accept its inevitability. The reader will surely remember the quotation from *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack* with which the previous section opened. There the protagonist, Tom, illustrated the possible career choices opened to him as a working-class black student of a “second grade school”: civil servant, sanitary inspector, plantation bookkeeper. Which one it was going to be depended on the child’s academic success. But Clarke is not the only Bildungsroman author to focus his attention on the many doors colonial schools were bent on closing, instead of opening. Foster, for example, describes the different paths segregated schools forced young children into when his protagonist, Howard, meets a white boy his age and realizes their school experiences up to that moment have been very different:

“Do you go to school?” he [the white boy, Trevor] asked. “Yes.” “You preparing the Common Entrance Examination, too?” “No, I ain’t in Class Three yet.” “I am at my school and you must be my age,” Trevor said. “He doesn’t go to the same school, Trevor,” his mother said. “He goes to the government school and they

teach differently. You begin preparing for the exam much sooner.” “Is that why none of their students pass? Our teacher says that,” Trevor said. (1992: 70)

Lamming, too, visualizes different educational paths for boys belonging to different races and social classes. He describes it as a race – a very unfair steeplechase – the rules of which are bent in favour of certain children, and work to the disadvantage of others:

Education was not a continuous process. It was a kind of steeplechase in which the contestants had to take different hurdles. Some went to the left and others to the right, and when they parted they never really met again. [...] The village school and the High School were not only different buildings with different teachers. They were entirely separate institutions. [...] Those boys who went from the village school to the High School had done so on the award of the public examinations. There weren't many and it wasn't easy for them to cope with the two worlds. They had known the village intimately and its ways weren't like those of the world the High School represented. Moreover, it wasn't until they had entered the High School that they knew what the other world was like. (2016: 242-243)

What is most interesting in Lamming's description is the fact that, despite the underlying awareness of the unfairness of the educational “steeplechase”, school remains virtually the only gateway to a different social status. The boys from the village who were accepted into the High School as scholarship winners “weren't many”, Lamming writes, “and it wasn't easy for them” to suddenly get used to a world they could never imagine being a part of before. Still, school was the only way they could ever become a part of that world.

Hodge's novel, *Crick Crack Monkey*, in particular, is built around the idea of identity being shaped by a person's social class and, therefore, the education they receive. The protagonist, Tee, will ultimately leave Trinidad having lost contact with the values of her working-class, Afro-Caribbean upbringing. This starts to happen when she moves to a different school, “the big school”, because of her academic success and comes into contact with her aunt Beatrice's bourgeois world. Her success is appropriated by her aunt's family, too, as a way of improving their own image and social consideration: “She is our first cousin. Her mother died so she's been living with us – and she's so bright at school! She goes to St. Ann's with Carol you know, and she came *first* in the last test...”. (2015: 121) Kincaid

describes a similar situation in which Annie gains the respect of her peers and teachers thanks to her academic success – the only way a child was taught they could ever aspire to that “other world” Lamming mentions in his novel. Kincaid writes: “My life in school became just the opposite of my first morning. I went from being ignored, with hardly a glance from anyone, to having girls vie for my friendship [...] Both my classmates and my teachers noticed how quick I was at learning things”. (1997: 48-49)

If school was, on the one hand, the product of a larger colonial society founded on hereditary privilege, and, on the other, the sole means of bettering one’s life conditions and social status within that very same society, it is understood that the journey through the different levels of education was bound to be complex and highly selective for children coming from underprivileged households. Several Bildungsromans belonging to the Caribbean tradition deal with the pressure coming from selective education – expressed particularly by the need to take an alarmingly high number of examinations during one’s school career and the anxious wait for the results, which would often determine a young person’s fate. Furthermore, the exams taken in the colonial West Indies were based on British standardized tests. Kathleen Drayton explains:

By the end of the nineteenth century students from secondary schools in all West Indian territories wrote Cambridge, and later Oxford and Cambridge and London Local examinations. [...] The West Indian perennial concern with standards, preferably those set outside, made these examinations, set and marked in the UK, highly valued. (1990: 211)

One recalls V. S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* (1959), and his satiric take on how hard it was for one of his characters, Elias, to please “Mr Cambridge” – a comedic prosopopoeia of the Cambridge examination itself – who kept failing him despite his hard work. Much of this feeling of unfairness and excessive pressure on young minds can be found in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition too. Beka Lamb, for example, fails her first year of high school and her father debates for a long time whether or not to send her back to school in order for her to try again. Ultimately, he decides to give her another chance – only one: “I’ll send you back for one term. But if you don’t pass I’ll be compelled to take you out of school”. (2007 :79) The novel deals in detail with Beka’s anxiety and her feeling of inadequacy brought about by her academic failure. On the first day of school, for instance, she is ashamed of

having to wear the green bow tie, which signifies she is still a first-year student, therefore “she shoved it into her blouse pocket. That she would pin on at school. There was no need to walk through the streets this first morning unnecessarily advertising the fact that she had failed”. (2007: 81)

In *No Man in The House* Foster too has his main character, Howard, worry about failing the Cambridge Common Entrance Examination. As his name is called last, when the results are being read out at the school assembly, the boy starts wondering what will happen to him now he thinks he has not passed: “I almost fainted. He had skipped my name. There was no Prescod. [...] What would Grandmother say? Did she really mean it when she said that trying my best was good enough, especially now that Marvis Thorpe’s [the neighbour] son had passed?”. (1992: 267) Seaforth’s portrayal of the anxieties and the excessive pressure caused by exam season is slightly different. The protagonist, Wilby, does worry about his results, especially as his mother, Miss Milly, is very strict when it comes to his academic career:

For Miss Milly, the only real success would be a place at St. David’s College. His previous successes in sport and in singing had been without meaning for her. The real success for his mother, Wilby knew, was in passing the Eleven Plus. She had never given him credit for being a champion athlete or a calypsonian. (1988 :123)

However, the narrative, while very understanding of Milly’s point of view, whose failings as a mother depend solely on her wanting a better life for her son, proves her perspective – one could say, with Drayton, “the perennial West Indian concern with standards” – wrong. Wilby passes the Eleven Plus examination, only not with a high enough mark to be offered a place at St. David’s. For Milly, this is a failure. However, the boy is later offered a scholarship to a Canadian school “as a result of his outstanding ability as an athlete and an all-rounder”. (1988: 128) It is Wilby’s passion and talent for sports and music – not his academic results – which allow the boy to “move up” in life and go to a prestigious high school. One could read Seaforth’s take on exam season as an attempt to denounce a system built on exclusion and on a hypocritical pretense of fairness, since, as this section has tried to demonstrate, being able to afford a certain kind of school in the colonial Caribbean meant actively improving a child’s chances of academic success.

Attending school having been, for a good portion of the twentieth century, a privilege and a socially-connotated experience in the colonial Caribbean, it is not surprising that the theme of not attending or not being able to attend school is of such interest to Caribbean Bildungsroman authors. When considering the twelve novels selected for this study, nine of them (75%) have school as the main setting and/or as a main or otherwise central theme. Of the remaining three, one – Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun* – is not concerned with school as an institution, but rather with learning to read and write informally, as Tiger, the sixteen-year-old Indian protagonist, has never had the chance of attending school, but decides to learn anyway as he wants to know what is going on in the world. Interestingly, the novel is set during WWII and deals with the ever-growing American military presence in Trinidad, which sparks Tiger’s interest in the world beyond. The other two novels – Drayton’s *Christopher* and Anthony’s *The Year in San Fernando* – while occasionally mentioning the fact that the young protagonists do attend school, have their narrative focus elsewhere. The study will deal with these exceptions later on in this section.

As already stated, when school is “out of reach”, as Austin Clarke writes, it is mainly because of economic problems or issues otherwise linked with marginality in the Caribbean colonial society. These were often connected with race. As late as 1931-1932, the Mayhew and Marriott report observed that “there [is] only one section of the community, the East Indian population in Trinidad, that can be described relatively to the rest of the community as educationally backward.” (Gordon 1964 D: 7) This likely depended on several factors, among which the fact that Indian immigration in Trinidad was a fairly recent phenomenon: being connected with indentured servitude, it only began after Emancipation, when Indian workers were brought over to the West Indies to replace the slaves in the sugar plantations. Moreover, schools were often religious (Christian) institutions, while Trinidadian Indians belonged either to the Muslim or the Hindu faith, and, lastly, Indian communities were frequently centered in the countryside, away from larger cities and towns where schools were closer and more numerous. These experiences probably reflect Tiger’s background quite well. Selvon writes:

That must be the college Boysie was telling him to look out for. You could get knowledge in there. If his parents were rich, they might have sent him to school in Port of Spain, perhaps in that very same college. He would have grown up clever.

He knew he would have learned all his lessons well and striven to be at the top of the class all the time. After, they might have sent him to study lawyer or doctor. Which one would he have chosen? It didn't matter, either one would have brought in plenty money, people always going to court or getting sick. (1985: 96)

When Tiger mentions school, it is in terms of what could have been. He imagines what would have happened if his family were rich and he had had the chance to study in the city, later to become a lawyer or a doctor. Throughout the novel, Tiger perceives his lack of formal education in terms of inadequacy, as he is ashamed of not understanding what goes on around him: "He must hurry up and learn to read. He couldn't go around asking people questions all the time [...] When he was smaller, he never got answers. Why hadn't they sent him to school, instead of having him work away so many years in the canefields?". (1985: 99) What is interesting is that Tiger's circumstances are by no means unusual in the rural setting he inhabits. Tiger feels a desire for "knowledge" – described in the first passage as something physical and concrete (see "learning" in Clarke 2003: 87) – but that desire goes beyond the practical and touches upon the boy's need to make sense of the world. The fact that, at the end of the novel, Tiger learns to write and sends a story to the *Trinidad Guardian* about the American road which was built through his and his neighbours' gardens also speaks of Tiger's need for his marginalized voice to matter and to be heard.

Tiger's predicament, however, is far from being the only case of a young child being denied the chance of attending school in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. While it is true that all other protagonists receive some sort of formal education, the question of who gets to stay in education and who does not is constantly in the foreground in the novels selected for this study. For instance, Lovelace's "collective Bildungsroman" raises important questions regarding the future of isolated rural communities when they open themselves up to progress – education being at the forefront of the community's desire for change and self-improvement. In *The Schoolmaster*, in fact, different opinions are held by different characters regarding the possibility of building a school in the village of Kumaca. Consantine Patron, for example, opposes the new school. Partly motivated by his own interests – he is known in the village as "a man of letters" and his reputation largely depends on his being able to read and write – Patron raises several points about the survival of the village once education is made available to everyone: "And what would become of the cocoa when the young men must go to school? And what will happen when they all want to go to the city of

Port-of-Spain, or to the town of Zanilla, because they could read what was written on the signboards?”. (1997: 29)

In the novel, both Patron and father Vincent, the travelling priest, appear reluctant to open a school in the village, as they want to defend the community’s right to self-preservation and relative “innocence”. In this respect, the schoolmaster’s betrayal of the community – he rapes his assistant, Christiana Dandrade, who later commits suicide when she finds out she is pregnant – is not to be read as a confirmation that education is best avoided in rural communities, but rather as a caveat that education is not a neutral item that one can simply gain by attending school (one is reminded of Clarke’s “learning” and Selvon’s “knowledge”, which are seen by their characters as solid realities). Instead, as Kenneth Ramchand explains, education is strictly connected with figures of authority, whose responsibility it is to provide it; therefore, it cannot be neutral as it will always be shaped, positively or negatively, by the motives of those higher up in the social ladder. (Lovelace 2015: 7-8) Lovelace does not mention propaganda, but that too is clearly part of the larger discourse on education and responsibility that the author introduces here (see the next section for further comment on “responsible” teaching and curricula).

Much like in Selvon and Lovelace, in Seaforth’s *Growing up with Miss Milly*, too, the theme of not attending school (or not attending regularly) is connected with the need to work to support one’s family. Wilby’s younger friend Nello, in fact, justifies his absence by saying: “Pa tell me days ago dat dis week and next week too I have to go help him harvest pigeon peas and tomatoes, so I ent taking on school now”. (1988: 88) Similarly, in Foster’s novel, Grandmother tries to avoid it as much as she can, but ultimately tells the boys she has decided they must leave school in order to work: “Sending us to work was drastic action, but that was the only choice left. ‘I don’t want to do it,’ she said. ‘but things are real hard and we could use any money we could get’”. (1992: 186) In this last case, Howard and his brothers will not leave school after all, as a local politician offers to help the family to win their votes in the upcoming elections. However, the theme of being unable to afford school is still very clearly in the foreground, especially since, at the end of the novel, Howard wins a scholarship to Harrison College (the same prestigious college in Barbados attended by Austin “Tom” Clarke, see Clarke 2003: 66) but is still unsure whether he will be able to attend, as the scholarship will not cover all expenses and, as Grandmother says, “books, uniform, shoes for his feet, bus fare, lunch money, all them things got to be provided for”. (1992: 275)

As the examples clearly show, then, the absence of school, or the threat to a child's ability to continue in their studies, is mainly framed as a social issue. Because of their marginality in society, certain groups are less likely to stay in education or even to receive the rudiments of reading and writing. These groups include minorities, rural communities, and people living in extreme poverty; clearly, these issues often intersect, making it virtually impossible for marginalized people to escape their underprivileged status. On the one hand, it is evident from the quotations presented in this section that the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition actively denounces the structural inequalities of colonial education. On the other hand, however, by focusing on school life and school experiences – and overwhelmingly successful ones, as most protagonists win scholarships and/or are described as attending secondary school – the novels selected appear to challenge the *status quo* as well, by offering countless examples of underprivileged people – this includes race, gender, wealth, and social class – succeeding in a system that was constructed to make them fail. The reader will recall Sterling's observation that writing should not be taught to those students whose families were unable to pay for it, as it is "of little value to the very poor." Considering this, it is probably not coincidental that many Bildungsroman protagonists should find success, recognition, or simply relief in writing. Tiger's example has already been mentioned, but, while his life story may be different from that of most other protagonists, his need to express his feelings in writing is far from isolated. Both Howard Prescod and Beka Lamb win competitions thanks to their writing, Clare Savage is inspired by Anne Frank to keep her own diary, while Annie John uses her ability for words to express the complicated relationship she has with her mother – thus winning the admiration, that she craves so deeply, of her teachers and classmates. "Writing back", as we know, is a central moment of the decolonization process, and it seems that traces of this can be found in the Bildungsroman tradition as well – which is not surprising given the political nature of the genre as it developed in the anglophone Caribbean.

While it is true that most Caribbean coming-of-age novels deal with school and/or informal education as a major theme, one must also observe that there are exceptions. As previously mentioned, among the novels selected for this study, two do not seem to feature school and education as prominently as the others. One is Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, while the other is Drayton's *Christopher*. In both cases, the protagonists are said to attend school, they occasionally reflect on school, but the characters' inner development mostly happens elsewhere. While Francis grows to understand the vulgarity and self-interest at the heart of the Chandles' household in San Fernando – which he was initially enchanted

by – Christopher gradually becomes independent from the adult figures in his life (this is reflected in the three sections the book is divided into, titled “The Father”, “The Mother” and “Gip”, the nanny). Being among the less openly political works among those selected, even though it would be naïve to interpret them as apolitical, the novels are also similar in their poetic descriptions of the Caribbean landscape and in their focus on the inner life of the characters – who are prone to experience loneliness and isolation. School, as a social space, is present in the novels, but never in focus, as the characters are shaped by their life outside of it and their growing understanding of the complexities and hypocrisies of the adult world around them.

Teaching and curricula: language, history, and the European perspective

In the 1931-1932 Mayhew and Marriott report on Caribbean education the compilers mention their shock at “most of the oral English work of both teachers and students, which often left us wondering whether in course of time English as spoken by large portions of the West Indies would be intelligible to English visitors from other parts”. They suggest correcting what were perceived as language mistakes by having the students listen to “records of correctly spoken English”, as “a gramophone and a few gramophone records [...] should not be beyond the means of the poorest Colony”. (Gordon 1964 D: 20) As observed by Drayton, the Moyne report too, which was made public in 1945, laments that “insufficient importance is placed on the formation of clear connected speech and the correct use of words, which is all the more important in view of the prevalence throughout the West Indies of patois of varying degrees of unintelligibility and imprecision”. (Drayton 1990: 208) Despite the obvious bias, the Moyne report is correct in identifying Caribbean patois (creole) as a spectrum. In this respect, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write:

The concept of a Creole continuum is now widely accepted as an explanation of the linguistic culture of the Caribbean. [...] The theory states that the Creole complex of the region is not simply an aggregation of discrete dialect forms but an overlapping of ways of speaking between which individual speakers may move with considerable ease. These overlapping ‘lects’, or specific modes of language use, not only contain forms from the major languages ‘between’ which they come into being, but forms which are also functionally peculiar to themselves (Bickerton

1973: 642). Thus they meet the paradoxical requirements of being identifiable as stages on a continuum without being wholly discrete as language behaviours. (1989: 45)

The continuum exists across different territories and different social situations, which means that individual speakers are fluent in many of the “lects” that compose the spectrum. This complex linguistic scenario is probably what “shocked” the report compilers, who viewed language variation as “unintelligible and imprecise”, a mistake colonial schools should strive to correct. In fact, when analyzing school experiences through the lenses of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition, the colonial obsession with “proper English” and the social connotations linked with Standard British English appear to play a major role.

For instance, Clarke mentions that the masters at Combermere school “spoke with the accents of the gentlemen of England. When one of the younger masters passed the examination [...] all of a sudden he became very intelligent and educated. Because he was our master and we too wanted to be educated, we spoke like little black Englishmen”. (2003: 49) Received Pronunciation and Standard British English denote status, therefore it is fitting that Clarke’s protagonist, Tom, should notice the change in accent when he starts attending high school at Combermere. Similarly, in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee observes that her cousins who attend the “big school” speak differently from her. In the text, their often exaggerated pronunciation is rendered by Hodge with non-standard spelling: “... So well I said well *dorling* why don’t we just go and pick the others up *orfterwards*...[emphasis added]”. (2015: 89) This is peculiar, as non-standard spelling is generally employed to convey the sounds of non-standard English. Here, Hodge is using spelling creatively to question the authority of RP and the imposition of a foreign standard.

Creative language use is also typical of Selvon’s protagonist, Tiger, after he learns how to read and write and devotes himself to studying the dictionary. Selvon uses Tiger’s lack of familiarity with registers for comedic purposes, but also to mark his progressive distancing from his background. This is Tiger talking to his young wife, Urmilla:

“Look, hand me my small cylinders of narcotic rolled in paper.” “Cylinder? What is that? Is what you mean at all?” Tiger chuckled, self-contented. “Just extend the terminal part of your arm, the extent of space between where you is and which part it is is not remote.” “I beg you pardon, Tiger, but I really don’t know what you

mean. This time you really tie me up!” Tiger chuckled again. “All right, girl. Reach the cigarettes for me, then.” (1985:160)

Significantly, even Mr Bradshaw, the headmaster in Foster’s novel, who is among the leaders of the political party for Barbadian Independence and is shown to be firmly against British colonialism, insists on Howard speaking Standard English at all times. Howard reflects: “He had demanded that I speak *proper English* on all occasions. I tried to speak slowly, thinking before letting anything escape from my mouth. However, no matter how I tried, the words sounded foreign, as if coming from someone close behind me [emphasis added]”. (1992: 165) It is clear that, while strict language policy is a product of British colonialism, it is also deeply rooted in Caribbean consciousness and society, because of the influence of colonial education itself. Therefore as “speaking proper English” continued to denote status, intelligence, and education, thus offering a chance to better one’s life condition, it was considered desirable even on the eve of Independence, which marked the rejection of political dependence on Great Britain. Cultural dependence, which includes language itself, is understandably a more complex issue. In fact, in 1984, approximately twenty years after Barbadian Independence, Kamau Brathwaite was still defending the right for Caribbean authors to write in what he called nation language (Caribbean patois or creole), which he identified as “the language of slaves and labourers” because of the West African influence, instead of using “the official English”, the language of the colonizer, Prospero’s language – which, in the words of George Lamming, is intended to be “the very prison in which Caliban’s achievements will be realised and restricted.” (1992: 110)

Besides advocating for Standard English, colonial schools also worked to promote British culture and literature. In previous sections, the way schools were used by colonial authorities to sponsor British values and life styles has been mentioned. This included offering examples of British literature as guidance, both moral (the reader will recall Sterling’s warnings) and literary. Brathwaite, for instance, recalls that all the models for poetry presented in schools were British and featured the pentameter. The meter, however, according to the Barbadian poet, failed to represent truthfully the Caribbean experience, as, while it could be used to describe the falling of the snow, which Caribbean people were unfamiliar with, it failed to convey the strength of Caribbean hurricanes because “the hurricane does not roar in pentameter.” (1984: 10) Brathwaite’s considerations on the

overwhelming presence of British values and models in Caribbean textbooks is easily confirmed by analyzing school books and readers adopted in Caribbean schools during the colonial period.

As reported by Drayton (1990: 203), the first readers to be used in Caribbean primary schools were the *Irish National Readers*, soon displaced, towards the end of the nineteenth century, by Thomas Nelson's *Royal Readers*. In both cases, the readers were not compiled for the Caribbean specifically, but they were simply imported from other regions of the Empire with no concern for the intended audience. Valery Joseph's study on the *Royal Readers* (2012) pointed out the alienating effect of the white European perspective on black Caribbean school children, who were taught to gaze at their own reality through the eyes of the colonizer, while, at the same time, becoming familiar with European standards which had little to no relevance in their everyday lives.

The *Royal Readers* would eventually become obsolete, as the Scottish firm Thomas Nelson & Sons published the *West Indian Readers* in 1925. This marked the first, partial attempt to include local culture in Caribbean curricula, even though the official imperial perspective was far from being abandoned. While the inclusion of local tales and history had a profound effect on the minds of the students of the West Indian Renaissance generation (see Fraser 2008), the new readers were heavily criticized by local intellectuals for allegedly lacking in educational value. Consider, for example, Naipaul's 1961 novel, *A House for Mr Biswas*, in which the main character denounces the first edition of the *West Indian Readers*, compiled by Captain James Oliver Cutteridge, the Director of Education for Trinidad and Tobago:

“Readings by Captain Cutteridge! Listen to this. Page sixty-five, lesson nineteen [...] ‘The cow and the goat give us milk and we eat their flesh when they are killed.’ You hear the savage? And listen. ‘Many boys and girls have to tie up their goats before going to school in the morning, and help to milk them in the afternoon.’ Anand, you tie up your goat this morning? [...] That is the sort of stuff they fulling up the children head with these days. When I was a boy it used to be the *Royal Reader*.” (Naipaul 1995: 326)

Mr Biswas belongs to the generation that studied on the *Royal Readers* and is happy to find any excuse (here, the teachings of the Hindu religion) to accuse his son's new school

books of being inappropriate. According to Drayton, the *West Indian Readers* replaced the *Royal Readers* at a different rate in the various territories of the Caribbean, as the *Royal Readers* were still being used, in some areas, as late as 1954. (1990: 203) Helen Tiffin adds that, in certain schools, they were adopted up until the 1960s. (2001: 45-46)

In spite of their revolutionary inclusion of local material, the *West Indian Readers*, much like the *Royal Readers* before them, remained closely tied to the imperial mindset by having their main focus be on promoting British culture and British values. As Cliff writes in *Abeng*: “No doubt the same manuals were shipped to villages in Nigeria, schools in Hong Kong, even settlements in the Northwest territory – anywhere that the “sun never set,” with the only differences occurring in the pages which described the history of the colony in question as it pertained to England”. (1995: 85) The ubiquitous and often alienating British perspective learnt through school books and education is expectedly featured in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition as well.

Both Clarke and Cliff, for instance, use the image of the daffodil to convey the idea of Britain’s pervasive cultural presence in Caribbean education – which ultimately mirrors Brathwaite and the foreignness connected with the falling of the snow. Cliff mentions Mr Powell’s teaching manuals sent to him by the colonial office in London and containing “a pullout drawing of a daffodil which the pupils were ‘encouraged to examine’ as they recited [Wordsworth’s] verse.” (1995: 85) Similarly, Clarke points out the lack of familiarity with the flower by fashioning a group discussion sparked by Robert Herrick’s poem *To Daffodils*:

‘What is a daffodil, though? They have daffodils at Cawmere [Combermere]?’ ‘A daffodil? A daffodil is only the name of a flower, man!’ ‘But we got flowers growing all over the place, wild flowers and good flowers. In the school garden and *out the front road*. And why we never call them a daffodil?’ ‘A daffodil is a English flower!’ ‘We is English too, man.’ [emphasis in original] (2003: 53)

Clarke’s novel, being an autobiography, is possibly the richest in direct references to school texts and study materials. On one occasion, the protagonist appears to be referencing the *West Indians Readers*, which Clarke likely studied on, by imagining himself as John Keats’s “naughty boy”. Clarke writes: “I think of a line in a poem, written about a boy I do not know and may never meet, on this beach or elsewhere, *who stood in his shoes and he wondered, he wondered; he stood in his shoes and he wondered...* [emphasis in original]”.

The poem, featured as lesson 10 in *Book One* of the *West Indians Readers*, is significantly about a young boy running away to Scotland and finding it not so different from England itself. In the same way, Clarke's passage evokes distance ("I do not know and may never meet", "elsewhere"), while at the same time sharing the boy's experience and appropriating it ("on this beach"). The next chapter will deal in more depth with the Bildungsroman protagonists imagining themselves as characters in English books, or inventing English aliases, as the chapter will focus on culture, identity, and strategies of belonging.

In this respect, it seems relevant to reflect briefly on the fact that, in Anthony's novel, *The Year in San Fernando*, William Wordsworth is mentioned once again: "'My heart leaps up when I behold-' and she paused. 'What's that?' 'Wordsworth.' 'Wordsworth?' 'You don't learn poetry at school or what?'" (2015: 101) The poem referenced by Mrs Chandles is Wordsworth's *My Heart Leaps Up*, which contains the famous line "the child is the father of the man". The line, as previously discussed, shares the Bildungsroman's focus on childhood as a time of privileged wisdom and, considering Anthony's scrupulous use of the child perspective (see Ramchand 1983: 205), the choice appears to be significant. Additionally, it is telling that this specific Wordsworth poem – which, the reader understands, goes a long way to explain Francis's circumstances and the peculiarity of his perspective – should be unfamiliar to the protagonist, despite his having studied poetry in school. In general terms, it could be observed that references to British literature and the British canon are frequent in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. Often the purpose is to denounce the impositions of the British canon (as with the reflections on the English nature of the daffodil), but examples of appropriation and identification are not uncommon.

Another example of attempted identification is offered, once again, by *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack*. However, rather than featuring British culture, it works towards creating a connection with Rome and the ancient world. Tom reflects: "Hannibal, whom we loved (and no one told us that he was black like us!) climbed mountains and was smart. Alas, he lost one eye: *in oculo altero*. [sic] But he had crossed the Alps, one of the highest mountain ranges in the whole whirl! We loved Hannibal [emphasis in original]". (2003: 46) The protagonist here points out how no school teacher had ever revealed Hannibal's African origins – as Carthage is to be found in modern-day Tunisia. Hannibal would have been more relatable to black Caribbean children, it is argued, if they had known about his being African. The implication is that the protagonist/narrator had to find that out on his own in later years. In the same passage, the protagonist struggles with reconciling his ideas concerning ancient Rome with the reality of current events:

We didn't know at first that Mussolini was an Italian, a Roman. All the Italians we knew were in books, dead, speaking a dead language; and wearing togas, and eating while lying on their sides: grapes from a bunch and wine from an urn [...] We in Barbados drank rum. We loved the Italians (and hated Mussolini) because they were like us, like the men in our village who loved rum and women more than work. (2003: 46)

There is another attempt, on Tom's part, to relate to classical history by drawing a comparison between Barbados and ancient Rome, while at the same time having to adjust what he knows about WWII to the topics he learns about in school: responsibility and relevance of school teaching are thus moved back to the foreground.

Cliff too deals with the responsibility of teaching in her novel, and she does so by painting the picture of Mr Powell and his unconventional teaching methods. Dissatisfied as he is with the official curricula and study materials sent to him from London, Mr Powell decides to make a difference by teaching the children in the popular school "about black poets as well as white ones. Langston Hughes collided with Lord Tennyson. Countee Cullen with John Keats. Jean Toomer with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He read McKay alongside Wordsworth". (1995: 89) The impact of such a choice can be best appraised by considering what Frank Collymore, editor of the literary magazine *Bim* and high school teacher of both George Lamming and Austin Clarke, once wrote to the editor and producer of *Caribbean Voices* in London, Henry Swanzy: "In Barbados there are plenty of people interested in poetry but who believe that it was interred with the late Alfred Lord Tennyson." (Griffith 2016) Teaching contemporary poetry by black authors to school children was not a commonplace occurrence in the colonial Caribbean. What makes the passage significant, however, is what Mr Powell chooses to omit, as much as what he decides to say. After having the children copy and read *If We Must Die*, by the Jamaican-born Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay, Powell "told them it was a poem about dignity, about people becoming better than they thought they ever could. Realizing that they were too precious. But Mr. Powell stopped there – keeping the context of the poem – the reason of the poem – to himself". (1995: 90) Powell is reluctant to share the history of violence and racism in the United States – specifically, the Red Summer of 1919 – which led to the poem being composed in the first place. He argues:

Better the children should not know this part of history – America was America anyway, and not for West Indians. [...] These children lived in a country which kept them poor and wanted to keep them ignorant, but at least it didn't lynch them, didn't put them in jail for no reason, Mr. Powell told himself. At least they could travel freely – if they had the means. Education. Education in the finer things of life was better than education which would only lead the children to sadness and discontent. (1995: 90)

Mr Powell's hesitance to share some of the bloodiest pages of American history remains controversial, while seemingly stemming from a desire to spare the children the "sadness and discontent" they would experience if they knew the truth. However, in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition, the teachers' unwillingness to confront history (especially colonial history) is often much less innocent. Consider, for instance, Lamming's passage on slavery and the erasure of memory:

[Old people] had talked about her [Queen Victoria] as a good queen because she freed them [...] I thought it was so strange, but I didn't worry because *it didn't refer to me*. The queen had made them free. They must have been locked up once in a kind of gaol. [...] But the old woman on the wall wasn't taking about that. She was talking about something different. Something bigger. [...] [The small boy] told the teacher what the old woman had said. She was a slave. And the teacher said she was getting dotish. *It was a long, long, long time ago. People talked of slaves a long time ago*. It had nothing to do with the old lady. She wouldn't be old enough. And moreover *it had nothing to do with people in Barbados. No one there was ever a slave*, the teacher said. *It was in another part of the world that those things happened*, not in Little England. [emphasis added] (2016: 56-57)

The strategy adopted by the teacher in the passage to dismiss the old woman's memory appears to be one of distancing from the point of view of both time and space. Slavery happened "a long, long, long time ago", "in another part of the world": it does not relate to the children in any way, therefore it is not to be talked about. The woman's memory, having been transmitted orally down the generations, is meaningless to official history, here represented by the teacher, which only ever seems to consider written documents as proof. Here, the author seems to question its motives:

“Moreover, they weren’t told anything about that. They had read about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundred years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that. It was too far back for anyone to worry about teaching it as history. [...] Probably it never happened at all. The old woman, poor fool! You could forgive her. She must have had a dream. A bad dream! They laughed quietly. The whistle was blown. Silence, silence! It came up like a ghost and soon faded again. (2016: 58)

On the one hand, the passage points to the dismissal of the old woman’s right to her memory and her voice; on the other, history being described as “a bad dream” is reminiscent of James Joyce’s famous quotation from *Ulysses*, in which Stephen Dedalus claims: “History is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake”. The same line would later be adopted as an epigraph by Derek Walcott in his seminal essay “The Muse of History” (1974), where the poet argues that the inability to confront and ultimately move on from history is what is keeping Caribbean culture hostage. Years of deliberate denial during colonial times clearly took their toll.

Lamming’s passage is echoed by a similarly constructed one in Clarke’s novel. The reader should consider the two novels as strictly connected as, despite having been written at different times, they are both set in the 1940s and they are informed by the authors’ respective high school experiences at Combermere school in Barbados, where they both studied under Frank Collymore. Clarke too denounces the strategy of distancing employed by school authorities when discussing slavery alongside the deliberate inaccuracy of so-called official history:

The only things we heard in history about the Amurcans were slaves. [...] No history book at St. Matthias or Combermere dealt with this shameful Amurcan invention! *It was the Amurcan blacks who were slaves, not the English blacks!* England would never allow any of her subjects to be held as slaves. *It was therefore far, far, far, far back in a past, which we had brushed clean,* that there were slaves to be found, *not related to us.* That is why we despised the Amurcans. [emphasis added] (2003: 150)

In this case too, slavery is presented as distant in space and time (“it was the Amurcans blacks”, “far, far, far, far back in a past, which we had brushed clean”) and unrelated to the children and their experiences. Slavery remains a ghost, a nightmare, impossible to grasp and to comprehend. It is the “Medusa of the New World” (Walcott 1998: 36), which should never be looked at directly – hence the need for a mirror, the American slaves, to be used for projection.

While Lamming and Clarke present their largely autobiographical protagonists as victims of colonial propaganda, adding their own comments and considerations in what could be called “the narrator’s voice” – more mature and politically aware than that of the child protagonist – Kincaid adopts a different approach in dealing with the biases of education and colonial history. In chapter five of *Annie John*, titled “Columbus in Chains”, it is Annie herself who questions official history, in this case with regard to the glorification of Christopher Columbus’s voyages to America:

In this chapter, there was a picture of Columbus that took up a whole page, and it was in color – one of only five color pictures in the book. [...] His hands and feet were bound up in chains, and he was sitting there staring off into space, looking quite dejected and miserable. The picture had as a title “Columbus in Chains”, printed at the bottom of the page. [...] How I loved this picture – to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by. [...] When I next saw the picture of Columbus sitting there all locked up in his chains, I wrote under it the words ‘The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up And Go.’ (1997: 77-78)

Annie is then punished by Miss Edward, as she herself explains, for “defaming one of the great men in history, Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the island that was my home”. (1997: 82) Annie’s act of defiance against the centuries-old European myth of Columbus’s voyage as one of pure intellectual discovery – almost that of a new Dantean Ulysses – is symbolically significant in the novel, as it marks a step towards Annie finding her voice and her place in the world she inhabits. Additionally, it is also significant with regard to the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition Kincaid’s novel belongs to, as it seems to evoke the Romantic trope of the “innocent-wise child”, who, as discussed by Bharat, is able to offer “the most effective critique” of colonial injustice and propaganda, as the child’s innocence and inexperience “offsets the murkiness around”. (2003: 12)

This section, having focused on study materials and school curricula as they are discussed and questioned in the novels selected, has introduced the theme of the Eurocentric perspective on history, poetry, and language. As an inescapable and insidious effect of imperial propaganda, the Eurocentric perspective acts largely thanks to colonial education and its tools to shape the children's expectations of the future and the role in society they are expected to fulfill. The novels acknowledge the overbearing and often oppressive presence of a foreign perspective being imposed on the children through their school experiences, and, as shown by the examples provided, either they offer critical insights on the reality of colonial propaganda, or they negotiate strategies around it to expose and counterbalance its effects. Having introduced the central topic of Caribbean culture having been forcibly shaped by colonialism – in the form of the annihilation of the native population, the introduction of slavery and indentured servitude, and the many European powers that have, at different times, controlled the various areas of the Caribbean region – the study will now turn to analyze the portrayal of Caribbean culture in the Bildungsroman tradition, by focusing on the themes of cultural alienation, hybridity, and the link between the self and the land it inhabits.

CHAPTER THREE:

HISTORY AND CULTURE. STRATEGIES OF BELONGING

Cultural alienation: Fanon's "colonized intellectual" and the hybrid nature of Caribbean culture

Finding one's place within the larger frame of society as a whole is a recurring theme in the Bildungsroman tradition. As Moretti explains (1999: 8-9), this process is far from straightforward even in the European Bildungsroman. According to his interpretation, in order to become a functioning member of society the protagonist is bound to compromise and renounce a part of themselves in order to belong – a loss Moretti identifies in either the young person's freedom or their happiness. In later European Bildungsromans, especially around the turn of the century, the positivistic faith in society and its higher purposes begins to shake, and the Bildungsroman tradition starts to question societal values and traditional figures of authority, as in Samuel Butler's 1903 novel *The Way of All Flesh*. With James Joyce's largely autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), the themes of marginality and dissonance between the self, the land, and the foreign culture imposed on it by colonialism gain centre stage, and the need to find oneself becomes a continual struggle rather than a fleeting rebellion doomed to failure. It is the Joycean Bildungsroman that the Caribbean tradition inherits, absorbs, and re-invents anew in the second half of the 20th century – hence the struggle to belong within and against the colonial system is at the core of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition. In this chapter, the study will consider the way the struggle to belong typical of the Bildungsroman tradition is depicted in the novels selected, by focusing on elements of conflict, alienation, dissonance, but also on the occasional epiphanies of meaning, their connotations, their cultural significance, and the instances in which they are more likely to occur.

As anticipated in the previous chapter, a common theme in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition is that of cultural alienation as a product of colonial education and propaganda. The written world, the world of books, literature and official history, is often shown to be at odds with the world of everyday life – which, at best, finds itself distorted and, at worst, completely ignored by so-called official sources. Most of the novels selected

present instances of cultural alienation, but a common thread linking many of these together is their close connection to the written word and the fantasies generated by it. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, a novel significantly concerned with storytelling and the oral tradition, as the title itself, "crick crack monkey", is part of the expression marking the end of traditional Anansi stories typical of Afro-Caribbean folklore. The passage in question, however, focuses on the written word and the distorted sense of belonging it creates in the mind of young Tee:

Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen, ate potatoes, not rice [...] Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad. Thus it was that I fashioned Helen, my double. She was my age and height. She spent the summer holidays at the sea-side with her aunt and uncle who had a delightful orchard with apple trees and pear trees in which sang chaffinches and blue tits, and where one could wander on terms of the closest familiarity with cowslips and honeysuckle. [...] I loved rainy mornings, for then I could pretend it was winter as I left for school bundled up in an old jacket. Helen wasn't even my double. She was the Proper Me. And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness. (2015: 67-68)

Hodge makes it clear that, for Tee, the real world is England, the England she knows from the books – with snow, and apples, and honeysuckle – while her real life in the Caribbean, looking nothing like the books she reads for school or pleasure, appears to be incomplete, a shadow of what real life is supposed to be like. The reader will recall V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) and the tragic idea of the New World being doomed to be an imitation of Europe and nothing else. Hodge's use of the "shadow" metaphor seems to evoke Naipaul's nightmarish scenario. At the same time, England is described in terms of solidity, realness, and rightness – which, paradoxically, are only attainable in dreams and fantasies. And that is how Tee ends up inventing Helen, the English double, "the Proper Me."

Similarly, in Kincaid's *Annie John*, Annie escapes from the reality of her life by imagining herself as the protagonist in a traditional growing-up novel:

I tried to imagine that I was like a girl in one of the books I had read – a girl who had suffered much at the hands of a cruel step-parent, or a girl who suddenly found herself without any parents at all. When reading about such a girl, I would heap even more suffering on her if I felt the author hadn't gone far enough. In the end, of course, everything would be resolved happily for the girl, and she and a companion would sail off to Zanzibar or some other very distant place, where, since they could do as they pleased, they were forever happy. (1997: 86)

In the passage, Kincaid evokes some of the tropes of the classic Bildungsroman tradition (the orphaned child, the cruel step-parents, the constant suffering, the happy ending) and has Annie discuss them and shape them to fit her own narrative. This type of daydreaming is not that different from *Bovarysme* in that it uses reading as a means to escape from an unsatisfying reality – in the case of Annie, the relationship with her mother, which changed drastically as soon as she reached adolescence and her mother became very strict, thus coming to embody the pressures of conforming to gender expectations, specifically those relating to black girls living in a colonial society. Her daydreams tend to take place in very distant places, and the reason the narrator offers is that her mother (and her obsession with respectable, “appropriate” behaviour) would mean nothing to her there:

My most frequent daydream now involved scenes of me living alone in Belgium, a place I had picked when I read in one of my books that Charlotte Brontë, the author of my favourite novel, *Jane Eyre*, had spent a year or so there. I had also picked it because I imagined that it would be a place my mother would find difficult to travel to and so would have to write me letters addressed in this way: *To: Miss Annie John, Somewhere, Belgium*. I was walking down a street in Belgium, wearing a skirt that came down to my ankles and carrying a bag of books that at last I could understand [...] (1997: 92)

Annie is brought back to reality by her friend Gwen, for whom Annie harbours romantic feelings, suggesting that Annie should marry her brother Rowan one day “that way we could be together always”. (1997: 93) The line crushes Annie’s hopes and heightens once again her feeling of not belonging. On the one hand, Belgium and Zanzibar are clearly not real places for Annie: they represent her desire to escape and find somewhere far away where she could be herself. On the other, the reference to books finally making sense when living in Belgium brings Annie’s reflections closer to Tee’s daydreams about England, by marking

Europe as the place all the books are about and where the dreams kindled by those books feel closer to coming true.

In *Growing up under the Union Jack* too the protagonist deals with this sense of cultural alienation, of belonging to another place – Europe, and more specifically England – which is portrayed as the place where real life happens, life that is worthy of being recorded in books, as opposed to the volatile “shadows” of the New World. Tom, the protagonist, dreams big:

I was more at ease in England, the Mother Country, than in Barbados. I lived the lives of those men in the *History of England* book. My mind crawled with battles and speeches, with Divine Rights, Magna Cartas, and I saw myself sitting in ermine with the Lords and Dukes, eating and drinking with Charles the First, who himself got into trouble and paid for it with his head. [...] The women in the book – Anne Boleyn, Anne of Cleves, Elizabeth Tudor (one by this name lived in Town), Mary Queen of Scots – all these were women with whom I was in love. I painted their faces black and put their huge crinoline dresses on the girls I saw around me. (2003: 69)

The childish dream of wearing ermine and consorting with kings, queens, and members of the nobility is overshadowed by a sense of disquiet, which in the text is expressed by a euphemism (“more at ease in England” means relatively uneasy in Barbados). More explicitly, the narrator references the skin colour of the English ladies, who, in order to be loved by Tom, have to have their faces painted black. While there is an attempt to adapt the fantasy to Tom’s reality – the reference to one Elizabeth Tudor who lives in town (see Clarke 2003: 133 for a similar occurrence with one Milton), the local girls wearing crinoline dresses – there is also an underlining awareness that this is not *his* fantasy, not meant for him to play with, in spite of how appealing it may feel. The reader should also consider the implication that local history is deemed “less than” in this context, as colonial education contributed to shifting the focus from the colonies to the centre of the Empire, the so-called Mother Country, to the point where the only history worth fantasizing about, for Tom and children like him, is the one including the Magna Charta and King Charles I – as it is the only history they know of.

Even Foster’s *No Man in the House* deals with the power of English books and their pervasive influence on young children, their dreams, and their sense of belonging. Howard

has discovered the library and has become an avid reader. Therefore, on one occasion, while out with his dog Tupper, he imagines himself as the protagonist of an adventure book. Of course, the peculiarity of his situation is very clear in his mind:

Tupper saw a mongoose and, like a true adventurer, chased it into the field, yapping loudly. This reminded me of the adventure books I had read, the ones about the boys in England about my age who took their hounds hunting. Watching him run around so spritely, I instantly forgot the purpose for our stroll. We didn't have foxes or rabbits, but the island was awash with mongooses, the brown furry animals that were just as much a threat to the island's poultry as Tupper was. (1992: 195-196)

The differences in fauna between England and Barbados are a minor detail here, as “the purpose for our stroll” mentioned by Howard, who manages for a moment to forget about it himself by indulging in his bookish fantasy, is that he is supposed to kill the dog, who has been stealing eggs from the family when they are already struggling to make ends meet and cannot afford to waste any kind of food. For a moment, however, Howard dreams that things were different and his stroll with Tupper becomes an adventure to chase wild animals, like the English kids do in all the library books. Howard's fantasy is certainly a form of escapism in the deeper sense of needing to step out of one's consciousness in order to cope with a reality that is too hard to face. However, it is significant that the alternate reality Howard naturally falls back to is the picture of an English idyll, with boys his age and their dogs running around in the countryside. Once again, England is the place of dreams, the home all the books talk about, the lost paradise colonial children can only guess at, having never known it, if not in writing – a fantasy that, however, feels safer and more familiar than reality itself.

The examples show how the kind of cultural alienation the protagonists deal with in the novels selected is connected to the colonial experience. As opposed to the Freudian definition of alienation – which arises from the inability to compromise between the *super-ego* and the *id*, a compromise Freud deems necessary in order to exist within a civilized society – the type of alienation portrayed here is connected to colonial culture as a whole and its insidious influence on the mind of anyone being subjected to it. As Frantz Fanon

explains, by referring to the figure of the “colonized intellectual”, it thrives on (Western) education and exposure to propaganda. According to Fanon's Marxist reading, it is also linked to class struggle and it should be read as the attempt of the ruling bourgeoisie to neutralize the resistance of the local intelligentsia by means of assimilation. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in 1961, Fanon writes:

In its narcissistic monologue the colonialist bourgeoisie, by way of its academics, had implanted in the minds of the colonized that the essential values – meaning Western values – remain eternal despite all errors attributable to man. The colonized intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas and there in the back of his mind stood a sentinel on duty guarding the Greco-Roman pedestal. (2007: 11)

Essentially, it is because of their education – which, in a colonial context, could only be classical and Western – that local intellectuals become alienated from their own communities and do not recognize them as representative of how they are or where they come from. And that is the reason why, according to Fanon, they are not a threat to the *status quo* anymore, as they have become part of the colonial establishment themselves. Fanon believes the colonized intellectual has to actively make the effort to rediscover their own culture, from which they have become alienated, by going back to its people.

Additionally, in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), Fanon – who was born in the French Caribbean, in Martinique – shares an insight into the deeply alienated minds of Caribbean children being taught history and approaching culture from the perspective of the white man. He focuses in particular on how Caribbean children end up assimilating the white man's Eurocentric perspective (see Hodge's “Proper Me” 2015: 68) because it is presented to them as the only form of civilization:

The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about “our ancestors, the Gauls”, identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to the savages – an all-white truth. [...] Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and the crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. When in school he has to read stories of savages told by white men, he always thinks of the Senegalese. [...] Because the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. (2008: 114)

Given the historical similarities between French and British colonialism in the Caribbean region – many of the islands in the archipelago have actually been under both French and British control numerous times, like Derek Walcott's native St. Lucia, which reportedly changed hands twelve times because of its strategic position (Walcott 1992: 31-44) – Fanon's critique holds true for the British Caribbean as well. Of course, the most powerful means to ensure that British culture was known and British values accepted throughout the region was colonial education, which this study has already explored in the previous chapter. Other means, such as mass media (at the time, mostly newspapers and radio broadcasts), religious beliefs and denominational networks, the import of products manufactured in Britain and the rest of the Empire also contributed to making British culture widely available and subtly present in the lives of colonial subjects across the Caribbean region.

Within a colonial context, however, British culture cannot and, in fact, *does not* exist in a vacuum. It entwines and coexists with other cultures – which, in the Caribbean, are the product of colonialism itself, in the form of slavery and forced migration – and there, despite the system's best efforts, British culture hybridizes. Hybridity, in this sense, already marks the failure of colonial propaganda. While, on a surface level, it is possible to determine the origin of a given custom or belief as belonging to a certain culture or tradition, on a deeper level, that custom belongs to a different culture already – not classical, British, West African, or Indian, but to Caribbean culture as a whole. And Caribbean, or West Indian, culture is hybrid by definition. It is not a choice, of course, but the product of centuries of oppression and violent history – nevertheless, hybridity is *de facto* the mark of Caribbean culture and, according to some, could also be its strength. In his essay, “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas” (1970), Wilson Harris quotes Denis Williams on the topic of culture and history in the Caribbean region:

Yet the first fact of the Caribbean situation is the fact of miscegenation, of mongrelism. What are the cultural implications of this mongrel condition? It is important to have experienced the homogeneity, richness, the integrity of the racially thoroughbred cultures of the Old West in order properly to take the force of this question. [...] For we are all shaped by our past; the imperatives of a

contemporary culture are predominantly those of a relationship to this past. Yet in the Caribbean we think and behave as though we have no past, no history, no culture. And where we do come to take notice of our history it is often in the light of biases adopted from one thoroughbred culture or another, of the Old World. (1970: 12)

Williams, and Harris with him, denounce the colonialist Eurocentric view of history and culture, which considers the New World as a minor appendage of Europe itself. They defend hybridity, or “miscegenation”, as the starting point of a new culture, a new perspective, which is born of out the “continuities” and “discontinuities” of old cultures, out of the issues on which they clash, and those where surprising balance is to be found – and, in their view, that new perspective, which contemporary culture sorely needs, can only originate from the Caribbean region, specifically because of its history. (Harris 1970: 25) Derek Walcott too deals extensively with the topic of hybridity of Caribbean culture in in seminal essay, “The Muse of History”. There, the Caribbean poet addresses his mixed-race ancestry and imagines to speak to his forefathers directly:

I accept this archipelago of the Americas. I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper “history”, for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive. [...] But to you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers, I give a strange thanks. I give the strange and bitter yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldiering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift. (1998: 64)

Having considered the cultural significance attributed to hybridity and mixed-heritage within Caribbean culture, and in the British Caribbean specifically, the study will now turn to the way the novels selected deal with the monumental themes of history and culture, in connection with the protagonists’ heritage and their growing understanding of the world around them, shaped by colonialism and racial inequality. The next section, in particular, will focus on the physical presence of colonial history in the Caribbean landscape and, inevitably, in the colonized minds of the children. This will be contrasted with the

themes of memory and the oral tradition – for instance, in the form of music and storytelling – and the way they are made to interact with so-called official history within the consciousness of the protagonists and in their daily lives. In this way, the central issue of “miscegenation” or hybridity shall be considered in order to determine its connotations and evaluate its overall significance within the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

The physical presence of colonial history: the “ruins of history” and their complex legacy

In his 2000 essay titled “The ‘High Anxiety’ of Belonging”, Kittitian-British novelist Caryl Phillips writes about history in terms of personal as well as collective memory, and the way the two combine to create what we call a sense of belonging. It is a personal essay, that traces the author’s heritage and life experiences, but at the same time it is a reflection on roots and their significance, especially within the context of the African diaspora. What is particularly interesting in Phillips’s essay is his focus on historical buildings, their practical use, and the way they are reinvented, in time, in order for contemporaries to come to terms with what these places used to represent. Phillips mentions Elmina’s Castle, in Ghana, the slave fortress built by the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century to facilitate the slave trade in Western Africa, but his reflection touches upon the Caribbean region as well. Phillips writes:

History is contained in buildings. [...] The half-crumbling sugar mills which litter the landscape of the Caribbean islands are an eloquent and painful reminder of Caribbean history. But what to do with them? Pull them down and make room for a condominium development? Leave them in their state of dereliction? Or rebuild them and charge tourists ten dollars to walk around them, and then offer these same people the opportunity to buy some molasses, or some sugar, or some local rum? What to do with our buildings? The answer is often to be found nestling neatly between two questions. To what extent do I belong to this place? How much do I want to forget? On coming face to face with our history the vexing questions of belonging and forgetting rise quickly to the surface. And near-cousin to the words ‘belonging’ and ‘forgetting’ is the single word, ‘home’. (2004: 10)

The author reflects on the ruins of the Caribbean islands, a constant reminder of their colonial past, and wonders what is to do with them – which also implies the issue of how to move on *from* them. The answer, as Philipps writes, has everything to do with the way one wants to remember history, in terms of belonging, or forgetting. “Whose past?”, Philipps asks in his essay, the same question that has been haunting Caribbean culture since its very beginning.

Jamaica Kincaid too touches upon the complexities and contradictions of colonial history in the Caribbean in her essay “A Small Place”, first published in 1988. Like Philipps’, it is a personal essay, but also a reflection on the island of Antigua, its colonial past, and the way that past impacts the island’s present, as it focuses on mass tourism as a new, subtler form of colonialism. In it, Kincaid denounces the tourist’s voyeuristic desire to visit “heaps of death and ruins” in order to feel “alive and inspired by the sight of it”. (2000: 16) She also points out how the island’s appearance, its monuments, its buildings, its very ruins, are inextricably linked with the colonial past of the Caribbean, whose traces are perfectly visible, but often ignored, or brushed aside. She writes: “In the Antigua that I knew, we lived on a street named after an English maritime criminal, Horatio Nelson, and all the other streets around us were named after some other English maritime criminals”. (2000: 24) Kincaid also recalls the history of the local school and library, now in ruins, where the generic “you” the author addresses – the tourist from Europe and the colonial past this figure represents – is responsible for having “distorted and erased my history to glorify your own”. (2000: 36)

The insistence on the “ruins of history” is a very noticeable *topos* of Caribbean culture: both in metaphorical and objective terms, the theme occupies a central position in Caribbean consciousness, and its link with the colonial past of the region is almost inevitable. Of course, the paradigm gets declined differently by different authors, according to their sensibility. Consider, for instance, Wilson Harris’s metaphor concerning “the rubble of the past”, by looking into which, by reinventing which, new art can be created and old wounds can begin to heal. (1970: 9) In “The Muse of History”, Derek Walcott chooses to contrast the relative paucity of ruins that characterizes the New World with the ruins of Europe, which, in contrast, is overrun with them. In this respect, according to Walcott, the great poets of the New World see man as “Adamic”, as “he has paid his accounts to Greece and Rome and walks in a world without monuments and ruins”. (1998: 37-38) It has to be considered that Walcott’s “The Muse of History” was written specifically to invite Caribbean authors to move beyond the resentment of colonial times, which Walcott felt was limiting their artistic development. V. S. Naipaul too insists on the “ruins of history” on several occasions.

Most significantly in *A Way in the World*, where he writes: “The history of the place was known; its reminders were all around us; scratch us and we all bled.” (2011: 31)

Predictably, the theme of the physical presence of history in the Caribbean landscape, in the forms of buildings, ruins, monuments, and so forth, features heavily in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition. The connotations are different: while it is true that the “ruins of history” mainly feature as a reminder of a colonial past that keeps impacting the present – especially as the novels selected all take place before the end of British colonial control in the Caribbean region, even though some of them were published afterwards – those very ruins affect the protagonists in different ways, depending on the individual, the direction of the narrative, and also on the type of monuments that the authors decide to focus on. Consider, for instance, the presence of tombstones, graves, and funerary monuments to colonial personalities that the protagonists come into contact with during their personal journey.

In *Abeng*, where the themes of uncertainty and erased memory feature prominently – to the point where expressions such as “no one knew”, “without knowing”, “not knowing much”, and similar, recur constantly, like a refrain – the tombs of former landowners are also immersed in this aura of mystery:

People around said that the graves were as old as slavery times – and the names, of a planter and his wife, had been erased by rains, and the spaces where the names had been, obliterated by a heavy green mold. Some people said that the planter and his wife had been killed by a raiding party of Maroons, but no one was sure. (1995: 112)

It seems significant that natural phenomena, such as rains and moss, are mentioned as the reason for the names of the planters having been erased, especially when considering that throughout the novel Cliff draws a clear line dividing the city from the country: the first being connected with English culture, education, and social expectations, the second with natural landscapes, the African heritage, and a deeper, less explored, feeling of belonging. The country, in fact, is connected in the novel with Clare’s mother and the Afro-Caribbean side of the family: “It seemed to Clare that Kitty [her mother] came alive only in the bush,

while Boy [her father] armed himself against it, carrying newspapers, and books and liquor, and a Swiss watch to mark the time”. (1995: 49) Additionally, the Jamaican bush is also connected with the Maroons. They originated as organized communities of runaway slaves, who made for the bush in order to escape the plantations. Occasionally, the Maroons organized raids against the plantation owners and their properties in order to free other slaves. In *Abeng*, the history of the Maroons is expounded on in a number of *excursus*, but the idea of their history having been erased by official sources remains central. The plantation owners might have been killed in a raid, Cliff points out, but, as it often happens with local history, whose significance is not recognized by colonial officials, “no one was sure”.

In *Beka Lamb* too graves and tombstones occupy a central position. At the beginning of the book, for instance, the reader finds out that the girls often meet near Baron Bliss’s grave and “they never failed to make up stories about why the crippled British Baron had left his entire fortune to the country”, that is to Belize. (2007: 13) Baron Bliss was an English nobleman, born in the second half of the 19th century, who travelled through the Caribbean, and, supposedly moved by the hospitality of the people from Belize (then British Honduras), decided to leave them his own fortune. What is most interesting about the story is the fact that Baron Bliss never actually set foot in Belize, as when he arrived at the harbour in Belize City, he was too sick to leave his ship. However, he was buried there, as per the instructions contained in his will. Therefore, on the one hand, the physical presence of history sparks the need for an explanation – even a creative one. Or, as Wilson Harris explains, *especially* a creative one, as it has the power to confront history and tell those stories that, across the centuries, have been suppressed (see Harris’s *The Womb of Space*). On the other hand, graves also evoke the Romantic idea of death as the great leveler. Edgell writes:

It was fun to go then [to the cemetery], scrabbling over the broken graves, trying to make out the names and the dates, or to gather coco plums from the bushes that grew in thick clumps on that side of the island. When Toycie and herself were younger, they’d sit on the crumbling grave stones eating the fleshy pink and white plums as they played a guessing game, trying to figure out which graves might be buccaneer graves and which were slave people’s graves, or wondering whether the early settlers buried treasures in the graves like the Mayas used to do when priests and nobles died. (2007 58-59)

Time has made the graves unrecognizable, to the point where the girls struggle to read the names and the dates, and have to guess who the monuments used to belong to. Though history in the form of ruins is everywhere, part of that history is lost to time: it cannot be recovered by means of research, as the documents are lacking and the ruins are in an irreversible state of decay. However, forgotten histories can be grasped through impressions, feelings, and moments of irrationality. Something of the kind seems to happen soon afterwards, when Beka and Toychie run back to the house across the graveyard “as if all the ghosts of long-dead slaves were pursuing them”. (2007: 59)

Kincaid also employs the imagery of graves in a significant way. The girls from Annie’s school use the graveyard as a private meeting place, to share their secrets and talk about their lives. The author describes it as such:

It was in a nook of some old tombstones – a place discovered by girls going to our school long before we were born – shaded by trees with trunks so thick it would take four arm’s lengths to encircle them, that we would sit and talk about the things we said were on our minds that day [...] What perfection we found in each other, sitting on these tombstones of long-dead people who had been the masters of our ancestors! Nothing in particular really troubled us [...] We were sure that the much-talked-about future that everybody was preparing us for would never come, for we had such a powerful feeling against it, and why shouldn’t our will prevail this time? (1997: 50)

The passage is quite clear in claiming – or, better, reclaiming – the graveyard as an exclusively female space. The tombs of dead white masters are contrasted very clearly in the text with the black schoolgirls who choose those very tombs to meet, gossip, and do forbidden things: “We would sit and sing bad songs and, of course, show each other various parts of our bodies”. (1997: 80) The idea of desecration is implied as the long-dead masters are evoked, but are of course powerless to intervene. In this sense, the moments described by Kincaid in the graveyard should be read as acts of rebellion against both the legacy of colonialism and the patriarchal system. The refusal to accept the “much-talked-about future” is, on the girls’ part, an attempt to escape the pressure of both systems, which in the graveyard, and in the graveyard only, have the appearance of being dead and buried. Once again, graves and tombs take on complex meanings: they offer a refuge, a momentary respite

from the harshness of the world, while at the same hinting at a past which, despite appearances, has not been buried at all.

Graves are not the only means by which history and its ruins make their way into the present. In *Abeng*, for instance, where graves and tombs do feature quite prominently, an important section of the narrative is occupied by the visit to a different type of ruin, the colonial estate. Clare, the protagonist, is a mixed-race girl whose father is very proud of his English heritage, therefore, at the beginning of the novel, he takes her to visit the plantation house that used to belong to their family, the Savages. Cliff writes:

Father and daughter drove through the gate of the estate and up the drive toward the great house. It was still standing. Barely standing in the center of the subdivision. A large wooden sign saying PARADISE PLANTATION was propped up against the verandah railing, and they could tell that the great house had been left by the developers as a “come on”, to convince prospective clients they could buy into the past. Capture history in their summer homes. (1995: 24)

The episode is marked by Clare’s ambivalence, where, on the one hand, she is encouraged by her father to be proud of her ancestors and their history, but, on the other, she feels more drawn to a different part of her heritage, represented by the backyard where the outbuildings used to stand: “These buildings out back, only a few yards from the great house, had once contained molasses and rum and slaves”. This part of history is less than ruins, it has practically disappeared, with only “the foundation stones” of the former warehouses being visible, alongside “the traces in the earth which Clare could now see indicated where the slave cabins had been”. (1995: 26) Boy, however, Clare’s father, is not interested in these other ruins, as he refuses to acknowledge they are also part of his history.

Similarly, in *Crick Crack Monkey*, Aunt Beatrice takes pride in displaying the photograph of “The White Ancestress, Elizabeth Helen Carter” in her living room, taking care to point out how similar to the lady her daughter Carol looks, while at the same time believing Elizabeth to have been “the last ancestor worthy of mention, for after her things went from bad to worse”. In the novel, Aunt Beatrice actively blames the protagonist’s father and his family for this, as soon after introducing the white ancestress she tells Tee: “If it hadn’t been for him [...] you might have looked like her”. (2015: 90) Much like in Cliff’s

Abeng, in Hodge's novel too the protagonist is torn between conflicting feelings of belonging that are developed partly in response partly in contrast to the wishes of her family. In both cases, the colonial house and the portrait stand for the white British heritage that one side of the protagonist's family values so much they choose to either ignore or actively resent the reality of being mixed-race.

Other instances of buildings and physical objects representing the complex relationship between the individual and their heritage (on a different level, the relationship between the community and its history) are, predictably, linked with places of education as well as political and/or economic power. As with graves or tombs, their connotations tend to be very nuanced. For instance, as previously mentioned, Baron Bliss is a significant figure in Belizean history, and as such features prominently in *Beka Lamb*. Many places carry his name and, among Beka's favourite, is the Bliss Institute, "where the library was located". Edgell writes:

In the Institute they would look at the neatly-spaced Maya artefacts in glass cases, puzzling over the amazing items displayed there, or the girls would hold up the boys [Beka's little brothers] simultaneously so they could peer up onto the empty stage of the auditorium. Then they sat on a front row of chairs, gazing straight ahead, pretending to be most important persons watching a play. Although the library itself was always closed on Sunday, Toycie would 'mind' Chuku and Zandy while Beka ran quietly upstairs to look through the glass doors at the books stacked neatly on the shelves. (2015: 14)

Despite being largely empty and significantly partly closed-off, the Bliss Institute does not strike the reader, on the whole, as a negatively-connotated space. The initial impression of peace, reflection, and knowledge is reinforced by a second trip when Beka and Toycie find comfort in the building – "what a blessing, it was open, always a sanctuary" (2015: 108) – after Emilio breaks Toycie's heart and leaves her to go to Mexico. Additionally, Beka is shown borrowing books from the Institute's library many times in the novel, for pleasure but also for research. Despite the notion that education is still not freely available to anyone, which the author does seem to stress, the Bliss Institute largely lives up to the legacy of the almost-legendary Baron from which it takes its name in terms of its inexplicable, but generally positive connection with the protagonist, her country, and her world.

In *The Schoolmaster* too a place of learning occupies a central role, as the elementary school in Kumaca is built by the villagers with the help of the priest. (2015: 51) The building here represents progress, and the hope for a better future by means of colonial education (the only type of formal education available at the time), while at the same time destabilizing the community by having the schoolmaster come from the outside and take advantage of his position of power. It is easy to read in the closed-off village of Kumaca, which longs for the outside world and yet is scared of it and susceptible to being taken advantage of, a metaphor for the circumstances of the island of Trinidad in the 1940s, where the story is set. In Lovelace's novel, the outside world is represented by the new school and personified by the schoolmaster, but it is also connected with the American military presence on the island – a historical reality, as, during WWII, the U.K. government allowed the United States to build military bases on the island. In fact, in *The Schoolmaster*, the Americans are building a road to connect the remote village of Kumaca to the nearby town of Zanilla.

The image of the road being used to represent progress as well as the dangers of external influence is not coincidental. Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* is also set in Trinidad in the 1940s, and as such it also focuses on the American presence on the island and the road the American soldiers are about to build. In this case, it is the biggest road ever built in Trinidad, the so-called Churchill-Roosevelt Highway. The protagonist, Tiger, is employed by the Americans to help build the road, but he is also forced to renounce a portion of his garden as it has been decided that the road will have to pass through there. As Roydon Salick points out, the road carries articulate metaphorical connotations:

A Brighter Sun, like so many other West Indian novels of adolescence, is a retelling of the myth of the loss of innocence and the acquisition of knowledge. The winding highway, then, lying 'shimmer(ing)' across the land, is the serpent that destroys a happy, pristine relationship between man and his garden. It suggests the intrusion of a foreign presence in the garden, and brings with it irreversible change, a new sense of power and unprecedented knowledge. (Selvon 1988: introduction)

Clearly, the road symbolism is significant both for Tiger on the level of personal growth and in terms of a collective sense of history and the future. It has negative connotations – foreign intrusion, first of all, but Salick also mentions its connection with death, as an old man is run over on the highway itself – while at the same time representing

the protagonist's desire for change. However, as change happens, it is presented in terms of violent rupture – a new banishment from Eden, which, as it increases knowledge, it also causes more suffering.

Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* also features a physical reminder of colonialism, in the form of the landlord's house (once the plantation house) on the hill overlooking the village. The house is presented in the novel as a place of power, as the narrative focuses heavily on the decisions made by the landlord in connection with local politicians – decisions which affect the people living in the village and their housing conditions, over which they have no control. The narrative also appears to draw a line separating the landlord's house from the village in terms of the world they belong to, an inside/outside kind of scenario that is best described in the novel on the occasion the protagonist's trespassing into the garden in order to watch the party happening inside the house. Lamming describes the scene:

The house looked so much bigger than I had thought. It was like some of the castles we had seen in pictures. There wasn't much light on our side, but we could see from the reflection in the distance that the other side was fully lit. We bent low and crept through the bush and between the trees to the other side. [...] We were well hidden and we sat easy and quiet taking in the spectacle before us. The music had started again and the sailors were dancing. Most of them looked tidier and more civilized than the sailors we saw in the streets. Some of the women wore evening frocks decorated with big bright buttons and jewels and necklaces that went around the throat like a decorous dog's collar. [...] We didn't speak. It was so different from the open-air meeting or the school concert or anything we had seen. It was like what we called the other world. (2016: 187-188)

The boys are hiding and watching the party from the landlord's house garden, which they normally would not have access to, and the scene they witness has the flavour of a dream or a fantasy (the castle, the "civilized" sailors, the ladies' jewels). The feeling is heightened by the boys' unfamiliarity with what is happening in front of them and by an acute sense of not belonging. The house, in fact, works as a barrier or boundary and a physical reminder of the inequality and exclusion at the heart of British colonialism.

It is interesting to compare Lamming's scene with a very similar one described in *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack* by Clarke. In this case, instead of the plantation house, the "fantasy" takes place inside the Marine hotel. The reader will recall Kincaid's "A

Small Place” and her attack on mass tourism, which she interprets as a new form of colonialism; Clarke here offers an insight as to how mass tourism impacts local communities in terms of their sense of belonging. In the scene, the protagonist is watching the hotel’s New Year Eve party from outside the wall, which possibly increases the inside/outside fracture that has been observed in *In the Castle of my Skin*. Clarke writes:

Outside the free wall hundreds of boys and unemployed men, and some girls who were old enough to have boyfriends and be out at night would stand in the dew dressed in men’s jackets [...] We would dance to the music in our own rhythmic steps, moving over the pebbles in the road, and watch the white people inside because the Marine was ‘blasted sirrigated [segregated]’. The men inside wore formal black suits that turned them into undertakers. And the women were white in long dresses skating over the huge dance floor [...] We watched them from below the wall. And we dreamed of becoming powerful and rich, to join them, to be like them. (2003: 32)

In Clarke’s novels there are two parties dancing to the same music: the local black people outside, and the white tourists inside. Clarke even mentions how they dance differently from one another. The wall separates them clearly, evoking their belonging to “the other world” Lamming speaks about, a physical boundary Clarke’s characters openly refer to as segregation.

As the texts clearly show, there is a tendency within Caribbean literature, and in the Bildungsroman genre specifically, to focus on the physical presence of colonial history in the Caribbean territory. As Phillips (2004) explains in his essay, this is done to spark reflection on the past and on the future, both at the level of the individual, and at that of the community as a whole. The various authors address the complex heritage of British colonialism in different ways, either focusing on “ruins” and their connotations or on what has become of them, but always with the clear understanding that, despite the divide, British culture does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. As per Clarke’s metaphor, the music is heard on the other side of the wall too, and people dance to it the way they choose to. Having focused on the ruins and monuments of colonial history and the way they are addressed in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, the study will now analyze the way local culture is portrayed in the very same novels, by focusing on the central themes of tradition, memory, and the spoken word.

“Invisible histories” and the oral tradition: music, storytelling, and magical-religious practices

It is necessary to make clear within the fabric of imaginative exploration that we shall pursue that homogeneity is a biological hypothesis that relates all mankind to a basic or primordial ancestor, but as a cultural model, exercised by a ruling ethnic group, it tends to become an organ of conquest and division because of *imposed* unity that actually subsists on the oppression of others. (Harris 1983: XVIII)

In the introduction to his monography, *A Womb of Space*, Wilson Harris warns of the dangers of cultural homogeneity being used as a tool of oppression and propaganda. He points to the issue of “imposed unity” as a tool of colonialism and views elements of what he calls “cultural heterogeneity” or “cross-cultural capacity” in literature as attempts to come to terms with suppressed histories and move forward through the act of artistic creation – virtually, the only way in which this kind of rebirth, or regeneration, is possible. A similar view is expressed by British-Guyanese author Fred D’Aguiar in the interview he gave to Maria Frías in 1997, significantly published with the title “Building Bridges Back to the Past.” In it, D’Aguiar speaks of the way his novels and poetic works relate to history and the past, while focusing on “people and their experiences rather than [...] [on] a rehearsal of dates and events”. (2002: 418) While discussing his 1994 novel, *The Longest Memory*, which focuses on the theme of slavery in Virginia, D’Aguiar explains his understanding of the purpose of writing historical fiction. Frías reports:

“For me, the German 18th century philosopher J. G. Herder's term *einfehlen* says it all, that fiction about history should be the act of feeling one's way into the past, not by holding a mirror but by stepping through the mirror into the unknown. Without ever leaving the plantation, old Whitechapel experiences history (slavery, the middle passage). By remaining on the plantation and relying on his own memory (personal and collective), as painful as it is, he records, in his own version of *einfehlen*, a new history.” (2002: 420)

Whitechapel, the old slave, one of the most significant speaking voices in *The Longest Memory*, experiences and re-creates history, according to D'Aguiar, by relying on personal and collective memory. The focus on memory and orality, as opposed to literacy and writing, which were forbidden to slaves, is one of the central themes of the novel, and actively relates to the purpose of writing historical fiction, which, according to both Harris and D'Aguiar, is to understand history by using fiction in order to tell those stories, or *histories*, which have been suppressed by official sources. That explains why orality plays such a central role in novels dealing with black history and the themes of slavery and the Middle Passage. In *Il presente come storia* (2015), Luca Rastello talks about memory as plural, polyphonic and contradictory, as he believes that a single perspective (comparable to what Harris calls “imposed unity”) is insufficient proof when the purpose is that of truly understanding history. Rastello writes:

Memory is most precious, but only on the condition of being subsumed into the struggle of history, the struggle of laying many interpretations, many “memories”, on a table – like Nelson Mandela did, for instance – and negotiating between different interpretations, and even accepting to reach an artificial agreement, because the objective, which is impossible in some respects, is to understand history.¹ (2015)

It is by referring to this theoretical framework, that this section will analyze the way in which memory and the oral tradition are dealt with in the novels selected, in terms of their connection to the complex history of the Caribbean region and the way they compare and relate to so-called official history – that of British colonialism. The focus on “invisible histories” will conclude the chapter on culture and belonging, by offering examples of what has so far been variously termed “polyphony”, “miscegenation” and “cross-cultural capacity”, and by evaluating the impact of such choices on the single narratives and the development of the Caribbean Bildungsroman genre as a whole.

¹ My translation. “La memoria è preziosissima, fondamentale, a condizione che sia sussunta nella fatica della storia, la fatica cioè di mettere molte interpretazioni, molte “memorie”, su un tavolo – come ha fatto, ad esempio, Nelson Mandela – e di negoziare tra interpretazioni diverse, accettando anche di arrivare a un accordo artificiale, perché l'obiettivo, per certi versi impossibile, è di capire il passato.”

The titles of at least two of the novels selected for this study contain clues as to the relevance of orality within the narrative. *Crick Crack, Monkey* by Hodge has already been discussed as featuring in the title the closing lines typical of Anansi stories: “‘Crick crack?’ [...] ‘Monkey break ‘e back / On a rotten pommerac [sic]!’” (2015: 15) This section will focus on the origins and history of Anansi stories and their connection to the Afro-Caribbean experience later on. Another title which points to the importance of orality in the context of the African diaspora is Cliff’s *Abeng*, whose meaning is explained by the author herself in the acknowledgments page: “*Abeng* is an African word meaning conch shell. The blowing of the conch called the slaves to the canefields in the West Indies. The *abeng* had another use: it was the instrument used by the Maroon armies to pass their messages and reach one another.” (1995: no page number) The reference to the conch shell is significant on a number of levels: firstly, it introduces the theme of the African diaspora and the discussion on “roots” and belonging. Secondly, while relating to the context of orality, it presents the specific themes of sound and music, which play a central role in Caribbean identity. Thirdly, by referring to an object with such contrasting connotations, it appears to refer, on the one hand, to the complex and often contradictory – one could say “cross-cultural” – legacy of Caribbean history, of which re-appropriation and reclaiming are an important part, and, on the other, to the way that history is told, from what perspective, and with what purpose.

While Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* appears to go in a different direction, with a metaliterary title referring to a line in Derek Walcott’s *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos*, in terms of structure Lamming’s novel too shows its concern with orality and especially its link with memory. This is particularly evident in the polyphonic nature of the work, which, despite being mainly concerned with G.’s story, leaves considerable space to other perspectives and voices – often quite literally, as is the case with the boys’ group dialogue at school (2016: 42), or with the Ma and Pa scene (2016: 79), which are written as theatre pieces, with the character names and their lines only, and no additional information about the characters’ actions, their feelings, or the context in which the scene is taking place. Orality, then, is clearly relevant to “invisible histories” and their portrayal in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. For the purpose of this study, the larger topic of “orality” will be divided into subcategories which are going to be analyzed separately: the first being music, especially in connection with Carnival celebrations and the calypso tradition; the second being storytelling, in terms of orally-transmitted myths and Anansi stories; and the third being culturally-connotated community rites, with close attention to obeah.

As is likely known, Carnival is a Catholic celebration and, therefore, at least partly connected with the colonial presence of European Catholic powers in the Caribbean region. As Ernest D. Brown explains, it is one of the most significant French contributions to Trinidadian culture and it was originally a bourgeois festival exclusively for the whites and the free blacks. (1990: 83) However, not every aspect of Carnival is connected to Europe and European culture. Hollis Urban Liverpool (1998) speaks of the spiritual meaning of wearing a mask and connects it with West Africans rites which include masquerading, such as the Yoruba celebration of Egungun. Harris (1970) traces the origins of the limbo dance, also connected with Carnival celebrations, back to the history of the Middle passage. But even the now-established connection between calypso music and Carnival is rooted in the history of the African diaspora more than in the European version of Carnival celebrations. Calypso music originated in Trinidad as a way to express the rivalry between slave gangs competing with each other in the plantations. After Emancipation, it turned into a symbol for the freedom gained by the black population of Trinidad and started to focus on the ruling classes instead, which became the target of the mocking songs composed on every Emancipation Day anniversary. It finally came to coincide with the Catholic celebration of Carnival, which in Trinidad lasts two days instead of three because of the 1884 British ban on *Camboulay* (Sunday, the first day of Carnival). (Brown 1990) In spite of their link with Catholicism and the island of Trinidad specifically, in the 20th century calypso music and Carnival became representative of Caribbean culture as a whole thanks to the international success gained by famous calypsonians, such as Lord Kitchener. Because of this, calypso music is significantly present in several of the novels selected, not just by Trinidadian authors, often in connection with the themes of cultural/ethnic/national identity and the characters' sense of belonging.

For instance, in Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, which is set in Trinidad, calypso music carries different meanings, depending on the context, the speaker, and the characters involved. When the American official condescendingly addresses Tiger by saying: "If you had a guitar [...] and could sing us some calypsoes- [sic]" (1985: 174), he is obviously stereotyping and assuming Tiger knows how to play and sing simply because he is from Trinidad. However, calypso music and Carnival do play a central role in the book, as in the last chapter, when WWII ends, "pandemonium reigned as Trinidadians were allowed to indulge in two days of Carnival, an annual festival which was held up when the war broke out." (1985: 210) Additionally, during the celebrations, Tiger's friend and neighbour Joe makes his first public appearance as a member of a local steelband, "pounding out calypsoes

[sic] and shaking his body to the rhythm”. (1985: 212) The Carnival celebrations are thus presented as the occasion in which the country comes together, regardless of personal differences. Throughout the novel Tiger’s Indian origins are presented as something that sets him apart and isolates him from the community, however, in Selvon’s view, Carnival and calypso music – despite being rooted, on the one hand, in Catholicism and, on the other, in the history of the Africa diaspora – appear to go beyond racial boundaries to become representative of the country as a whole.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Seaforth’s *Growing up with Miss Milly* too deals with calypso music and its connotations. What is particularly interesting about the choice is that the novel is set in Jamaica, not in Trinidad, where calypso originated, therefore it testifies to the widespread interest in the genre that characterizes the Caribbean region. On the one hand, Wilby’s father, Lenny, is a performer and a lyricist for calypsonians – Milly says he “had been writing calypsos since Attila the Hun and never get a cent from it” (1988: 74) – and the narrative seems to play with the stereotype of the struggling artist who scrapes by and does not seem to care about anything that is not himself and his music (see Selvon’s short story *Calypsonian* (1995: 24-32) for more on this trope). On the other, Wilby is interested in music too, but Milly does not believe he should pursue it, as she thinks he should focus solely on school. Possibly because of Lenny’s influence, Milly is prejudiced towards calypso music and musicians in general – “she had never allowed herself to believe that a boy like that [who writes calypsos and poems about revolution] could write ‘proper grammar’” (1988: 74) – and even argues with her sister Gertie, who lives in North America and comes back to Jamaica in order to celebrate Carnival, on this topic: “Yuh leave all dat clean, nice white snow to come an jump in a band wid hot, sweaty people yuh don’t even know”. (1988: 113)

Ultimately, as already mentioned, Wilby wins a scholarship to a Canadian school thanks to his music and extra-curricular activities, thus proving Milly wrong. This narrative choice allows the author to show a more complex and multi-faceted representation of musicians and musical talent in the Caribbean region, while at the same time connecting Milly’s resistance to it to a general skepticism, on the part of the locals, to indigenous forms of music and art, which, because of cultural alienation, tend to be considered “not as respectable” as their Western counterpart. This is what Brown means when, telling the story of Bertie Marshall, whom he calls “a major innovator in the history of steelband”, he writes: “Like many poor parents with middle-class aspirations, the last thing Marshall’s mother wanted was for her child to show an interest in steelband or calypso”. (1990: 81) Thus, it is

not a coincidence that Wilby's American aunt is shown to be much more enthusiastic about "playing mas" than Milly is.

However, calypso music is not the only type of music to be featured in the novel selected, or to be connected with the African diaspora or the black Caribbean experience. Drayton's *Christopher* offers an interesting take on this from an outsider's perspective. The young white protagonist of the novel suffers from nightmares and struggles to sleep. His fears, which have to do with the complex relationship he has with his parents, are explicitly linked, in the narrative, with the sound of drums that the boy can hear in the night. Drayton writes:

On moonlit nights the labourers in the plantation villages collected to sing hymns. Their hymns were Christian, but the rhythms to which they sang them were African, simple and repetitive, gaining speed and volume as they gained in length. [...] Christopher's body grew taut as he heard the drums begin. The large and wandering shapes of half-sleep leapt upright and fused with the shadows in his room. He turned his face to the wall and drew the blanket up over his head. He listened – and knew he must not listen. The top of his head and ears felt unnaturally sensitive, as if a hand was poised on them or as if someone was watching him. He was afraid to look. He screwed his eyelids more tightly against the fold of his cheeks and lay still. Perhaps if "they" thought he was asleep they would go away. Where he rested on it his left temple pounded, slowly and noisily. (1972: 28)

It is interesting to consider this scene in comparison with the plantation house/Marine hotel scenes from Lamming and Clarke, which have been discussed in the previous section. Here too we find the inside/outside fracture between black and white Barbadians, and the sound of music connecting the two experiences, while at the same time separating them further. There is an element of fascination and recognition ("he listened – and knew he must not listen", "their hymns were Christian"), but the music is mainly connotated in nightmarish terms, as something foreign and menacing. It marks the anxiety growing in young Christopher and his feeling that some sort of ill-defined danger or "shadow" is lurking in the night. Having already discussed the significance of Christopher's name, it is easy to grasp the symbolic significance of the scene, which appears to point to unexpressed feelings of guilt and to ancient and recent wrongs alike coming back from the "nightmare of history" to haunt the white ruling classes.

A similar scene, albeit from a different perspective, can be found in Cliff's *Abeng* on the occasion of the funeral procession that Clare and her family encounter while heading back to town from the country. The mourners are shown to have adopted syncretic rituals, with African and Christian elements fused together "cross-culturally":

The procession moved forward underneath a steady hum, which at first seemed of the same key and pitch, but soon differentiated into harmony, led by the high falsetto of a man, whose voice circled the hum and turned it into a mounting chant. The words of the chant were strange, unrecognizable. "What are they saying?" Kitty turned to face her daughter on the back seat. "They are singing in an old language; it is an ancient song, which the slaves carried with them from Africa." "Some sort of pocomania song," Mr. Savage added, a bit smugly, as if to contradict the tone of his wife's voice, which had a reverence, even a belief to it. (1995: 50)

Clare's parents, as usual representing different aspects of the protagonist's heritage, react to the procession and the chant very differently, Kitty being moved and recognizing something of herself and her beliefs in it, while Boy makes a disparaging comment about the ritual and the people involved in it. The chant starts "strange" and "unrecognizable", but soon the mourners switch languages and move "from the complexity of an African chant to the simplicity of an English hymn. 'The night is dark and I am far from home'". (1995: 50) Here too the protagonist's contradictory feelings about the music – expressed aloud by her parents – are linked with the history of Jamaica and the survival of African cultural elements in modern society. While elements of foreignness are still used to characterize the chant, as it happens in *Christopher*, in *Abeng* there is no fear or sense of impending doom, possibly because of Kitty's closeness to it. As it often happens in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition, in Cliff's novel too music – as a way of preserving, transmitting, and re-inventing experiences and values within an oral context – is employed to evoke an ancestral, half-forgotten sense of community and belonging, and to raise questions about the role of this heritage in the protagonist's life and, on a larger scale, in the cross-cultural scenario of the 20th century Caribbean.

Much like calypso music is linked to the experience of the African diaspora, Anansi stories are a recognizably African feature of Caribbean folklore, and their roots are markedly

oral. Emily Zobel Marshall explains that Anansi means “spider” in the language of the Asante/Ashanti people of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) (2007: 30), and in fact Anansi is the name of the spider-like trickster God whose tales originated in this region. Marshall argues that Anansi represented the liminal space between (social) order and chaos in the context of Ashanti society, but that its meaning changed with slavery and the Middle Passage. She writes:

The Asante slaves brought the tales of their trickster hero with them to Jamaica, and the stories became popular in the plantations. However, it seems that whereas Anansi both tested and strengthened the social rules of Asante society, in the Jamaican plantation context, Anansi inverted social order without paradoxically upholding it. In other words, Anansi’s liminal force was interpreted differently in the Jamaican plantations as he functioned as a symbolic destructor of an enforced and abhorrent social order [...] Anansi becomes less spider and more man as he begins to symbolise the black slave stolen from Africa. (39-40)

The subversive nature of Anansi and of the oral transmission of African tales emerges in some of the novels selected too. As already mentioned, Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey* uses Anansi stories and storytelling to stress the protagonist’s Afro-Caribbean heritage and sense of belonging, which will later be tested by her being admitted into the house of Aunt Beatrice, who despises everything that reminds her of her black heritage. It is interesting to contrast the scene in which Tee’s paternal grandma tells the children an ancient African tale with the reception of Carnival celebrations in Aunt Beatrice’s (Tee’s maternal aunt) household. Hodge writes that during Carnival aunt Beatrice and her party sat amongst the “nice people who were in two minds about Carnival – saw the unmistakable niggeryness of the affair (real nigger-break-loose, said Bernadette) but were not able either to stay at home and extract themselves from it”. (2015: 94) By becoming a part of Aunt Beatrice’s household, Tee, too, develops a sense of shame and distance, which separates her from her roots and the way she grew up with the other side of her family. In fact, the beginning of the book – which describes Tee’s childhood years spent with her paternal aunt Tantie – is characterized by a very different attitude towards African traditions and rites. Hodge writes:

Our grandmother [...] did not use up too many words at a time either, except when she sat on the step, with us teeming around her, when there as a moon, and told us

‘nancy-stories [alternate spelling for “Anansi stories”]. If the night was too dark, or if it was raining there was no story-telling – it was inconceivable to her that one should sit inside a house and tell ‘nancy-stories. At full moon there was a bonus and then we would light a black-sage fire for the mosquitoes and sand-flies and the smoke smelt like contented drowsiness. And when at the end of the story she said ‘Crick crack?’ our voices clambered over one another in the gleeful haste to chorus back in what ended on an untidy shrieking crescendo: ‘Monkey break ‘e back / On a rotten pommerac! [sic]’ (2015: 14-15)

Some of the elements that feature prominently in the storytelling scene are the connection with history – here represented by the grandmother, who does not speak much, except for when she tells tales to the children, thus connecting an ancient past that goes beyond her own years and life experiences with the future represented by the younger generations – and the idea of story-telling as a community activity (“it was inconceivable to her that one should sit inside a house and tell ‘nancy-stories”), which even implies the participation of the audience.

In *Beka Lamb* Edgell uses Anansi stories in a similar fashion. The author describes the wake held in remembrance of Beka’s great-grandmother, and the characters themselves discuss how wakes have changed in time, mainly because of the influence of British colonialism: “Oh but wakes was lively things when I was young! [...] What a good wake we had same night as the death. Not the coffee and johnny cake kind they keep nowadays. Nowadays it’s law this, and law that. The body gets buried before a proper wake. Takes the life out of the whole thing”. (2007: 75) According to Miss Winny, who recalls how people used to dance all night the sound of drumming in the old days, “nowadays everybody so genteel with all this education [...] that they shame to do the old things”. (2007: 76) The concept of having a “proper wake” comes back in the novel on the occasion of Toychie’s death, which Beka can only process by holding her own wake in honour of her friend. However, even the too-modern wake for Beka’s great-grandmother displays elements of a tradition that is neither Christian nor British in its origin. Anansi stories help place the occasion of the wake in the context of the African presence in the Caribbean region:

There [on the front steps] a gathering of children sat listening eagerly to Uncle Curo, a glass in his hand, telling of a day long ago when Brer Anancy [Anansi], the spider, flattered Brer Alligator into carrying him safely to the opposite bank of

the Sibun River. Occasionally, the children laughed in loud bursts of self-recognition, at the knowing twists Uncle Curo gave to the familiar tale. (2007: 72)

Like in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, here too storytelling is presented as an outdoor community activity. It is interesting to note that Uncle Curo mentions the Sibun River in Belize – which has the effect of giving the story a more local flavour. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of orality and orally-transmitted tales, as opposed to writing, is the chance to twist the story in different directions, according to the occasion and the specific audience. Orality, then, appears to lend itself quite naturally to what D’Aguiar describes as the purpose of historical fiction by means of *einfehlen*: the creation of a new history – or, better, of several new histories that defy bias and censorship, as they are based on personal experiences.

In Hodge’s novel, however, which is the most closely connected with Afro-Caribbean orality culture, not all tales are Anansi tales. Consider, for instance, the following passage, in which Tee describes her attempt to raid the local estate and escape the terrifying Mr Brathwaite:

I had only ever raided the Estate in Mikey’s company, for there was danger about, blood-curling danger. For Mr Brathwaite who lived in the depths of the acres and acres of Santa Clara estate was a spirit. Centuries and centuries ago he had killed a woman, a very beautiful woman who was a servant in the Estate house, and the woman’s man had worked an obeah on him so he couldn’t die. At full moon he turned into a lagahou and by the light of the moon met the woman, who had naturally meanwhile turned into a djablesse. (2007: 62)

The term “lagahou” comes from the French *loup garou* (literally: werewolf), but actually describes a creature closer to a vampire. The tale testifies to the link between Trinidad and its French heritage, which has been mentioned before while describing the origins of Carnival. However, French terms and cultural references change their meaning as they are absorbed into Trinidadian (one could say Caribbean) culture and elements of syncretism become more and more prominent. The reference to obeah – here connotated negatively as a sort of curse, the product of black magic, but which has a more complex array of meanings in Caribbean culture – introduces the third and final type of “invisible history”

that shall be dealt with in this section, that of religious and magical practices whose origins can be traced back to Western Africa and the history of slavery in the Caribbean.

As we have seen, both calypso music and Anansi stories are practices which have their roots in African culture and folklore. Their development was shaped by the history of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, and because of that they have taken on additional meanings and connotations which did not necessarily characterize these practices at their inception. Obeah has had a similar history. There is evidence of colonial authorities attempting to ban such practices as far back as 1760, when the slave revolt known as Tacky's Rebellion broke out in Jamaica and saw the involvement of obeah practitioners. Browne (2011) tackles the issue of obeah at the time of slavery by referring to case files and documents connected with court rulings about slaves accused of such a crime. He traces the complex history of obeah and stresses how it was "an ambivalent and ambiguous practice: it could be used to heal or harm, to preserve life or to destroy it". (2011: 459) He also points out how obeah practitioners were both respected and feared by the slaves, who approached them with their problems but were also suspicious of their power. (2011: 461)

Obeah did not end with Emancipation, however, and the novels selected for this study well describe the fascination, fear, and reticence which still surrounded such practices around the mid- and late 20th century. In *Abeng*, for instance, Mr Powell, the schoolteacher, blames many of Jamaica's issues on superstition and the belief in magic. He thinks that "these people [...] had to be taught to rise above their past and to forget about all the nonsense of *obeah* or they would never amount to anything". (1995: 87) However, views such as these are contrasted in the novel with frequent *excursus* on the history of the Maroons and their practices, including obeah. Consider, for instance, the following passage about Nanny, the obeah-woman, which links magic and religious practices with the history of slave rebellions:

In 1733, Nanny, the sorceress, the *obeah*-woman, was killed by a *quashee* – a slave faithful to the white planters – at the height of the War of the Maroons. Nanny, who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless, was from the Empire of Ashanti, and carried the secrets of her magic into slavery. She prepared amulets and oaths for her armies. Her Nanny Town, hidden in the crevices of the Blue Mountains, was the headquarters of the Windward Maroons

[...] They waged war from 1655-1740. Nanny was the magician of this revolution – she used her skills to unite her people and to consecrate their battles. (1995: 15)

The explicit contrast between education, propriety, and colonial law on one side, and old “superstitions” and the history of resistance to British colonialism on the other, is a central theme in *Abeng* – one that has also been observed in *Beka Lamb*, for example, on the occasion of the wake for the protagonist great-grandmother, when the characters discuss on how things used to be done before it became “law this, and law that”. In Kincaid’s *Annie John*, the element of science and medicine is added too, as Annie’s parents disagree on the best way to treat Annie’s illness, which, from the description given in the novel, appears to be depression. Kincaid writes:

My mother and my father, sometimes together, sometimes separately stood at the foot of my bed and looked down at me. They spoke to each other. I couldn’t hear what they said, but I could see the words leave their mouths. [...] Most likely, my father said that it was all the studying I had been doing at school, that I had moved along from form to form too fast and it had taken a heavy toll. Most likely, my mother agreed, but she also would have said that, just to be sure, she would call Ma Jolie, an obeah woman from Dominica who now lived not far from our house, and who was recommended to my mother by her mother, Ma Chess, who still lived in Dominica. To the Ma Jolie idea, my father would have said, “Very well, but count me out; have her come when I’m not here.” (1997: 109-110)

While Annie’s father believes only a doctor could help heal Annie, her mother is open to different possibilities, and will later call upon both Ma Jolie and Ma Chess for help. It is interesting to note that in both this quotation and the one from *Abeng* about Nanny the sorceress, obeah appears to be a positive force. While it is true that the narrative in *Annie John* does not connect her healing with obeah, it is also significant that the obeah women are called upon to help heal Annie with their powers, and not to do harm. In the same way, Nanny helps the Maroon army fight for freedom and the end of slavery with her amulets and enchantments. In Edgell’s novel too, obeah is mentioned in terms of what it could do to help Toycie’s mental illness, much like it happens in *Annie John*. However, the reference here is indirect and peculiarly syncretic, as Beka juxtaposes core Christian beliefs with her understanding of what an obeah practitioner is supposed to do. Edgell writes:

Beka entered Holy Redeemer Cathedral, near the canal that flowed into the creek. She set her books on a pew right at the back of the church and knelt to pray. At first she had been unable to decide which person of the Trinity to ask for help. In the end she chose the Holy Ghost. His reputation was very much like that of an obeahman's and Beka was in desperate need of a little supernatural intervention for her friend, Toycie, that very afternoon. (2007: 141)

The miracle Beka asks for does not come to pass, but once again the reference to obeah and its syncretic link with the Christian faith appear to present this kind of practice firstly as something extremely commonplace, and secondly as a positive supernatural influence on a person's everyday life. This is clearly very different from the blood-curling tale in *Crick Crack, Monkey* where the obeah man curses Mr Brathwaite into turning into an undead vampire-like creature at every full moon. However, as Browne (2011) writes, there is an element of danger connected with the history of obeah and, among the novels selected, this appears to emerge most prominently, and possibly not by accident, in Drayton's *Christopher*.

The second section of the novel, the one that focuses on the figure of "the mother", features a prominent subplot about obeah. The new cook in the Stevens' household is believed to dabble in such practices, and because of that Mr and Mrs Stevens decide to lay her off. The official reason is that the servants are uncomfortable with it, but Mrs Stevens also has fears that the girl might start "putting things in the food". (1972: 99) When the cook is sacked, she curses Mrs Stevens for her decision:

"You white people think we ain't got no pride, that you can pick us up and push us back when and how it suit you. Well, it ain't always goin' be so." Her voice crescendoed to a shout. "You hear? It ain't always goin' be so. By that dead child you carrying I swear it ain't." (1972: 102)

Mrs Stevens will indeed deliver a stillborn baby in later chapters. Despite her later explaining to Christopher that "there wouldn't have been any baby anyhow" (1972: 123), as she knew she could not have any more children, it is interesting that one of the few instances in which obeah is (if briefly) believed to actually work in real life (as opposed to myths or

legends) is when it is used as black magic, to curse someone – despite having very many uses. Specifically, obeah appears to work when it is seen from the outsider’s perspective of the white plantation owners, who are shown to be as afraid of it as their ancestors used to be at the time of Tacky’s Rebellion in the 18th century. The link between obeah and slave revolts seem to be suggested in Drayton’s novel too, as the cook’s curse focuses on race relations, as the Stevens seem to believe they can decide their black servants’ fate without facing any of the consequences.

All types of “invisible histories” that have been dealt with in this section point, in some way, to their African roots and to the history of the African diaspora. Calypso music, Anansi stories, and obeah all originated, developed, or were re-invented within the black community in the Caribbean. In the novels belonging to the Bildungsroman tradition, this link is underlined and exploited to point to different interpretations of such immaterial traces of black history. Some characters, as shown, often influenced by colonial propaganda and/or their own bias, believe these practices and art forms to be a relic from the past that should be abandoned in order to embrace Westernized culture, which they identify with progress. On the other hand, such traces of history are predominantly portrayed as complex but largely positive experiences which connect the protagonists with their past and help them develop a sense of belonging within the polyphonic experience of Caribbean culture. Having dealt with the characters’ connection to their past and its legacy, the study will now focus on the role of the individual within their community and the political significance of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR:
THE SELF WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The role of politics in the Caribbean Bildungsroman: setting, publication dates, and a brief history of decolonization

In his monography, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, Kenneth Ramchand discusses the West Indian “novel of childhood”, focusing especially on Michael Anthony’s *The Year in San Fernando* in order to point out its peculiar use of the child perspective and the way it sets the novel apart from the genre as a whole. Not only, Ramchand says, is the novel characterized by an attentive use of the child perspective – which is never contrasted with the author’s point of view, as it happens in Austin Clarke for example, in order to “make social protest” – but Anthony’s novel is also focused on Francis’s consciousness with no explicit intention to make his personal experiences universal, or representative of something larger than the boy himself. Ramchand compares this with the portrayal of the largely autobiographical protagonist of Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin*, which was to become the model for most West Indian Bildungsromans in years to come. Ramchand writes:

George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) evokes the boy’s world, but Lamming’s intention is to suggest the essential outlines of typical boyhood in a West Indian community that is growing painfully – like the four boys in the novel – into political self-awareness; and his concern to suggest the complex shiftings in the community at large, at times, takes precedence over any notion of fidelity to the boys’ consciousness. Michael Anthony’s novel, set in the penultimate year of the Second World War, registers neither that event nor the political stirrings in Trinidad of that period. (1983: 206)

The link established between the self and the community by means of the changes happening in both has already been touched upon in the first chapter of this study by referencing Booker and Juraga’s reflections on the connection between the Bildungsroman and what they call “the crucial project of constructing viable postcolonial cultural identities” (2001:5) in a context as culturally polyphonic as that of the Caribbean region, especially

around the time of decolonization. As observed by Ramchand, Lamming's model is prevalent and recurring in the Bildungsroman genre, therefore the present chapter will focus on the way politics permeate the Caribbean novel of childhood in terms of general structure and direct references to specific issues of local and international interest. In order to better understand the political relevance of works such as Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, however, it will be necessary to sketch briefly the theme of decolonization and Independence in connection with the chronology of the novels selected.

The 1960s are the decade in which most of the Caribbean territories achieved Independence, albeit at different times. However, the history of the political struggle against the British Empire in the Caribbean region begins earlier, most prominently with the workers' strikes of the 1930s – influenced both by the political climate in Europe in the preceding decade and by the radical ideas of local political activists such as Marcus Garvey. The gradual growth of a national conscience was also shaped by the war effort, with as many as 10,000 West Indian men volunteering to fight alongside the British and imperial troops during WWII, and by the mass migration of the post-war years (beginning with the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948) which was to facilitate contact and exchange between different regions of the Empire. With India gaining Independence in 1947, and with many of the British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa following in the 1950s, it was clear that it was only a matter of time before the Caribbean territories followed their lead. At the time, the theme of Independence was widely discussed not only in restricted intellectual circles but in popular culture as well: consider, for instance, Lord Kitchener's famous calypso, "Ghana", which celebrates the Independence of the African country that was to become effective in 1957.

While discussions regarding Independence were largely popular at the time, the means by which it was to be achieved were much less clear. Between 1958 and 1962 there was a brief attempt to federate the Caribbean territories with the declared objective to achieve Independence as a single nation. The project, known as the West Indian Federation, failed after a few years – largely because of persisting economic inequalities and, therefore, because of the different needs and demands of the various Caribbean regions. For a taste of the debate surrounding the Federation issue consider, for example, the scene in *Turn Again Tiger*, the sequel to Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, where the characters from the village meet at Tall Boy's shop to discuss current events. The book was published in 1958, the year that marked the beginning of the Federation experiment:

What going to happen when all the islands federate, Joe?" Tiger asked. "What going to happen!" Joe said, "all them small-island going to thrive off the big ones like Trinidad and Jamaica, that's what's going to happen. And as for all-you Indians, you better watch out, 'cause when we begin to federate it ain't have nothing like vote for Lalla or Rampaulsingh, is only top men we want to federate we." (1979: 7)

As already anticipated, the experiment failed – Joe's objections being far more widespread and popular than the character himself is shown to be aware of – and the different Caribbean territories went on to achieve Independence, and in some cases to later join the Commonwealth, as separate nations – Trinidad and Tobago as well as Jamaica became independent in 1962, Guyana and Barbados in 1966, to mention only the largest among the former colonies.

When comparing this essential timeline with that which can be obtained through a synoptic view of the novels selected for this study, several observations can be made regarding the political engagement of the novels themselves. First of all, as briefly acknowledged in previous chapters, all of the novels selected are set between the 1940s and the 1960s, despite many of them having been composed at a later date. This implies that, whether or not the author chooses to engage with the political turmoil that characterized those years, the growing political consciousness (especially with regards to race and class), the creation and/or discovery of a national identity, as well as the gradual understanding of the possibilities and problems connected with Federation and Independence are necessarily the historical backdrop against which the protagonists and their stories are set. Among the six novels that are set during or around WWII, at least four openly engage with the war and the political changes brought about by it – the exceptions being Drayton's *Christopher* and Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, whose peculiarities have already been discussed.

Among the novels set in the 1950s – curiously all by female authors, possibly because they belong to a later generation than most of the male authors and thus were referring to their own childhood/adolescence years when writing the novels – the ones that engage the most with the political upheavals of the time are *Beka Lamb*, which openly deals with the struggle for Independence in Belize (fully achieved only in 1981) and *Abeng*, which mostly focuses on the subject of race and class consciousness, but also openly refers to the

differences in the perception of race in the Caribbean and the United States and to local matters as well. Finally, *No Man in the House* by Foster, the only novel set in the 1960s, on the verge of Barbadian Independence, is largely concerned with the theme of race relations, elections, and the link between local and global politics.

However, publication date is also an element to be considered when addressing the issue of how politics features in the Caribbean Bildungsroman genre. As already discussed, all novels were composed in or around the second half of the 20th century, between 1952 and 1991 – and while publication dates do not seem to influence the political engagement of the author, or the political relevance of the novel itself, the attitude towards specific issues, such as the relationship with the Empire and the future of the colony, appears to shift as the end of the century approaches. Lamming himself in his “Author’s Introduction” to *In the Castle of my Skin*, first published in 1983, addresses his choice to spare the life of the landlord character during the riots:

When I read this scene some twenty years after its publication, I was surprised by the mildness of its resolution. From the distant and more critical vantage point of London, the past now seemed more brutal. I wondered why I had allowed the landlord to go free. Was it the need to make the story conform to the most accurate portrayal of events as I had known them? [...] Now I had begun to think that the most authentic response to the long history of shame and humiliation which had produced the riots demanded that the white landlord should have been killed. (2016: XIV)

Lamming’s considerations on his own writing choices some twenty or thirty years after the novel was first published, and especially, as the author himself points out, “from the distant and more critical vantage point of London”, reflect a paradigm that is easy to identify within the Caribbean Bildungsroman genre as a whole. Later novels, especially those written in 1980s, while not necessarily more “political”, tend however to be more critical of the relationship between the Caribbean colonies and the Empire. About his political leanings as he first arrived in London in 1950, Lamming writes that he “still shared in that previous innocence which had socialized us into seeing our relations with the Empire as a commonwealth of mutual interests”. It is clear that what Lamming calls “the tactical withdrawal which the British now so proudly call decolonization” (2016: XIV) had an enormous impact on the way the colonial relationship was perceived and portrayed in fiction.

Austin Clarke's *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack* (1980) is possibly the boldest in terms of its harsh anti-colonialist rhetoric – which is already clear from the title – but *Beka Lamb* (1982) and *No Man in the House* (1991) are also very critical of the “mutual interests” the colonial relationship was supposed to provide for the Caribbean colonies. This is not to say that previous novels condone or attempt to explain away the horrors of colonialism – it is more a matter of tone and perspective. While Selvon's characters in *A Brighter Sun* (1952) are shown to celebrate the end of WWII by “playing mas” in the streets for two days – though Selvon does not forget to describe the clashes with the armed forces marring this joyous occasion (1985: 210) – Clarke's “man at the Bath Corner” manages to convince his audience that the Germans should win the war for the sake of the colonies:

“I am going to tell you why Hitler is a fucking giant. Hitler is a giant because Hitler understand that by beating Englund, Englund would have to let go, free all her colonies and possessions beyond the seas. The people living now in them colonies would become free. People like me-so. And you-so. And the Mathematics-fool-so. I read that in a book in the public library. And I dare any one o' wunnuh to argue against that point. Philosophically speaking, though, Hitler is a giant compare to Churchill.” (2003: 71)

There are a few interesting things to observe about this passage: first of all, the authority of books. “I read that in a book” – as unlikely as that sounds if one takes into consideration what has been said on the subject of British colonial control on education – makes the argument immediately more compelling. The man's opponent “who had become emotional and had been praising the British Empire [...] had forgotten to say that the self-evident truths he was telling us had *come from a book* [emphasis in original]” (2003: 71), so he lost the argument. Additionally, as inaccurate and naïve as the man's understanding of the conflict and its possible resolutions may sound, not siding with Churchill and the British is framed in the passage as a form of anti-colonial resistance. In the same vein, Clarke mentions that “the church wall meanwhile was painted with the swastikas of our *irrepressible* graffiti [emphasis added]”. (2003: 13) The characters are clearly reacting to the colonial patriotic propaganda that they are fed constantly because of the war.

Similarly, in *Abeng*, published in 1984 but set in the 1950s, Cliff describes Clare's interest in WWII and especially in the fate of the Jewish people. However, the questions she

asks at school on the subject inevitably go unanswered, as the teachers prefer to focus on topics that can be more easily turned into patriotic praise:

They talked about the London Blitz, the heroism of the British, and the cowardice of the French, the character of Benito Mussolini, and the failure of the Weimar Republic and the Treaty of Versailles, which they said had brought on the war in the first place. Above all these words hovered the figure of Winston Churchill, whose speeches the girls had to memorize, in whom the teachers personified victory. “Sir Winston”, they called him, a brilliant man who smoked cigars and drank brandy and slept in little silk undershirts. (1984: 70)

In addition to the dissatisfaction with the “official” version of events fed by colonial officials and their harsher take on the colonial relationship, the novels composed in later years often appear more optimistic when addressing the future of the Caribbean colonies. The last chapter of this study will focus on the theme of departure, which is a common trope of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition, partly reflected in the authors’ biographies as well. Often departures are presented as a way to escape a reality that appears unchangeable and lacks prospects, especially for bright young people who would like to improve their current material conditions. Departures do not disappear in later novels – consider, for instance, Kincaid’s *Annie John*, published in 1983, at the end of which the protagonist leaves Antigua for England – but there are at least two cases of characters who change their mind about leaving (Beka Lamb and Howard Prescod, from *No Man in the House*) and one case (Will Trotby in *Growing up with Miss Milly*) in which the character leaves Jamaica on a scholarship not thanks to his academic success – as was the norm and the wish of his mother – but because of his musical talent and propensity for sports.

The colonial Caribbean are sometimes shown to be changing for the better in later novels, in terms of the prospects they can or could offer to young people. Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* begins with such a consideration sparked by the news that Beka won the essay contest at St. Cecilia’s Academy: “‘Befo’ time,’ her Gran remarked towards nightfall, ‘Beka would never have won that contest [...] And long befo’ time, you wouldn’t *be* at no convent school’”. (2007: 1) In the same way, the Grandfather character in *No Man in the House*, known as Duhdah, while usually praising Britain and the Empire in front of the children, is shown at the beginning of the book to have conflicting opinions, to the point where Howard wonders “if his feelings about England were genuine or if he was saying those things just to

make me feel better”. (1992: 16) Duhdah, belonging to an older generation like Beka’s Grandmother, is very perceptive of the changes happening or about to happen in the Caribbean colonies:

“Things will change,” he said repeatedly. “Things will be different when the people on this island wake up and realize that they don’t have to go anywhere to make a life for themselves. Barbados is where they were born and where they should die. We are of a proud African heritage, good enough to rule ourselves”. And just as quickly, he would snap out of his mood, probably seeing the confusion it was creating for me. (1992: 17)

The passage, in its defiant optimism and open criticism of the colonial condition well represents the attitude which appears prevalent in later Bildungsromans. It also anticipates several of the core themes of the novel itself, which, as discussed, will introduce the theme of Barbadian Independence and will see Howard change his mind about leaving, to the point where on the day of the Common Entrance Examination he writes a mock-letter to his parents, who have emigrated to England years ago and are now unreachable, saying that *they* should “come home and join us” in order to become “part of the independence experiment”. (1992: 270-271) In accordance with the examples provided, it seems justified to conclude that, while the time setting of the novels does not appear to influence the political nature of the works analyzed in this study, their composition/publication date does – not in terms of how “political” the works are but in terms of their attitude, which is often harsher towards the Caribbean’s colonial legacy and, sometimes, more optimistic towards the future of the (former) colonies as well.

Independence and the legacy of British colonialism are then clearly among the most relevant and heavily discussed themes in the novel selected – though, for now, the theme of Independence has been analyzed mainly from a historical/chronological perspective. Before analyzing the political meaning inherent in the theme of self-growth, which allows for Independence to be discussed at a personal and collective level, it seems appropriate to deal with the other “words of politics” which, together with *Independence*, hover over the political discourse in the novel selected. *America* is another recurring word, the US being usually presented as a land of riches and infinite possibilities, but also employed to discuss the theme of race consciousness, civil rights, and, in some cases, to address the issue of

modern-day imperialism. *Corruption* and its connection with bureaucracy and local politics will also be addressed and contrasted with the protagonists' *dreams* of pursuing a political career. The chapter also aims to discuss what have been termed the *places* of politics, in order to best comprehend the way in which the nature of political discourse changes and shifts, according to its belonging to the public or private sphere.

The words of politics: a glossary

America:

The United States features prominently in the novels selected. The characters dream of the US, they draw comparison with the US, occasionally they move there as well. The topic which most of all encourages discussion, as it links the Caribbean colonies to the United States, is that of civil rights and, more generally, of the material condition of black people in both countries. In *A Brighter Sun*, for instance, where, as previously discussed, the US military presence in Trinidad during WWII constitutes a major plot point, as it leads to the construction of the road that will pass through Tiger's garden, the characters discuss the merits of the US by comparing them with their current colonial condition:

“A fellar was telling me the other day that he would prefer to live under the Stars and Stripes than the British Bulldog. He say how much thing the Yankee do for this country since they come, look how much modern machinery they have, look how much more money they paying us.” “Don't worry wid he. He ain't telling yuh bout how dey does kick nigger over dere in America, and how dey does kill dem and shoot dem down like dog? He ain't tell yuh bout dat? Bout how they have ah big notice in de road. Saying 'Nigger Keep Out'. [...] Boy, Ah don't like de British, but if it come to de worse, Ah radder stay wid dem any day dan live under American rule!” (1985: 196)

Similar observations are rather common in the novels. This study has previously referenced Mr Powell's reflections on the topic in *Abeng*, where Jamaica is described as a “country which kept them [black kids] poor and wanted to keep them ignorant, but at least it didn't lynch them, didn't put them in jail for no reason” (1995: 90) and also Trumper's speech in *In the Castle of my Skin* about the different kind of racism he encountered when

he moved to America. (2016: 332) In later novels the differences between the fight for Independence in the colonial Caribbean and the civil rights movement in the US are brought to the foreground. Consider the scene in *No Man in the House* in which Mr Bradshaw, one of the leaders of the party in favour of Independence, meets with a US activist called “Brother Abdul”. The man clearly shares the positions of Malcom X, and Bradshaw realizes that their respective political goals are not as compatible as he thought – Barbados being “still a Christian community”, unlikely to be willing to accept Islam, as well as a mixed-race society (“the Barbadian population isn’t all black people”). (1992: 168-169) Bradshaw knows that for his party to be acceptable – and, most importantly, *accepted* – it cannot be linked with radical views. Therefore, he refuses Brother Abdul’s offer to collaborate by saying:

We are not interested in segregation, we are not interested in fighting the civil rights battles of the United States, we are simply looking to make a new society where every member, black, white, yellow, or half-caste, can reach their full potential. That is what independence means to us. (1992: 169)

Bradshaw’s words clearly sound utopian, but the difference between his positions and that of the US activist marks a visible distance in their respective political agenda. It is also interesting that Bradshaw should mention the issue of segregation. On a different occasion, in the same novel, Pretty reports the words of another politician in favour of Independence, Mr Phillips, who, once again, refers to the US as a negative example Barbados should steer clear of. Pretty paraphrases Phillips’s speech by saying: “We will show the world that all Bajans [Barbadians] can live together, that this ain’t going to be like places in Africa or the southern United States where black people got to be marching every day for the right to vote”. (1992: 206) In *Abeng* too, the difference between black West Indians and black Americans is discussed – this time by focusing on cultural differences which contributed to alienate the groups from each other even when they lived in the same neighbourhoods, as was the case of the West Indian community in Harlem. The author reflects that “all were of course of African descent, but each group had been colonized differently” and, by using the experiences of Mr Powell as an example, she goes on to explain exactly how differently:

The Americans said the West Indians were too intent on status. Too concerned with achievement. [...] Even worse than their ways with money and property, the Americans thought, was the imitation by Black people from Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad, Tobago, and so on, of the things the English brought to the islands, which West Indians now brought to Harlem. There were people who played cricket on weekends. Who held balls in honor of English monarchs, English holidays. Who flew the Union Jack over their shops and real estate offices. Who seemed to think they were something they were not. (1995: 86)

However, the characters' allegiance to Britain and all things British is not the default option in the novels selected. In *Beka Lamb*, singing *God Bless America* instead of *God Save the Queen* is an act of resistance and "another thing governor Radison had against Granny Ivy's party" (2007: 110), while Beka herself relates at least partly to the story sister Gabriela tells her about growing up poor in rural Wisconsin and being hit hard by the Great Depression. (2007: 115) In Clarke's novel too, Kenny, the American student, despite his condescending attitude ("Combermere school was like summer camp to him, he told me"), is presented as a sympathetic character and Tom "liked his American accent. It was pleasanter than the English accents all around me". (2003: 145) Additionally, both in *A Brighter Sun* and in *In the Castle of my Skin* there are characters who want to leave the West Indies for America: "Wen de war over, Ah going to America. On one of dem ship self. Yuh can't imagine how life different dere, boy," Boysie says – though his words should be weighed against Joe's, who will later say he prefers the "British Bulldog" to the "Stars and Stripes". (1985: 88) Trumper too talks of America's "difference" in positive terms – "They say things good there." (2016: 184) – and in Seaforth's novel, Milly's "dis ent the States and we is poor and yuh have to work hard at school" (1988: 119) also contributes to presenting the United States as the land of opportunities – closer at hand in Trumper and Boysie's minds than in Milly's – but still completely different (and better) than the reality they have to face every day.

However, one of the most significant passages that underline the cultural, social, and political differences between the colonial Caribbean and the United States is definitely Trumper's speech about "my people". G.'s childhood friend has moved to the States and, as a consequence, his understanding of the world has changed, shifted. He speaks of Paul Robeson² as "one of the greatest of my people" and, when G. pushes him to explain, he tells

² African-American actor and singer. Renowned for his civil right battles. 1898-1976.

him that his people are “the Negro race” – he also mentions how he didn’t know that until he moved to the US. (2016: 331) Trumper says:

“Course the blacks here are my people too, but they don’t know it yet. You don’t know it yourself. None o’ you here on this islan’ know what it mean to fin’ race. An’ the white people you have to deal with won’t ever let you know.” [...] “What’s the difference between us an’ the black people over there?” I asked. “’Tis a great big difference,” said Trumper. “They suffer in a way we don’t know here. We can’t understan’ it here and we never will. But their sufferin’ teach them what we here won’t ever know. The Race, our people.” (2016: 331-332)

In retrospect, it does not appear to be coincidental that Lamming’s novel should also mention the Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey, who fought for workers’ rights and against racism in the United States. Garvey believed that all black people scattered around the world because of the African diaspora should be encouraged to identify with their African heritage and ultimately “return to Africa”. Lamming’s characters recall attending one of his political meetings (Garvey died in 1940, so the timeline fits): they remember especially how Mr Slime, a local schoolteacher-turned-politician, left the meeting early because “he didn’t like Garvey tellin’ him ‘bout he’s any brother”. (2016: 111) More than that, the characters observe, “if you tell half of them that work in those places [middle class people] they have something to do with Africa they’d piss straight in your face” because, in the Caribbean, “no man like to know he black”. (2016: 111) America, then, is many things to the characters and the protagonists of the novel selected: it is a dream to chase, a goal to reach, the destination of one’s journey, an aspiration and a political model too, especially when explicit links are found which connect the Caribbean to the States, as is the case with Garvey, but also, when issues such as segregation and racially-motivated violence are brought up, an example to avoid, to learn from and improve on – with a view on Independence.

Corruption:

In the novels, politics does not exist solely in connection with global events, such as WWII, or in terms of the Caribbean’s belonging to the British Empire or its relationship with the United States, but on a smaller scale as well. Local politics is often linked to such global events anyway, but its immediate consequences tend to be closer to the people’s hearts as

they affect their everyday life in a way that is much more visible. It is not uncommon to encounter the topic and dynamics of local politics being addressed, in the novels, by focusing on the less grandiose and more prosaic aspects of it – the dirt, corruption, and double-crossing that are shown to haunt public life during colonial times. As expected, the topic gets declined differently in the different novels, while at the same time presenting interesting similarities.

Consider, for instance, Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and the parable tracing the rise and fall of Mr Slime and his reputation among the villagers. Initially a schoolteacher, he resigned his job and “won the seat in the general election with a great majority.” As “he had been responsible for the education of the children”, he had now “extended that work to include the education of the workers”. (2016: 104) As the founder of the so-called “Poor Man’s Penny Bank and Friendly Society”, Slime pushed the villagers to invest their savings in it by promising he would make them owners of the land they inhabited – a land which up to that point had belonged to the landlord, to whom they paid rent. However, at the end of the novel, many villagers – most notably Pa, the grandfather figure of the novel – lose their homes, as the landlord sells the land to Slime’s bank, which then awards “privilege spots” to its main investors.

When, at the end of the novel, G. asks Trumper what he thinks about Slime, his reply is harsh: “I don't have to think much 'bout him [...] An' I not at all surprised that he do what he do. 'Tis what I learn in the States, an' I know how to handle all the Slimes that come my way”. (2016: 323) When confronted with Trumper's, Pa's words are milder and drenched in the fatalism that characterizes his figure: “A man make a promise an' a man change, and the man who make a promise ain't the same said man as the man who change, an' I don't know, I don't know who got the right to judge why he change or whether he should have change at all.” (2016: 340) Despite Pa's refusal to judge Mr. Slime's “change” and the reasons behind it, the responsibility remains clear. Slime presented himself as the local man who understood the workers and their needs – as opposed to the “outsider”, the white landlord, which next to Slime appears to the workers as another ruin of history, “a relic of another time” (2016: 256) – he convinced them to invest in his bank and was ultimately responsible, morally but of course not legally, for the loss of many of their homes. It is also interesting to note that Mr Slime used to be a schoolteacher, as there are at least two other prominent figures of schoolteachers who are shown to abuse their power, or are accused to do so, in the name of “progress” – which clearly evokes the topic of the responsibility of education, which has

been dealt with in the second chapter of this study, and connects it with the responsibility that comes from politics and public life.

The schoolmaster in the self-titled novel by Earl Lovelace is possibly the clearest example of this. The man believes himself to be above the law because of the prestigious role he fulfills in the small and isolated community of Kumaca as the first schoolmaster to reside and teach in the village. Lovelace even allows a glimpse into the schoolmaster's mind and his twisted understanding of what his “duty” towards the community consists of:

And embracing this as another and more cogent sign now, he knew he would remain [in Kumaca, despite raping his assistant and getting her pregnant]. It was no mere inclination to remain, it was a duty. If he left, what would become of the villagers, the council, the school, the road, the many projects that he had in his brain. It was a duty. [...] The schoolmaster felt that things would be ironed out. They must be. The village was his. And he felt now not only as if he had discovered Kumaca, but had had it willed to him by some Sovereign of The Backward Regions. (2015: 154)

The passage is rich in indirect references to the *conquista* (“it was a duty”, “the village was his”, “not only as if he had discovered Kumaca”, “Sovereign of the Backward Regions”) and if we interpret with Ramchand (Lovelace 2015: 7) the village of Kumaca as representing the island of Trinidad, or the Caribbean at large, the colonial metaphor becomes even clearer. The schoolmaster is the outsider drunk on power and greed who appropriates the land and the people under the guise of “helping them progress”. While it is true that the schoolmaster here is not a politician, both the colonial metaphor and his plans for the village (“the council, the school, the road, the many projects he had in his brain”) contribute to making him a political figure of sorts – which is why it seems appropriate to compare the schoolmaster's brand of corruption and vileness with Mr Slime's betrayal. The two are different as Mr. Slime is not an “outsider”, but presents himself and builds his public image on the premise that he is one with the people, but in both cases the responsibility that comes with the public role they occupy falls tragically short.

Cecil Foster's Mr Bradshaw in *No Man in the House* is a more nuanced figure. The local headmaster and a leader of the DFI, the Democratic Front for Independence, he is presented as a charismatic and energetic figure – someone who believes in the role of

education to improve the material condition of the children and of society as a whole. He is also, like Mr Slime, an “insider”, a man from the village who got out and “made himself” only to come back to help the people follow in his steps. While many of the villagers are suspicious of Bradshaw and his revolutionary ideas regarding Independence and self-government, we see him through the eyes of young Howard who deeply admires him. Throughout the novel, his image does not get tainted by the gossip and the slander – not until the very end when the body of Sandra Ward is found in the quarry and the people in town start looking for someone to blame.

Sandra is a white woman, a campaigner for Independence, and, perhaps most controversially, the daughter of Mr Ward – a powerful politician who is fighting against Independence to defend the colonial *status quo*. He is shown not to be above corruption and bribes in order to win the upcoming elections, as the reader encounters him mid-novel offering Howard's Grandmother a job for her and her two daughters in exchange for their votes. (1992: 192) His daughter Sandra Ward, in addition to supporting the opposition party, is also in a relationship with Mr Bradshaw – an interracial relationship that shocks and confuses many people. Howard comments: “It was the first time I had ever seen a black man and a white woman holding hands and joking with each other like close friends”, and, later on, at dinner: “It was fascinating: a white woman serving a black man! I had to tell Grandmother and Pretty about this when I got home”. (1992: 152, 155) People question Sandra's loyalties too wondering “if the Democratic Front for Independence is still a black people party” (1992: 207) and whether the Ward family is not attempting to save their own name and reputation by joining “both sides of this independence issue”. (1992: 208) However, when Sandra's dead body is found in the quarry, on Election Day no less, nobody is beyond suspicion, not even Mr. Bradshaw:

One group saying that Phillips and his people [the DFI] murdered Sandra and drove the car into the quarry to get sympathy votes. The DFI supporters say Ward and his people could never forgive Sandra for turning her back on the white people, on her family, and that they had always promised to get even with her. [...] Everybody on all sides agree about one thing, that the headmaster was involved one way or the other because recently you couldn't see one of them without the other. (1992: 253)

By the end of the novel the issue is still unresolved, and, though Howard never believes that Mr Bradshaw could be involved in Sandra's murder, the suspicion remains and his reputation and public image suffer from it. In Bradshaw's case too, despite his involvement never being proven, the link between education and politics is brought to the foreground, as the alleged corruption that lies behind Bradshaw's relationship and his political activism is bound to cast a disturbing shadow over his public role as an educator.

Dreaming:

As made abundantly clear in this section, the political landscape in the Caribbean is quite complex and deeply connected with British colonialism. The prospect of a political career is not exactly accessible for the average person, even when they do have or plan on getting a higher-level education – with issues of class, wealth, race, and gender intertwining with the traditional resistance of the colonial system. In spite of this, at least three of the novels selected show their protagonists dream of (or least consider, or imagine, more or less seriously) the option of pursuing a political career. By confronting the three scenarios – as they are portrayed in George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, in Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, and in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* – one can observe that the main focus is on the attempt to balance the naïve utopian dream with the harsh reality of colonialism and bureaucracy and the consequent disenchantment. On the one hand, in fact, a political career seems like a way to make a difference especially at or around the time of decolonization when the political landscape is changing very quickly and, as Cecil Foster writes, “there seemed to be a stirring among [the people], as if for the first time they were ready to question everything”. (1992: 138) On the other hand, far from being identifiable solely with ideas and ideals, politics exists in the real world, where the *status quo* operates in order to exclude and marginalize.

For instance, in *In the Castle of my Skin*, G. is encouraged by Trumper, who is back from the US visiting his relations, to be more political. He insists that G. should know about politics as “you got education better than me” (2016: 328) and goes on to explain that politics does not equate with “external relations” (“Things like shopping, buyin’ this, an’ payin’ for that. [...] A kind o’ high-grade housekeeping”) but that it has a real and tangible impact on people’s lives. (2016: 329) G., however, does not feel up to the task as he fears the responsibility that would come with the job: “I don’t like the idea of being responsible to hundreds of people. It frightens me the thought of being called on by every Tom, Dick and

Harry to explain why I did something”. (2016: 328) When comparing the way the topic is dealt with in Lamming’s novel with how Selvon’s protagonist Tiger understands or envisions his role in society, it is easy to observe how certain elements tend to be recurrent – firstly, the already discussed connection with the United States of America. It is an American soldier who, rather condescendingly in fact, tells Tiger – whom he calls John, because he is not interested in learning his actual name – he should care about politics:

It’s politics that builds a country, John, don’t ever forget that. Don’t sit back and let things happen to you. Interest yourself in how you are governed, find out why laws are passed. Oh yes, I’ve already seen you’re an easygoing people. But, John, when you vote for a man who gets a seat on the government, remember that you want a man there who’d fight for your rights, a man you and other poor people like you could trust, a man who- what the hell am I talking politics for, anyway!
(1985: 173)

The man is clearly speaking from a place of privilege, one he is largely unaware of: not only is he white and an American citizen – where politics is clearly different from that of a country which is still a British colony – he is also actively contributing to the invasion of Tiger’s garden (and to the loss of part of his revenue) by being in charge of the construction of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, while at the same time preaching about voting for people “you and other poor people like you could trust”.

Additionally, Tiger’s journey, much like G.’s, explores the connection between education and politics, as throughout the novel Tiger is shown to feel very strongly about how learning to read and write will help him understand the world around him:

Is not a matter of who better than who, Joe. Is just me, inside of me. Things I want to learn, things I want to find out. Boy, life was different with you, yes. You grow up in the city, you had a lot of experience. If even you don’t have an education, you still not a fool. But look at me. A stupid coolie boy from the country, can’t even read and write. [...] You think I like to remain ignorant? You think I don’t want to find out what happening in England and America? (1985: 109)

It would seem that education is indeed central: not only it allows the characters to better understand their surroundings, but it also puts them in a position where they might know how to make a difference. Consider, for instance, the subplot dealing with Tiger finding his voice and sending to the local newspaper a story about his garden and the way he was affected by the road the Americans came to build.

Both Trumper in Lamming's novel and, to a degree, the American soldier in Selvon's insist that there is a responsibility that comes with education and with the understanding of the world at large. However, as we saw, G. feels overwhelmed by the prospect of being held responsible for dealing with other people's problems. Similarly, Tiger, while initially dreaming of getting an education and going into politics – interestingly he says his intention is to “fight for everybody rights”, not just Indian rights, like his acquaintances suggest (1985: 203) – he ends up becoming disillusioned with his own dream: “It had a time when I was thinking of doing that, yes. But it have plenty other things to think about, Boysie. A man just can't take up heself and do this and do that.” (1985: 213) The novel itself ends on a similarly fatalistic note, with the protagonist reflecting on the “sameness” of everything, on how he has learnt to read and write and yet nothing has changed in his life, on how the war has ended but his life hasn't been impacted by this massive event in any positive way. (1985: 214-215) One could follow Naipaul and extend this feeling of helplessness to the colonial condition at large.

The sense of responsibility supposedly connected with education is counterbalanced, then, like weights on a scale, by a feeling of fatalistic disenchantment. While, on the one hand, politics and its ideals are presented and interpreted by the characters as a way to make things right, on the other, politics is flawed, inaccessible, and largely incapable of escaping the suffocating structure of the colonial context and its limitations. If in Lamming and Selvon the scales appear to be tipped in favour of disillusion and disenfranchisement, the topic certainly has a different connotation in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. As previously discussed, the more optimistic attitude towards the future prospects of the Caribbean colonies tends to be a feature of later novels – and in fact Edgell's Bildungsroman was published in 1982, approximately thirty years after *A Brighter Sun* and *In the Castle of my Skin*, and just one year after Belize officially became an independent country.

In one of the first scenes featuring Beka and her best friend Toycie, Beka points out that her friend's guitar has a label on it saying “Made in Spain” – which prompts a discussion about politics and Independence:

“You are right, Beka. But why you always bring politics into everything?” “It’s not me that’s bringing it in, Toycie! Guatemala claims Belize from Britain through rights inherited from Spain, and Spain got rights from the pope, and who are we going to get rights from?” (2007: 36)

Beka’s interest in politics is hardly casual. Because of her family’s involvement in political matters and their support of Independence, she believes that politics is not something that one decides to “bring” into a discussion, but rather a fact of life which can determine the fate of a whole country. It is in another scene with Toycie that we are introduced to Beka’s “dream”. Toycie suggests they play a game: “Do just like the politicians at Battlefield Park. I am the crowd. I will sing the opening song and when I am done, you give the speech, all right?” (2007: 44) She sings *Land of the Free*, now the national anthem of Belize, and Beka goes on to mimic a political speech:

“Good people of Belize,” Beka began in a high falsetto. “It gives me great pleasure to be here with you all this evening...” Toycie was cracking up with laughter. [...] “Beka, gyal, you sound exactly like Lady Radison!” She howled again and said in a choking voice, “If you talk like that at Battlefield, people will boo you, even your Granny Ivy!” “Well, there’s very little wrong with her ladyship’s accent, my pet,” Beka said, mimicing her mother’s voice [...] (2007: 45)

Politics is a game here – though the reader knows Beka’s background and her understanding of its very real implications. It is certainly interesting that the girls should focus on the contradiction between the governor’s wife’s British accent (which Beka mocks in this scene) and the rousing pro-Independence political speeches that are usually held at Battlefield Park, in Belize City. Once again, politics cannot really exist in a colonial context if not in connection with Britain and the British Empire.

Despite the very obvious criticism of the Victorian mindset which still largely permeates Belizean society in colonial times, Edgell’s novel ends on a rather positive note when it comes to discussing the future of the country. While G. leaves because he cannot stand the lack of prospects – one could say the “sameness” of the colonial condition – and Tiger stays but denounces the very “sameness” that plagues Lamming’s protagonist, Beka is

shown to be more hopeful towards the future. The novel is carefully constructed so that Beka's new beginning (i.e. her winning the essay competition and finally passing the year) can be read as a metaphor or symbol of the country's path towards self-government and Independence. In this light, Beka's game involving a make-believe political career is more positively connotated than either Tiger's or G.'s political dreams, thus tipping the scales in favour of a more idealistic interpretation of politics. Largely because of the political climate in which it was composed – that of newly-achieved Independence for the country of Belize – Edgell's novel appears to take a step back from the disenchantment that has plagued the Caribbean colonies thus far, while at the same time looking somewhat hopefully towards the future.

Independence:

Arguably the most widely influential among the key words analyzed in this section, the theme of Independence is, as anticipated, at the very core of the Caribbean Bildungsroman genre. Kenneth Ramchand's observations on the way George Lamming's Bildungsroman depicts not a boy, but "typical boyhood in a West Indian community that is growing painfully [...] into political self-awareness" (1983: 206) holds true for many of the novels selected. The connection between the Caribbean's struggle for political Independence and the way the young protagonists strive for their own personal independence is often made explicit in the novels. Having just mentioned *Beka Lamb* and the way Zee Edgell uses her "new beginning" to represent Belize's journey towards self-government, it seems appropriate to start from this text the analysis of the individual-country metaphor as it pertains to Independence. Edgell writes:

"Is this the end of everything then, Uncle Curo?" Beka asked, thinking sadly of Granny Ivy's struggles. [...] "The end, pet? Belize people are only just beginning! Soon we'll all be able to vote instead of only the big property owners, then we may get self-government and after that, who knows?" Beka laughed with relief and in her heart she was suddenly excited for she had made a beginning too. (2007: 167)

Beka's new beginning has to do with her winning the essay competition organized by her school, whose theme centers around the history of Belize – specifically that of the

Sisters of Charity. Significantly, Beka is shown to struggle with how to tell the story of the missionary nuns, as she says: “I can’t get the history before the nuns came, and the history after they came, to fit into this bit about how it all looked to Mr Rabatu, as an acolyte, standing in his robes waiting for them at the wharf.” (2007: 155) The struggle of which history to tell and from which perspective – when despite the efforts all one can seem to achieve is what Luca Rastello calls “an artificial agreement” (2015) – is also the struggle of a country that is slowly and painfully coming to terms with its past in order to be able to look at the future. This is what Beka does in her essay, and also what she does in her personal life by holding a wake in honour of her friend Toycie, in order to finally be able to move on from her loss. In Edgell’s novel, then, the connection between the growing awareness and maturation of the young Belizean girl and those of her country is made very explicit by the author.

Another instance of a “new beginning” within the frame of what has been termed the individual-country metaphor can be found at the end of Austin Clarke’s novel. Tom gets into a more prestigious high school because of his academic success, but only at the cost of being deprived of his “rank” – which he gained by joining the Cadet Corps – for breaking the rules and invading “enemy territory”. Clarke writes: “He touched the stripes, then tightened his grip and ripped the rank from my shoulders. I knew then that the time had come for me to dream of a new beginning”. (2003: 190) Self-awareness, in Clarke, also means having to realize the seemingly unescapable unfairness of the system.

When considering the many ways in which the individual-country metaphor is employed in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, one cannot ignore the way in which ethnicity and culture become metaphorical. Consider, for example, Clare in *Abeng* and Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey*. They are mixed-race girls whose fragile and often-questioned identity comes to represent the different cultures and ethnicities (one could even say the different “histories”) which make up the polyphonic reality of Jamaica and Trinidad respectively – and this is made even more significant by the fact that the novels are set at a time of rapid change and political turmoil. Howard, too, in *No Man in the House*, largely thanks to his connection with Mr Bradshaw, grows into political self-awareness and his essay on the topic “the future is in our hands”, which encourages Barbadian people to fight for Independence and for a future in which there is no need to emigrate, gets him a scholarship which will allow him to attend high school. Significantly – and symbolically – this happens on the very same day as the general elections which see Mr Bradshaw’s party win and the process which will lead to political Independence begin.

This study has already discussed the fact that Earl Lovelace's *The Schoolmaster* could be considered a collective Bildungsroman, with the village of Kumaca representing the island of Trinidad. This is another way in which the protagonist (here, the entire community of the isolated village) is assigned a symbolic meaning that goes beyond its own personal life experiences. This happens in Lamming too, with G.'s growing understanding of the world around him – thanks to school, his friends who have emigrated, his relationship with Pa, the strikes and riots happening in the islands, and ultimately Mr Slime's betrayal – representing the growing “political self-awareness” of the country of Barbados as a whole. In Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* we find something very similar, framed as Tiger's desire to know “how ships sinking, and why people fighting war, and all the sort of thing” (1988: 75), which will lead him to learn to read and write in order to better understand the world around him. His garden being invaded by the American road is also representative of the colonial experience of the island of Trinidad.

Even less political novels, like Sybil Seaforth's *Growing up with Miss Milly*, present the main character's growth in terms of opposition to the current *status quo*. It has already been observed how Wilby gets into high school because of his propensity for sports and arts – thus showing there is another way forward that does not have to pass through the unfairness of the colonial (school) system. The flip side to that is Annie's battle against colonial prejudice and rules of appropriate behaviour in Jamaica Kincaid's novel – which culminates into Annie's mental illness and ultimately in her need to leave the island of Antigua. Which of course speaks of a condition much larger than the girl herself. Drayton, too, calls his protagonist *Christopher*, like Columbus, and has him fantasize about conquering the Caribbean shores:

“All hands ashore,” he yelled, scrambling to his feet. “And be careful, there may be cannibals.” As a precaution he picked up a stick and poised it, ready to shoot. They advanced up the sand back into the jungle. “Food and fresh water first,” Captain Christopher Stevens announced. “Later we'll collect palm leaves and build a shelter for the night in case of animals.” (1972: 179)

Having identified the considerable influence and widespread presence of the individual-country metaphor in the Caribbean tradition, it seems useful to compare these findings with the features of the European Bildungsroman. The purpose is that of discovering

and analyzing the differences and similarities in the way the characters relate to their surroundings and the way the colonial experience shaped political discourse within the Caribbean Bildungsroman genre. In *Il romanzo di formazione* (1999), Franco Moretti explains the origins of the Bildungsroman genre as an attempt to provide meaning to modernity – this is done by adopting “youth” as a symbol for modernity itself. Youth being characterized by mobility and change, according to Moretti, it comes to represent, in the Bildungsroman, the fairly sudden socio-political changes happening in the world around the protagonist – the context being that of central Europe around the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, Brigid Lowe, who writes about the English Bildungsroman specifically, refers to the plot of the novels being “driven by the external constraints that attend their protagonists’ growing up – a process that is posed as inherently problematical, reflecting, perhaps, the anxieties of a modern age increasingly at the mercy of an ever-accelerated rate of growth and change”. (2012: 406)

Something comparable, as already anticipated, seems to happen in the Caribbean Bildungsroman. As the examples provided show, the protagonists are frequently employed in the Caribbean novel in what could be termed a metaphorical way, in that they come to represent their countries’ desire for change and their growth into political self-awareness – which will ultimately lead to Independence, whether or not the author chooses to portray the steps leading up to it in the novel itself. The differences between the two traditions appear to stem from the different interpretations of the concept of identity and from the direction the much-discussed desire for change is likely to take in the respective traditions. For comparison, the study shall now offer an example taken from the Italian Bildungsroman tradition and the role the individual-country metaphor plays within it.

The novel is Ippolito Nievo’s *Le confessioni di un italiano* (first published in 1867 under the title *Le confessioni di un ottuagenario*). It is a fictional autobiography, with elements of the Bildungsroman, that traces the protagonist’s growth from poverty into nobility and from identifying as a Venetian to embracing his identity as an Italian. In the background, the revolutions and Independence wars leading to the kingdom of Italy being established. The connection between the main character’s identity and the political changes happening in Italy at the time is very clear and central to the structure of the novel – however, here, the fight for Independence is an external issue, an obstacle to be overcome. Identity adapts to the changes happening in the world around the protagonist, it is not problematic in itself. It is not composite either: being a Venetian and being an Italian are not in contrast with each other, they are complementary – and change has to do with the main character

expanding his view of the world, rather than trying to make sense of a complex and multifaceted sense of belonging. This clearly depends on the history of the country, on its relatively stable and established relationship with its past, but also on the fact that Nievo writes in the nineteenth century, before Sigmund Freud, when belief in the existence of a unified conscience was still the norm.

The example provided is meant to show a way in which the European Bildungsroman interprets the individual-country metaphor. Far from suggesting that every European novel follows the same pattern – in Gustave Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* (1869), for instance, the political content is already less central – the study intends to argue that the individual-country metaphor already existed in the European tradition before the twentieth century. However, it later became a recognizable feature of the Caribbean Bildungsroman novel, both for political reasons – the novels being written during or soon after the beginning of the process of decolonization and, consequently, of Independence – and because it allowed Caribbean writers to explore issues of identity and belonging in a way that felt relevant to them. Which is why the issue of identity and what could loosely be termed “national belonging” is dealt with in such peculiar and recognizable terms. In fact, if in the Caribbean Bildungsroman novel identity is complex, mediated, constantly *in fieri*, this reflects the history and culture of the place – a history and a culture that, as already explored in the third chapter of this study, are often best described as “histories” and “cultures”.

Given the complex cultural and historical scenario of the Caribbean colonies – a product of the *conquista*, first, and of the genocide of the native inhabitants of the region, and later of centuries of European colonialism, slavery, and indentured labour – it is clear that identity shifting to fit the new order of things, merely adapting to the environment, is not enough. It cannot ever be enough, as within the Caribbean context the question of identity – of belonging, of history and thus of tradition – is problematic in itself. “Which history, which tradition?” These questions are at the very core of Caribbean culture.

In the Caribbean Bildungsroman, then, the focus is not as much on the individual, who adapts to a shifting cultural and political environment, but rather on the way the changes within the individual are reflected in the world around. The connection is largely symbolic: it is clearly not, say, Beka’s work on her essay, her negotiating different stories and perspectives on the history of Belize that plant the seeds for Independence, but the focus on her journey of self-discovery, on her gradual understanding of her history and her identity – which is also that of her community – is nonetheless reflected in the changes happening in

the political landscape of Belize. It is not Beka who adapts and shapes herself according to the ever-changing rules of a fast-paced political scenario, it is the political scenario of the colony that reflects the changes within the child. It is this highly symbolic connection between the individual and their community, the individual and their environment, that has Ramchand claim that, rather than depicting a West Indian boy, George Lamming is depicting “West Indian boyhood”. As we have seen, this tends to be the pattern with the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

Places:

The final key word that shall be analyzed in this section is connected with the geography of politics on a local rather than global scale. The “places of politics” mark the physical spaces in which politics is discussed and/or those spaces where the people have the chance to see and hear from the politicians they shall be voting for. This study is mainly focused on identifying the different connotations of private and public spaces, with the awareness that the two, rather than marking an either-or binary choice, are best interpreted as the ends of a spectrum, as various degrees of “public” and “private” are clearly discernible in the novels selected.

Among the most public spaces in which politics happen, one cannot help but mention political meetings and events. *No Man in the House* by Cecil Foster is perhaps the novel in which political discussions are more frequent – which can be explained by the setting of the novel, which takes place during the political campaign that was to decide the future of Barbados as an independent nation or a British colony. The importance of visual clues during such public events is obviously central, as proven, for instance, by Pretty's words when she describes seeing Sandra Ward, the white daughter of a politician famously against Independence, at the event organized by the opposition party:

I couldn't believe these two eyes God gave me when I looked up at the platform with all the lights and banners to see this woman, the only white person, sitting up there just smiling and waving. The only white face among the twenty-four candidates. To tell the truth, I had to ask myself if the Democratic Front for Independence was still a black people party. I heard plenty of people around me mumbling the same thing. (1992: 207)

Sandra being white and a visible spokesperson for the DFI sends a message that is not necessarily well-received by the crowd, who perceives it as a kind of betrayal of the party's roots – the reasoning behind this choice, on the part of Mr Bradshaw, has already been discussed in the section titled “America”. In addition to the visual aspect, however, a considerable significance is given, in Foster's novel, to the connotations of music. At the DFI event, a man in the crowd complains about having to listen to “that damn Jim Reeves record” while the crowd waits for Phillips, the leader of the party, to come onstage. “Play something West Indian, something black, – the man says – Play the Mighty Charmer if yuh got any calypsos. Play Nat King Cole, the Drifters, Louis Armstrong. Something the people know”. (1992: 119-120)

It is clear that music is hardly background in public events like this. Herbert Ward, the white leader of the anti-Independence party, knows it too, which is why his party's event – immediately preceding the election, when everybody was convinced he was going to win – is described by Howard as “a parade of people dancing and singing as if it were a small carnival led by a loud bass drum and a piccolo”. (1992: 245) In both cases, the reader can recognize either a request or an attempt to connect public political events with popular culture and perceptions regarding roots and belonging. In *Beka Lamb* too, as previously recalled, refusing to sing *God Save the Queen* and playing the American anthem instead is framed as a radical, political act – much like refusing to hang the King's portrait in the Chamber. (2007: 107)

If political meetings are the most public places in which politics happen, they are hardly the only ones. This study has already focused on the way several of the novels connect politics and schools, by having the characters write politically-minded essays (*Beka Lamb*, *No Man in the House*) or by having school teachers be involved, at different levels, in local politics (*In the Castle of my Skin*, *No Man in the House*, *The Schoolmaster*, *Abeng*). Occasionally, what drives school teachers to politics, in the novel selected, is a desire for power and recognition. At other times, they can represent a force for change – despite the authors not shying away from a nuanced portrayal of mostly positive characters as well. Often too, like in *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack*, school teachers are an instrument of colonial control. Consider, for instance, the very public speech by the school headmaster which Tom describes in Austin Clarke's novel. “It was a speech of sorrow, – he says – the German had sunk another merchant ship”. Clarke writes:

That sad morning the headmaster said a very long prayer. We prayed for the King and the Royal Family, and the Prime Minister and for all of our Allies, with closed eyes and lowered heads, we asked God to give our English leaders good counsel, wisdom and strength to kill more Germans and Italians and Japanese than the Axis Powers could do to us 'in these days of peril'. [...] The headmaster brought the sad proceedings to a close by leading us into the singing of *Rule Britannia, Britannia Rule the Waves*. And in all the singing, nobody remembered to pray for the families of the Barbadian seamen lost or dead at sea. (2003: 14-15)

As usual, Clarke's description is hardly a neutral one. The author uses irony to provide layers to the headmaster's speech with his own (mature) considerations on the hypocrisy of the event – considerations that his young self could hardly have formulated, and certainly not in this manner. This only serves to highlight the political charge of the speech itself, its power and its purpose. The topic of politics and school has been touched upon at various points during this study and therefore shall not be repeated here, but it seemed fitting to remind the reader of this connection and the different meanings it can take on, when discussing what have been termed the “places of politics”. School – whether in the form of colonial control, as a subversive instrument to challenge the *status quo*, or simply as a tool for ambitious people to gain power, fame, and recognition – is undoubtedly one of them. School and political meetings, then, are among the most public of settings in which politics happens – public to the point where, in *No Man in the House*, the grandmother character feels the need to defend the family from political pressure and intimidations. She says: “I’ve tried my best to stay out of politics and of harm’s way. I won’t even go to a political meeting so that nobody can say I like one party over another”. (1992: 220)

Another common “place of politics” is the bar – occasionally, the rum shop, or, more informally, the street corner where the people from the village meet up. It is interesting to observe how the connotations of bar talk, in the novel selected, are only partly in line with those of other public places. In fact, if public places tend to be those of official speeches and symbolic gestures, both in favour and against Independence, political bar talk, despite happening in what is undoubtedly a public place, can be characterized by a higher degree of spontaneity and freedom of expression. As both Glyne Griffith (2016) and Laurence Breiner (2003) report, bars were also the places where the radio was listened to in the colonial Caribbean, as most people did not have radios at home, thus making listening to the news and to other broadcasts effectively a communal experience. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Foster’s novel:

Inside, a group of six stern-faced men were standing under a large radio. Instantly, we realized something was wrong because there was no talking or arguing. All looked sad, standing with their big black arms crossed at their chest, listening to the humming radio at full volume. The announcer on the radio had a foreign accent and there was a crackling sound in the background, indicating the broadcast was coming live from overseas. “What you listening to?” someone asked the men. They looked at us as if to suggest we shouldn’t interrupt. [...] “They shot the president,” one of the men answered. (1992: 78)

Foster describes how the people from the village learn about the assassination of JFK, which incidentally also helps set the novel firmly in 1963, but international news is far from the only news discussed at the bar. In *A Brighter Sun*, for instance, the notice warning people to clear out of their gardens because the Americans are going to build a road is put up in Tall Boy’s rum shop. (1985: 104) In *In the Castle of my Skin*, the notice put up at the street corner warns villagers that the landlord has sold the land. (2016: 275) All of these can be considered events pertaining to the more public side of bar talk.

However, one should also remember that the bar (specifically, the rum shop) is where G. and Trumper have their talk about “my people” – where harsh words are said about Mr Slime’s betrayal and the issue of racial discrimination in the Caribbean colonies is compared and contrasted with what happens in the US. (Lamming 2016: 327) The bar is also where Little Foot, a character in *No Man in the House* who supports the anti-Independence party, gets to be very critical of the DFI party. Mr Bradshaw himself allows this, by saying Little Foot should be given a chance, as “he is going to come around some day and see that independence is good for all of us”. (1992: 124) Even in *The Schoolmaster* we get to hear the characters’ opinions on the new school without filters only in Dardain’s shop, even if this happens after closing time, thus making the event even more private. (2015: 25)

But if the bar/shop is characterized by its somewhat ambiguous nature, treading the line between public and private and occasionally confusing it, the home is where political discussions are the freest, as they are unburdened by anxieties and self-censorship. Home, obviously, means family – which is why, in *No Man in the House*, Grandma refuses to answer when her neighbour asks her if she is planning on voting, by stating simply: “Me? I ain’t plan to vote for one soul but Christ, the Truth, the Light and the Way”. (1992: 200) In Lamming’s novel too, as discussed, the home has a central role, as the topic of land

ownership and the power derived from it are pivotal to the plot. Home is where the conversations between Pa and Ma take place: conversations about life and change – which inevitably touch on politics. Their exchanges are made even more symbolic by the fact that, after Ma’s death, their house will be among the ones sold by the Penny Bank and Friendly Society, and Pa will be moved to the Alms House, which he describes as “my last restin’-place before the grave.” (2016: 339)

Home is also where Sunday lunch happens, and where Beka gets to listen to her family argue about politics. This serves as a way to present Beka’s family background but also as a means for the reader to be exposed to different perspectives on the Independence issue – in fact, though Beka’s family on the whole supports Independence, the stakes are not the same for every character. While Granny Ivy, for instance, openly supports the P.I.P. (the party in favour of Independence), Beka’s father, Bill, is more careful about showing his support, to the point where he claims he will not wear guayaberas³ in order not to be accused of “Latin leanings”, as he needs to protect his job at a local business. In fact, the issue of Independence from Britain in Belize is entwined with the claims on the territory advanced by Guatemala, therefore people in favour of Independence were often believed to be in cahoots with “the Guats”. (Edgell 2007: 95) Beka’s father is trying to protect himself and his family from suspicion – and home is the only place where he gets to talk freely about these issues.

Finally, home is where, because of the freedom the setting allows, the characters are also confronted with uncomfortable scenarios. After the birth of his daughter, Tiger invites his family over to celebrate and he ends up being scolded for the company he keeps in Baratavia: “Is only nigger friend you makeam since you come? [...] Plenty Indian liveam this side. Is true them is good neighbours, but you must look for Indian friend, like you and your wife. Indians must keep together.” (Selvon 1985: 47) Far from being a sanctuary, then, home can be suffocating and restricting too, much like colonial society at large. While family and close friends can and do grant the characters a greater freedom of expression, a chance to speak freely in the only context in which this is allowed, they can also mirror the same constrictions and limitations which characterize the outside world. The last chapter of the study shall focus on this topic and thus develop the theme of departing and leaving one’s home in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition.

³ A particular type of men’s summer shirt, very common in Latin America, distinguished by two vertical rows of pleats down the front and back.

CHAPTER FIVE:
LEAVING HOME BEHIND

The colonial predicament: Joyce, Lamming, Naipaul, and the idea of departure

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use — silence, exile, and cunning. (Joyce 1960: 247)

In James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus resolves to leave Ireland and explains his decision, on the one hand, in terms of disenchantment ("I will not serve that in which I no longer believe"), on the other, as a search for a kind of personal and artistic freedom which staying does not allow him ("I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can"). Significantly, Dedalus mentions "silence, exile, and cunning" as the weapons he will arm himself with – "for my defence", he says. Dedalus is reacting to what he perceives as the provincialism of Ireland at the time, to a certain kind of nationalism that he believes to be as limiting as it is oppressive. In this sense, the weapon of "silence" is his right not to express those very same ideas that circulate everywhere and that, for this reason, he is expected to share as well. As it is known, the novel is largely autobiographical, as Joyce himself left Ireland for Trieste first, and then for Paris and Zurich.

It is interesting to note that Joyce was writing at a time of great change for Ireland – *Portrait of the Artist* was published in 1916, the same year of the Easter Rising, an armed rebellion organized by the Irish republicans in order to end British rule. It is also significant that the reasons his protagonist offers for leaving are both steeped in disillusion and charged with a desire to do, to live, and to create. Finally, the many autobiographical references that are recognizably present in the novel – most importantly, the choice to go on an allegedly voluntary exile – are also worth considering, as we find all of these elements in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition as well. This is partly due to the vast influence Joyce's work had, in anglophone literatures and beyond, during the whole of the 20th century, while also partly

stemming from the constrictions and limitations of the colonial condition, which Ireland and the Caribbean have long shared. Before introducing the theme of departure in the novels selected, however, it seems appropriate to briefly analyse how Caribbean culture as a whole has considered the theme of departure in connection with the colonial predicament.

In 1960 George Lamming, who at the time had lived in Britain for ten years, published a non-fiction book, a collection of connected essays titled *The Pleasures of Exile*. In the introduction, the author writes: “My subject is the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero’s and his language. This book is the report on one man’s way of seeing”. (1992: 13) Much like Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist*, Lamming draws on his own life experiences in order to write of the artist in exile, of the reasons why exile is the only way for West Indian writers to make art. What is interesting, in Lamming’s book, is how the author connects his personal journey to the condition of all colonial writers from the West Indies. He writes:

This is one of the seeds which much later bear such strange fruit as the West Indian writers’ departure from the very landscape which is the raw material of all their books. These men had to leave if they were going to function as writers since books, in that particular colonial conception of literature, were not – meaning, too, are not supposed to be – written by natives. Those among the natives who read also believed that; all the books they had read, their whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from the outside: Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and all that sacred gang. (1992: 27)

Lamming appears to question the voluntary nature of the artist’s exile by tracing its reasons back to the colonial condition itself. In order to escape the colonial constraints of what art is supposed to look like and where it is supposed to come from, the colonial artists find themselves in the position where they can either leave home, looking for “some mode of life or art” in which to express themselves “as freely” and “wholly” as they can, or stop making art. Lamming speaks of the way colonial education is responsible for the myth of “England’s supremacy in taste and art” (1992: 27) and the way this myth inevitably shapes the perception and credibility of those he calls native writers. To escape the prison of colonial prejudice, the artist decides to leave.

Of course, leaving home brings with it its own issues, especially when, like in Lamming's case, the journey is circular, as the destination is once again England, the so-called "mother country":

When the exile is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonised his own history, then there are certain complications. For each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England. [...] although the new circumstances are quite different, and even more favourable than those he left in the West Indies, his reservations, his psychology, his whole sense of cultural expectation have not greatly changed. He arrives and travels with the memory, the habitual weight of a colonial relation. (1992: 24-25)

The artist may leave, but memory stays – and the issues connected with cultural imperialism and oppression continue to haunt the artist in exile. The obstacles may not be external now, but Lamming suggests that internalized prejudice still "weighs" on the artist's mind and his conscience. In other words, colonial writers may leave their home looking for artistic freedom – Lamming even argues that they are *forced* to leave – but they cannot fully escape the constraints of the colonial condition, whose influence is far from limited to external circumstances. Frantz Fanon's description of the "colonized intellectuals", who lose their connection to their people and their capacity for identification because of colonial education, comes to mind.

This fatalistic element touched upon by Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* and its connection with the history of British colonialism are at the very core of V.S. Naipaul's reflections on the condition of the colonial in exile – though the perspective is very different. In *The Mimic Men* (1967) Naipaul has his protagonist famously reflect on the "unreal" nature of colonial life when compared to the West. He writes:

We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came quickly to the new. (2011: 157)

The only way out of the unrealness and essential mimicry of the colonial condition is to leave the New World for the Old, because, as a consequence of the history of the Caribbean colonies, the author believes that authenticity cannot be found there.

In his Nobel lecture – significantly titled *Two Worlds* – Naipaul argues that growing up in Trinidad as a child of a recently immigrated Indian family meant that the outside world was “an area of darkness” for him: and this included both his family's ties to India and the life of the colony outside of the immediate circle of his family. The author argues that he made these areas of darkness the subject of his books – and, most significantly, that leaving, travelling, allowed him the perspective that he needed to describe not just the world, but also Trinidad, the very island where his journey began. Naipaul writes:

Accident, then, rescued me. I became a traveller. I travelled in the Caribbean region and understood much more about the colonial set-up of which I had been part. I went to India, my ancestral land, for a year; it was a journey that broke my life in two. The books that I wrote about these two journeys took me to new realms of emotion, gave me a world-view I had never had, extended me technically. I was able in the fiction that then came to me to take in England as well as the Caribbean – and how hard that was to do. I was able also to take in all the racial groups of the island, which I had never before been able to do. (2001)

What is true of the colonial, then, the need to leave home because it will never be but a shadow, a mimicry of what real life is supposed to be like, is especially true of the artist. The artistic freedom, or perspective, that the artist gains by leaving home is an essential part of their art. Much like in Joyce, exile is what allows the artist to keep making art. When comparing Naipaul's take on the artist's exile with Lamming's it is not solely the much more pessimistic view that Naipaul argues for that stands out. For Naipaul exile is a solitary experience. His 1987 largely autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, which deals with the themes of art, nature, and the elusive concept/feeling of home, makes it abundantly clear. The artist leaves home in order to get to know his own areas of darkness.

While Lamming points out the similarities in the journey of so many West Indian writers, who left the colonies for England “independent of discussion among themselves, in some cases ignorant of each other except by name” (1992: 24), Naipaul's understanding of the artist's exile is much more personal, while still inextricably linked with the history of the New World. What is common to these different takes on the artist's exile, however, is the idea that leaving home is a means – quite possibly the only means – for art to be created. Whether it is to avoid prejudice, censorship, to gain perspective, freedom, or more chances of success, leaving appears to be the *condicio sine qua non* of colonial art.

With this in mind, the study shall now turn to the Bildungsroman tradition in order to inquire how the departure, or exile, of the artist compares with that of the child – keeping in mind that many of the novels are, at least partly, autobiographical (and therefore there is an overlapping between the “child” and the “artist” figure) and also considering the traditional Romantic connection that links the two together. This final chapter shall deal with the theme of departure by focusing on the many different types of “departures” that are present in the novels: real, imagined, and metaphorical. The reasons for leaving will also be analyzed in connection with the different destinations of the protagonists' journey. Finally, the possibility/impossibility of return will be discussed by referring to the classical topos of the *nostos* (or “return of the hero”) and its Caribbean connotations.

Real, imagined, and metaphorical departures: history and the texts

Looking at the texts, and how they deal with the theme of departure, one might be surprised by the variety of destinations. From a British perspective, in fact, Caribbean migration tends to have a definite beginning – 1948, the year of the *Windrush* – and a precise destination: Britain itself, mainly London and the bigger cities. This is, historically, only a partial truth. As Robert Winder explains in *Bloody Foreigners. The Story of Immigration to Britain*, in the first half of the 20th century, “up to 150,000 Jamaicans (a tenth of the population) went job-seeking in North and Central America. Many had been ferried to Panama to dig the canal.” (2013: 333-334) Emigration, mainly to seek jobs, was already part of Caribbean culture before mass migration to England began in the 1950s.

The docking of the *SS Empire Windrush* at Tilbury docks on June 21st 1948, a ship carrying 492 Caribbean migrants, became a symbol of the beginning of multi-ethnic Britain; however, as Graham MacPhee writes, “Britain's existing non-white population probably stood at somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 [already] in 1945”. (2011: 43) In *Writing Black Britain* (2000), the period spanning from 1948 (the year of the *British Nationality Act*, which extended British nationality to the colonies and contributed to encourage immigration) to 1962 (when, with a new *Act*, citizenship began to be restricted) is defined as ‘*lasser faire* phase’ or ‘open door’ period in the history of British immigration laws. This period coincides with the beginning of mass migration from the Caribbean to Britain: according to Winder, “in 1954, 24,000 West Indians arrived; in 1955, there were 26,000” and “by 1958 some 115,000 people, mostly single men, had sailed from Kingston and Port of Spain, and juddered their way to Southampton and London.” (2013: 352) Modern technology in the form of steamships, plus the relatively open (or unprepared) attitude towards migration which characterized British politics in the 1950s, had contributed to making Britain a desirable destination for Caribbean migrants.

It was not, however, the only possible destination. The present section shall analyze the novel's “departures” by dividing them into two main categories: “real” departures, which occur when the novel ends with the protagonists physically leaving (or on the cusp of leaving) their home country, and “imagined” departures, when the protagonists, at one point in the narrative, express their desire (need, or necessity) to leave, but ultimately do not. A third category can be that of “metaphorical” departures, in which the idea of leaving does characterize the ending of the novel, but is expressed solely in metaphorical terms. Before detailing the different departures and how they fit into each category, however, it seems fitting to expound on the theme of destination in order to ascertain where the Caribbean protagonists go, or dream of going, in each of the novels selected.

As anticipated, Britain is very present: both Annie, in Kincaid's *Annie John*, and Tee, in Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, leave their respective islands to go study in Britain. Similarly, in *Beka Lamb* and *No Man in the House*, the protagonists dream of crossing the Atlantic, but ultimately decide to remain where they are. It is interesting that, while Howard dreams of leaving to join his parents, Beka just wants to go somewhere far away. She is not the one to bring up England – her grandmother does – but Beka specifically refuses Mexico

as a destination because it is “too close” and “too similar to Belize for my liking”. (2007: 147) Departure is considered in the direction of either England or America both in *A Brighter Sun* and in *Abeng*. Clare, specifically, is bothered by the idea she will probably have to leave Jamaica as England and America are “the places island people went to get ahead”. (1995: 37) In *Growing Up with Miss Milly*, Wilby wins a scholarship to a Canadian school, and in all other cases, either there is no departure (*Christopher*), the departure is metaphorical (*Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, *The Schoolmaster*), or the protagonist moves within the context of the Caribbean region. This happens to G., in Lamming's novel, who leaves for Trinidad (though his friend Trumper moves to America), and to Francis, the protagonist of *The Year in San Fernando*, whose departure is actually a return to his hometown from the big city.

Whether to Britain or elsewhere, leaving home is clearly a central theme in the Caribbean Bildungsroman, rooted, as it has been shown to be, in the centre-periphery relations typical of the colonial condition and in the history of the Caribbean territories themselves, where permanence and stability have been made impossible by the genocide of the natives during the European *conquista*, and later by the slave trade and by the use of indentured labour. As discussed in previous chapters, Caribbean identity is composite and diasporic by definition and the desire/need to leave the Caribbean, often searching for better economic or social conditions, adds another layer of complexity to the picture.

Starting from what have been termed, for the sake of clarity, the “real” departures that the reader can find in the novels selected, they are five, representing little more than 40% of the total. The majority of them is characterized by a common thematic denominator: the protagonists leave because the idea of staying has become intolerable. We shall consider *In The Castle of My Skin* first, on the account of it being the novel which has inspired the flowering and success of the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition. G. leaves for Trinidad at the end of the novel: his explanation of the reasons that led him to make this decision are closely tied with the protagonist's sense of self and the feeling that the community he has been living in all his life has been holding him back. It is actually Trumper, who left for the United States long before G. decided to leave, who explains it most clearly: “‘America make you feel,’ he said. ‘It make you feel that were you been livin’ before is a kind of cage.’” Or, in G’s own words:

When I reach Trinidad where no one knows me I may be able to strike identity with the other person. But it was never possible here. I am always feeling terrified of being known; not because they really know you, but simply because their claim to this knowledge is a concealed attempt to destroy you. That is what knowing means. As soon as they know you they will kill you, and thank God that's why they can't kill you. They can never know you. (2016: 292)

G. is trying to escape an environment in which he perceives being known as being labeled (one could say “caged”), and while this “claim to knowledge” will never be accurate, it is, however, limiting and oppressive. Hence the need to get away, even though G. does worry that “the same will be true in Trinidad”. (2016: 292) G.’s departure is interestingly paralleled in the novel, not only with Trumper’s, but also with Pa’s, the old man from the village who is forced to abandon his home after the land it is built on gets sold. It is Pa himself who presents his and G’s situations as similar, as well as opposites, when he says: “We both settin’ forth tomorrow. [...] I to my last restin’-place before the grave an’ you to the wide wide world”. (2016: 339) In a way, they are both forced to make this decision by external circumstances. G’s reasons for leaving are also interesting because they seem to resonate with the explanations Annie offers in Kincaid’s *Annie John*, despite the pressures put on the protagonists being somewhat different because of gender expectations and despite Annie’s journey having England as its destination. But the feeling is the same. Kincaid writes:

Everything I would do that morning until I got on the ship that would take me to England I would be doing for the last time, for I had made up my mind that, come what may, the road for me now went only in one direction: away from my home, away from my mother, away from my father, away from the everlasting blue sky, away from the everlasting hot sun, away from people who said to me, “This happened during the time your mother was carrying you.” (1997: 133-134)

Annie, too, feels that she can be allowed to be herself only away from home, where no one knows her, where everything she is is not predetermined by the conditions, the place, and the family she was born in, where she can start afresh. Annie significantly mentions

people bringing up tales from before she was born, and the metaphors of the “everlasting blue sky” and “everylasting hot sun” contribute to painting an almost visual picture of the oppressive sameness that characterizes the Antigua she has known for seventeen years. As it is for G., also for Annie to be known – which, as shown, means to have assumptions made about oneself, based on one’s background and the circumstances of their life – is a cage to be escaped.

While the theme of the gradual discovery, or creation, of a separate identity is obviously central in any Bildungsroman, as it is closely connected with the end of childhood and adolescence, these traditional themes acquire an additional flavour within the context of the Caribbean tradition, as the dissatisfaction with one’s home is certainly psychological in nature but has its roots in the history of the place as well. This study has touched several times upon the topics of mimicry, unrealness, even alienation as effects of the colonial condition, often the products of a colonial education and the mindless imposition of Western values on colonial subjects; these feelings, coupled with the often scarce chances colonial life offers to young people, have historically led to emigration. In Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* too, the protagonist, Tee, feels like her education has somehow uprooted her, and this has made leaving Trinidad the only possible choice she has left. Hodge writes:

Everything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be since I had moved up and no longer had any place here. But it was painful, and I longed all the more to be on my way. (2015: 122)

“Moving up”, for Tee, means going to a new, more prestigious school and frequenting the social circles of her middle-class aunt, Beatrice, and her cousins. This leads to Tee “shrinking from the ordinaryness” (2015: 123) of her previous life and longing to leave Trinidad for England, where her father lives. There is a sense of inevitability in Tee’s desire to leave the country: she suffers from having cut ties with her family and her previous sense of belonging, but at the same time acknowledges that “this was as it should be”. (2015: 122) While the novel does not end with the protagonist leaving, rather with her goodbye party, during which Tee experiences acute feelings of isolation, the very last line of the novel

paints a rather precise picture of her departure: “I desired with all my heart that it were the next morning and a plane were lifting me off the ground”. (2015: 123)

Different connotations characterize the other two “real” departures that shall be analyzed in this section: Francis becoming disillusioned with the big city and going back home in *The Year in San Fernando* and Wilby obtaining his scholarship to a Canadian school after the successful tour he undertook with a group of musicians and calypsonians in *Growing Up with Miss Milly*. In both cases, it is possible to recognize an attempt to subvert the traditional paradigm.

In Anthony's novel, the young protagonist, Francis, gets to spend a year in the city, as a guest of the Chandles' household. During this period, he gets to come to terms with the “sordid story” (Ramchand 1983: 220) of the family: issues of inheritance, infidelity, and family secrets become gradually clearer to the protagonist, who ultimately decides to leave San Fernando right as old Mrs Chandles's is dying, to go back to his family in the small village of Mayaro. Ramchand stresses how Anthony is more interested in the inner life of the protagonist, rather than in expressing a moral judgement. In fact, Francis's year in San Fernando, rather than marking the end of the boy's childhood, offers him an insight into life outside of the small village: he gets to see Linden Chandles as something more than the “tidy-looking and neat” man Francis describes in the first chapter (2015: 2-3). Francis gets to understand his personality, his flaws, his problematic family life, and ultimately decides that, at this point in time, going back home is what he wants to do. In this sense, *The Year in San Fernando* does end with the protagonist deciding of his own free will to leave – Edwin Chandles, Linden's brother, mentions he will not be able to look after Francis after Mrs Chandles's death and points out how Francis's mother might not want to send him back, but it is Francis who decides he will not be coming back to San Fernando. Francis goes back home, somewhat wiser after the year spent in the big city, though still very much a child. The protagonist's need to leave, in Anthony's novel, is not connected, like in the other novels, with his feelings for his home, but rather with his desire to move beyond his experiences his San Fernando. Social advancement is hardly the ultimate goal here.

While in some ways a lot more traditional, the departure described (or, better, announced) in Sybil Seaforth's *Growing Up with Miss Milly* is also different from the others analyzed so far, in that it lacks the sense of constriction caused by the protagonist's homeland. Wilby leaves Jamaica because he gets a chance to pursue his dreams to become

a sportsman and a musician, but his “cage”, rather than Jamaica itself, is his complex relationship with his mother and her expectations for him. Because Milly ultimately realizes her mistake, Wilby’s imminent departure feels like a happy chance, maybe even a sign things are changing, rather than an obligation or the only possible escape from a fate of immobility. It seems important to stress that, among the novels detailing a “real” departure, Seaforth’s is the most recent, having been published in 1988, which could explain, at least partly, the different, less bleak, more optimistic feelings towards the destiny of the Caribbean territories.

For many young protagonists who leave, there are many who stay – despite having dreamt of or imagined, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, their own departure from the island or territory that they call home. Among those that have been termed “imagined” departures (four in total), the only protagonist for whom leaving is a fantasy in the sense of an unrealistic dream is Tiger from Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun*. This has to do with Tiger’s responsibilities as a young husband and father, who gradually moves away from his dream of going to England and America and realizes “it have plenty other things to think about”, as “a man can’t take up heself and do this and do that”. (1985: 213) There is an element of tragic irony too in the fact that Tiger spends most of his time in the novel building a road that ends up leading him nowhere. Like Annie and G., Tiger too laments the repetitive nature of the life he leads – in his case, the “sameness” is connected with how everything seems to change *around* him, leaving his condition virtually untouched. It seems relevant to mention the last few lines of the novel, as they appear to anticipate another “imagined” departure:

He considered going back to the canefields in Chaguanas, but the thought of it made him laugh aloud. He broke a blade of grass and put it in his mouth. Overhead, a cloud fled the sun, moving in a swift breeze. “Now is a good time to plant corn,” he muttered, gazing up at the sky. (1985: 215)

On the one hand, in this closing passage, the author seems to hint at the repetitive nature of time and, therefore, of life by explicitly referring to the endless cycle of seasons and the duties connected to each of them. “Now is a good time to plant corn,” Tiger says.

And the only reason he knows this is because he has experienced this time and this season over and over again. On the other hand, a new element is introduced here. The idea of going back to his native village of Chaguanas to work in the canefields. This is the life Tiger has left behind at the beginning of the novel by getting married and going to live in Barataria. “The thought of it, – Selvon writes – made him laugh aloud.” To Tiger, the canefields in Chaguanas are a step back, not forward, and they could hardly represent the meaningful departure from the sameness of life the protagonist so ardently desires.

Interestingly enough, Tiger *will* end up going back to Chaguanas. In 1958 Selvon publishes *Turn Again Tiger*, the sequel to *A Brighter Sun*, in which Tiger decides to move back to the canefields. Sandra Pouchet Paquet calls this “the step backwards which Tiger hopes will result in two steps forward; a step which awakens memories of a way of life that Tiger thought he had left behind.” (Selvon 1979: X) In a way, then, Tiger laughing at the mere thought of leaving for Chaguanas contains the seed of his own departure: an unusual one at that, because Tiger’s journey takes him back to the start in order for him to accept this part of him, of his background, and move forward. One could identify an element of alienation even here, in Tiger’s move from the countryside (largely populated by the Indian community) to the multi-ethnic town, despite the character never physically leaving the country.

If for Tiger, at least in *A Brighter Sun*, the possibility of leaving feels either ridiculous or a childish dream one has to grow out of, there are two cases (*Beka Lamb* and *No Man in the House*) in which the protagonists mature the decision not to leave the island gradually, over the course of the novel itself. Moving away from their desire to leave and embracing the decision to stay and participate to a new historical phase, identifiable with Independence or the struggle to achieve it, is actually a significant part of both Howard’s and Beka’s arcs. If, at the beginning of the novel, Howard’s main concern is for his parents to send for him so he can join them in England and thus escape poverty and the shame and vulnerability he feels at living in a place where there is “no man in the house”, his desires gradually change. Especially after meeting Mr Bradshaw, he starts to think that maybe *he* is in the right place and his parents in the wrong one. Foster writes:

I was not sure I wanted to leave Barbados. Not that I didn’t want to see my parents, but I knew Grandmother needed someone around to help her as she got older. [...]

At the same time, I wanted to be with my parents. There was a hunger in me to know them and be with the people who were responsible for bringing me into this world. [...] I wanted to be part of both worlds but I didn't want to give up anything. Most of all, I didn't want to give up Grandmother. I suppose I wanted my parents here, where they were supposed to be. I didn't feel like I should have to make any choices. (1992: 239-240)

Howard's gradual acceptance that the destiny of Barbados is about to change for the better, and that he should remain there and contribute to this change, is deeply rooted in his exposure to the pro-Independence movement. Similarly, Beka's initial wish is to leave Belize for a "faraway corner", where, if things were to break down for her, "she could maybe pick up the pieces, glue them together and start over again" (2007: 147) without anyone knowing. The theme of societal pressure in a colonial society, which has been analyzed in previous novels where it is presented as a reason for the protagonist to leave, is a central issue in *Beka Lamb* too. However, as with Howard in *No Man in the House*, Beka's growing interest in politics and the movement for the Independence of Belize ultimately convinces her that her journey is intimately connected with that of her country – to the point where, by the end of the novel, they both are said to have "made a beginning". (2007: 167)

Among what have been termed "imagined" departures, Clare's in *Abeng* emerges as particularly significant as her attitude towards having to leave for England or America in order to "get ahead" (1995: 37) remains negative throughout the narrative. While Clare is aware that this will probably be her destiny, she is consistently resentful about it. When Clare's friend from the country, a working-class black girl named Zoe, points out their differences, she mentions Clare eventually leaving Jamaica as one of them, though, according to Zoe, even now they live close, at least during the summer, they belong to different worlds:

Me will have fe beg land fe me and fe me pickney to live pon. Wunna will go a England, den maybe America, to university, and when we meet later we will be different smaddy. But we is different smaddy now. (1995: 118)

Clare struggles to accept that everything seems “so fixed” and “unchangeable” and wants her and Zoe “to be the same”. (1995: 118) At the end of the novel, Clare is not yet ready to leave the island, and her parents cannot afford a boarding school, so she is forced to move in with a family friend, Mrs Beatrice, as a punishment for disobeying Miss Mattie and accidentally killing her bull with a stolen gun. The whole episode is highly symbolic: Clare “felt she had a right” (1995 :124) to the gun, which her brothers are allowed to use for hunting, but she is punished for daring to hold it. Killing the bull, an obvious symbol of masculinity, cannot but result in punishment for Clare, who learns that, as a girl, she is not allowed the freedom and agency the boys have. Her stay with Mrs Beatrice makes this all too obvious, as it is characterized by complete and utter immobility. “Miss Mattie had protected Clare from labor, but Miss Beatrice allowed her no movement,” Cliff writes. And Clare’s only escape from this cage of stereotypical femininity and proper behaviour is fantasy, “where she could pretend she was an Aztec princess kept prisoner by a conquistador”. (1995: 157) In a way, it could be said that Clare comes to be physically trapped by the very same fixedness she resents in the world around her.

Having considered both the “real” and the “imagined” departures, only one category remains to be dealt with: that of what have been termed “metaphorical” departures, possibly the hardest category to define. In general terms, this study considers metaphorical those instances in which the theme of leaving one’s home does characterize the ending of a novel, but rather than an event occurring to the protagonist, the reference to the theme is purely symbolic. To this category belong both Clarke’s *Growing up Stupid to the Union Jack*, which uses literary references to evoke the idea of departure, and Lovelace’s *The Schoolmaster*, which, as a symbolic Bildungsroman itself, where the protagonist is the community, uses the departure of two characters to close the narrative and move away from the otherwise overpowering point of view of the community.

Clarke’s novel ends with the protagonist, Tom, entering Harrison College, the prestigious high school which is almost exclusively attended by white boys. This success comes with a price, however, as Tom also sees that, as a member of the Cadet Corps, he has been demoted as a punishment for crossing “enemy territory” at camp – ironically, Tom is discovered and “arrested” by the Harrison College boys themselves, who, as Clarke writes, took their roles very seriously and “imagined they were in the British army”. (2003: 188) On

the one hand, one can perhaps identify a seed of rejection of military culture in this demotion, on the other, it is inevitable to read it as proof that integration and belonging are issues much more complex than simply getting into a prestigious high school. It is not surprising, then, that the issue of departure should crop up in Clarke's novel too. The closing paragraph reads:

And even when I entered Harrison College the next term and saw my rank posted on the notice board beside the clock tower outside the classical sixth form – A. A. C. Clarke: Acting Lance Corporal – I thought only of Sleepy Smith and his somber voice in the translation of Vergil, *The Aeneid*, Book One: '*I sing of arms and a hero, who first sailed from the shores of Troy...*' The year was one thousand, nine hundred and fifty. (2003: 190)

Vergil's *Aeneid* appears frequently, almost obsessively, in Clarke's novel. Tom spends a lot of time transcribing and studying it, largely perceiving it as something foreign, distant, and impersonal. In chapter twenty-five, for instance, "the master [...] was translating as if he was an Anglican minister reading *The Collect: I sing of arms and a hero, who first sailed from the shores of...*" (2003: 141) It is not surprising, then, that the verses are almost constantly in Tom's mind, always ready to be recalled. However, what is peculiar is that they mark the ending of the novel, the spot that is so often occupied by the protagonist's departure: within this context it is impossible not to notice that Vergil's verses also speak of a departure. According to the myth, Aeneas is forced to abandon his homeland alongside his family when the Greek seize the city, setting fire to it. Aeneas journeys across the seas and ultimately fulfills his destiny by landing in Latium and marrying Lavinia, daughter of the king of Latins, thus paving the way for the foundation of Rome.

In the opening lines of the *Aeneid*, the ones Tom recalls at the end of the novel, the poet, as it is customary, introduces the themes of the poem: the arms and the hero – the Latin text actually says "virum", which is most often translated simply as "man" – who first sailed from the shores of Troy, "fato profugus", or "an exile of fate", as J. W. Mackail translates.⁴ On the one hand, Aeneas's journey is all he has left: his homeland burnt, there is nothing to do but to escape; on the other, his journey is fated – and, as such, as is typical of classical

⁴ From *The Aeneid of Vergil*, 1885, MacMillan and Co.

epic poetry, not really Aeneas's choice, or within his control – since, without Aeneas, there would be no Rome. It does not seem coincidental that Tom should recall Aeneas's departure from Troy and the reasons that led the great Trojan hero to leave right at the end of the novel. It can be read both as an appropriation of the Western canon, which ultimately, finally, begins to make sense when applied to a significant context, and as an attempt at self-identification: the West Indian youth, both forced and willing to leave, becomes, for a moment, if only in Tom's imagination, the great classical hero, whose journey is fated and whose destiny is great. For a moment, Tom seems to evoke a future in which leaving can be more than just an escape from the colonial condition, and ironically does so by referring to one of the main literary pillars of the Western canon.

If Tom's departure in Clarke's *Growing up Stupid Under the Union Jack* is metaphorical because it happens through a fleeting, if significant, moment of identification with myth and literature, the departure that closes Lovelace's collective Bildungsroman *The Schoolmaster* is metaphorical because, given the nature of the work itself, whose protagonist is the closed-off community of Kumaca in Trinidad, the theme of leaving is developed by focusing on a single pair of characters, the travelling priest and Benn, the man who accompanies him. The two men leave Kumaca after the schoolmaster's funeral; they both realize that he has been killed by the villagers after the rape and successive suicide of his assistant, Christiana Dandrade. Their journey towards Valencia, mainly connotated in terms of "silence" (2015: 184) – the reader will remember Joyce's arms: "exile, cunning, and silence" – acknowledges what happened without offering judgement and, while widening the perspective to what is outside Kumaca, the main focus of the novel, it also recognizes that some changes cannot be undone. Lovelace writes:

"You will have to get another schoolmaster, priest." "Yes, the school is there."
"You cannot close it down." "It is how things are. Something begins, it continues."
"Maybe next time... sometime... you get someone from the village to teach school," Benn said, then added: "Or maybe with the road opened the teacher if he from outside can travel to and from Kumaca." "The opening of the road will bring its own difficulties," the priest said. (2015: 185)

The priest, who had initially resisted the building of the school to protect what he perceived as Kumaca's "innocence" – which favours the interpretation of the novel as a *sui generis* Bildungsroman – accepts that change has happened and will continue to happen: the school has been built, the road connecting Kumaca to Valencia will be opened. Change isn't necessarily positive, but it has to be acknowledged, and the journey Benn and the priest undertake towards Valencia seems to point to a future where the village will not be closed-off and "innocent" anymore. This symbolic departure solidifies Kumaca as the protagonist of the novel and seems to frame the events occurring within it as a journey the community undertakes towards maturity and self-awareness – elements that often recur as the final goal, whether it be reached, missed, or merely hinted at, of the typical novel of childhood.

Whether real, imagined, or metaphorical, departure seems to be a central theme in the Caribbean Bildungsroman tradition. In one of the novel selected, Drayton's *Christopher*, while there seems to be no focus on the theme of departure specifically, arrival is given a highly symbolic meaning instead. As previously mentioned, the young boy Christopher, son of a plantation owner, imagines himself as a *conquistador*, landing on the Caribbean shores and warning his men of the danger of "cannibals". (1972: 179) In this case, the departure (from European shores) is merely implied and Christopher's journey, much like that of Columbus, has the Caribbean archipelago as its destination. In this sense, one could speak of a metaphorical arrival, hinting at the history of the Caribbean archipelago itself, which is the very reason for Christopher being born in Barbados and considering it his home. In Christopher's peculiar case too leaving, or having left, one's motherland is not a choice, but a product of history and choices made by other men. By recreating it through play, history comes alive again with all its contradictions and seemingly predetermined paths – and it is this element of fate, of fatality, which lingers on and seems to define the theme of departure in the Caribbean novel, that leads naturally to the question of return, or better of the possibility of it.

Nostos: the possibility of return

The need or desire to leave inevitably opens up the question of return. Many protagonists leave, or dream of leaving their native land, but the novels selected offer much

less material when it comes to the issue of return. In ancient Greek literature, the term adopted to define both the hero's return and the tale recounting it was *nostos*. Anna Bonifazi (2009) explains how the term was used to refer to a journey by sea, usually featuring a shipwreck, out of which the hero came out miraculously alive. She also recalls the Indo-European root from which the word *nostos* is believed to be derived, namely *nes-, which is significantly connected with the concepts of “‘saving oneself’, ‘being safe’, or ‘having a safe journey’”. (492) The *nostos*, then, is the safe return of the hero, through which all suffering is healed: Ulysses finally making his way to Ithaca at the end of the *Odyssey* is the best-known embodiment of this classical *topos*.

In the Bildungsroman tradition, however, there does not seem to be much space for returns. Because of the focus on change and maturation typical of the genre itself, these novels often end with a new phase in the character life: a departure from a previous state of being, that can be a literal departure (like in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, where the protagonist leaves Ireland for the continent), or a metaphorical one, like a marriage (*Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*), or a different kind of life-changing experience that puts the protagonist on a new path (as it happens, for instance, in Wright's *Black Boy*, whose protagonist leaves the party and decides to become a writer). The direction of the typical Bildungsroman epilogue is forward, its focus the immediate future, and the narrative typically closes as the protagonists find their “way in the world” (Naipaul 2011), or dramatically fail to as is the case of novels such as Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*.

In the Caribbean tradition too, despite the theme of departure being undisputably central, the heroes hardly ever come back home – or even imagine themselves doing so. Only two of the novels selected, as seen in the previous section, appear to deal with the issue: *The Year in San Fernando*, where Francis goes back to Mayaro after the eye-opening, yet overwhelming, year in the big city, and *A Brighter Sun*, whose protagonist briefly considers (and immediately laughs at) the idea of going back to Chaguanas and the canefields which he left when he got married. In both cases, the movement happens or is imagined to happen within the island of Trinidad, from the city to the countryside. The connotations are different, as Francis goes back to his previous life knowing more about the world, while Tiger needs to go back to accept a part of himself he simply rejected and never came to terms with. This second return, which will see the light only in the sequel to *A Brighter Sun*, *Turn Again Tiger*, is perhaps more reminiscent of the classical *nostos*, as it allows the hero to heal, or come out at the other side of the metaphorical shipwreck. In other novels, the theme of return is merely hinted at: in *In the Castle of my Skin*, Trumper briefly comes back from the States

to make G. reflect on the topics of race and belonging, while in *No Man in the House* Howard constantly waits for his parents to send for him in England – just to realize it is them who should return and join the movement for Independence. It seems significant that, however scarcely present, when mentioned, returns tend to carry positive meanings, specifically the hope for a better future.

Despite the Bildungsroman genre not leaving much space for developing the theme of return, the concept is very much present in the mind, and the lives, of several of the authors whose works have been considered in this study. In an interview with Reed Dasenbrock and Feroza Jussawalla (Nasta and Rutherford 1995), for instance, Sam Selvon speaks of his decision to move to Canada after twenty-eight years spent in England. Together with Lamming, Selvon was among the first West Indian novelists to settle in England, having emigrated in 1950.⁵ In the interview, Selvon explains: “I suddenly felt that I had had enough of English tradition and European culture. I wanted to get back to the West before it was too late.” Despite not going back to his native Trinidad, Selvon presents the idea of “getting back to the West”, to the New World, as a return to what is more familiar, as opposed to the growing boredom he felt with “English tradition and European culture”.

Among the authors’ returns, it is possible to find what could be termed, borrowing the terminology adopted for the characters’ departure, “real” returns; for instance, that of Earl Lovelace who, after studying and working in the US, moved back to Trinidad in 1982 to teach at the University of the West Indies, or that of Michael Anthony who moved back in 1970. However, it is also interesting to consider other kinds of returns: as previously mentioned, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming writes about going back to West Indies several times but, most importantly, focuses on the writers’ departure from “the very landscape which is the raw material of all their books”. (1992: 27) Many of the novels selected – and not simply the most obviously autobiographical ones, such as *In the Castle of my Skin* and *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack* – can be considered a way for the authors to return to their own childhoods in the Caribbean, now with a mature perspective that allows them to expose inequalities and offer a more well-rounded judgement of the colonial experience, but also with the remnants of that “innocent-wise” child perspective that Bharat (2003) considers so central to the post-colonial Bildungsroman tradition. Going

⁵ George Lamming and Sam Selvon happened to sail to England on the same ship, and, according to what Susheila Nasta writes in the introduction to *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 2006: IX-X), they allegedly bickered over the usage of the one typewriter that was on board.

back to the Greek *nostos* and its link with the theme of “saving oneself” and “nearly escaping death by drowning”, it could be said that these literary returns share the same healing nature.

The authors’ literary returns, of course, are not limited to the novels selected for this study, nor can the theme of return in Caribbean culture be represented only by the works of these authors. Consider, for instance, Selvon’s Moses trilogy. While the first two books deal with the life of Moses, a black Caribbean man living in London, the third book, titled *Moses Migrating* (1983), details his return to his native Trinidad in time for Carnival. The timing is not a coincidence as Moses’s time as a local is nothing more than an illusion, a mask, as in Trinidad Moses discovers that the island has changed, and he himself has changed, and ultimately decides on a final return – this time back to Britain. Moses’s final *nostos*, however, remains uncertain, its success not to be taken for granted, as the novel ends with Moses being stopped at the airport to have his papers checked and feeling “like I was still playing charades”, thus circling back to the Carnival theme. (Selvon 2009: 194)

This specific kind of *nostos*, where the hero leaves to find a part of themselves with which they discover they cannot fully identify, is not unique to Moses or Selvon’s work. In Derek Walcott’s epic poem *Omeros* (1990) too, the protagonist Achille “returns” to Africa on a dream journey in search of himself and his past – and what he discovers there is partly familiar, partly foreign. His name and its meaning are questioned by his ancestor Afolabe, but Achille has no answers for him. Despite realizing he does not fully belong, Achille realizes there are similarities too between the ancient Africa he gets to visit in his vision and present-day Afro-Caribbean culture. The description of the feast in book III explicitly evokes customs and rites typical of the Yoruba people that have survived the Middle Passage – which Achille’s journey seems to mimic, despite being headed in the opposite direction, being a journey through personal and collective memory – and live on in Caribbean culture.

The theme of memory and the way it is connected with history and each individual’s (as well as the community’s) sense of self has been shown to permeate Caribbean culture and to specifically characterize the Caribbean Bildungsroman novel. It also appears to permeate many literary returns Caribbean culture has given a voice to. Both Moses’s and Achille’s returns are, in different ways, journeys of memory, where past and present clash, and the possibility of a future, the suggestion of a path forward, is hinted at. But the examples are many. In “The ‘High Anxiety’ of Belonging”, Caryl Philipps mentions his “thirteen years of compulsive itinerancy”, after which he came to realize what he means by home. He writes:

I know my Atlantic ‘home’ to be triangular in shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the New World of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle. (2004: 8)

It is this realization that leads Phillips to visit the slave fortress of Elmina Castle in Ghana. He describes this journey as a return of sorts, a return to what he perceives as his personal history and its Atlantic places, in the hope to understand:

As a man of African origin, I was coming face to face with a part of my Atlantic history. It was disturbing, but I wished neither to look the other way, nor to romanticize the encounter. I wished simply to understand. This place, after all, was where my journeying in the Atlantic world began. When faced with our own histories in the form of places and buildings, we all respond differently. A holocaust survivor wanders the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto and then breaks down and cries. Ronald Reagan idly sips a pint of beer in an Irish pub and smiles for the cameras. We respond in different ways. (2004: 9)

In his writing, too, Phillips has returned to Atlantic history. In *Foreigners* (2007), for instance, he strings together three Atlantic stories, starting in the 18th century with Francis Barber, Samuel Johnson’s slave, and ending with David Oluwale, a Nigerian immigrant who was killed in Leeds by the police in the 1960s. As Fred D’Aguiar writes, returning to the past through memory and fiction contributes to fill the gaps of history and “build bridges back to the past”. (Frías and D’Aguiar 2002). The idea of understanding goes hand in hand with that of healing, as the *nostos* traces the way that from the present leads back to the past in order for the present to develop a true and meaningful relationship with it and finally move forward.

In Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988) too the author returns, if only with her mind, to the Antigua she knew as a young girl. In the text the author contrasts her recollection of the island with a European tourist’s impression of it – thus stressing the importance of this return, one that gives voice to an experience, that of the locals, otherwise easily ignored. This literary return is hardly conciliatory, as it exposes the hypocrisies of mass tourism, but it does “build bridges”, aiming, as it does, to draw a connection between the old Antigua, colonial Antigua – the one the author remembers but that “no longer exists” (2000: 23) –

and the new Antigua, the tourist's tropical paradise, whose heritage of corruption and inequality can be traced back directly to colonial times.

From Canada, to Trinidad, to colonial Antigua, to 17th century West Africa, the places of return are manifold, depending on the direction of one's journey. Given this context, it does not seem coincidental that the two Nobel lectures given by West Indian writers should also focus heavily on the theme of return. Both Derek Walcott and V. S. Naipaul speak of returning in their work. Having already mentioned Achille's return to Africa, a journey not merely through the Atlantic Ocean, but through time and history, it seems appropriate to remember that Naipaul too was interested in this literary *topos*. In *The Mimic Men* (1967), for instance, Singh returns twice to the fictitious Caribbean island of Isabella looking for a chance or an opportunity that would give his life some purpose. He ultimately fails and ends up in an hotel in London writing his memoirs and, through these, Singh thinks back to his life experiences in what can be seen as a sort of metaliterary return. But the theme of return is central to Naipaul's life and work.

Naipaul is known for his travelogues and for the way his writing links together past and present, and distant parts of the world to each other. In his 2001 Nobel lecture, *Two Worlds*, he explains this as his attempt to fill those "areas of darkness" – D'Aguiar would talk about building bridges – that he felt characterized his childhood and early years because of his relatively isolated childhood in the Trinidadian countryside, where he lived with very little understanding of the world outside his small Indian community. Significantly, *An Area of Darkness* is the title of Naipaul's 1964 travelogue about his journey (back) to India, which he felt he had to visit "because there was no one to tell me what the India my grandparents had come from was like", while the "fading India" the rural community in Trinidad lived in (or pretended to, as Naipaul says) was never enough. (Naipaul 2001). In *A Way in the World* (1994) too, which is among Naipaul's most recent work, the author travels back both to the Trinidad of his childhood and adolescence and to the Caribbean the Spanish *conquistadores* encountered when they first crossed the Atlantic. Naipaul's *nostos* too, it would seem, works towards linking history and personal experience.

In his Nobel lecture, titled *The Antilles. Fragments of Epic Memory* (1992), Derek Walcott also deals with a return – specifically his own return to Trinidad during which he gets to experience the East Indian festival of Ramleela, a dramatization of the Hindu epic Ramayana. The author experiences the event as an outsider, not being part himself of the East Indian community of Trinidad, and catches himself comparing what he sees to what the

original Indian festival must have looked like – as if the festival in Felicly, Trinidad were a sort of mockery of the real thing. Walcott writes:

Consider the scale of Asia reduced to these fragments: the small white exclamations of minarets or the stone balls of temples in the cane fields, and one can understand the self-mockery and embarrassment of those who see these rites as parodic, even degenerate. These purists look on such ceremonies as grammarians look at a dialect, as cities look on provinces and empires on their colonies. Memory that yearns to join the centre, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed, like those bamboo thighs of the god. In other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. “No people there”, to quote Froude, “in the true sense of the word”. No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken. (Walcott 1992)

It is the tragedy of the “mimic men of the New World” (Naipaul 2011: 157), who can never be anything but a shadow of a different civilisation. In his return to the island of Trinidad, Walcott realises he has adopted an outsider’s view on the Caribbean, its rites, and its people, seeing them as “less than” a perceived original, drawing comparisons as limiting and prescriptive as many grammarians’ views on local dialects. “I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration, – Walcott writes – I misread the event through a visual echo of History [...] when all around me there was quite the opposite: [...] a delight of conviction, not loss”. (1992) While initially “polluted” by a prescriptive (and decidedly Western) view of local traditions, Walcott’s return gradually becomes an occasion for celebrating the fragments – which, he says, can be even more valuable than the whole:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. (1992)

Returning, then, becomes an occasion of rediscovery and reevaluation. Through a new perspective – which is old too, which is the very same perspective of the festival goers, who do not care about the origins of the Ramleela festival but believe in it anyway, because they experience it first-hand – the pain of history is quietened, the shipwreck is left in the past, and tradition is appreciated for what it is, not what it should be. Return is a form of rebirth too, which finally leaves behind the ruins of history, together with their heritage of immobility. As Walcott says, “We make too much of that long groan which underlines the past”. (1992)

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