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Los Angeles

Representing Radical Politics in Anglophone Caribbean Literature After Independence

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Robert Kyriakos Smith

2020

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2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Representing Radical Politics in Anglophone Caribbean Literature After Independence

by

Robert Kyriakos Smith

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Jennifer Sharpe, Chair

"Representing Radical Politics in Anglophone Caribbean Literature After Independence" examines the depiction of black radicalism across multiple works by V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Merle Collins, and Earl Lovelace—the first writers of fiction to address the emergence of Black Power in the Caribbean. These authors repurpose, expand, and revise their portraits of Caribbean resistance movements in the wake of decolonization and in so doing betray the limitations inherent in the literary forms that their representations take. I argue that reading these authors alongside each other illuminates a myriad of formal difficulties that prevent Afro-Caribbean revolutionary struggle from being portrayed as something other than mere mimicry of Anglo-American forms. When read in turn, each author illustrates the evolving search for a form amenable to the fictive depiction of a radical politics indigenous to black West Indian culture. Collectively, their works either manifest or challenge the inability to recognize the uniquely Caribbean relationship of blackness to radicalism due to the region's politics being seen until the

1980s as imitating or secondary to British or African American modes. The dissertation finds that, respectively, the authors' testing of literary forms moves from mimicry to parody to allegory before culminating in Lovelace's most recent novel, *Is Just a Movie* (2011), a work of historiographic metafiction that spotlights the representation of Caribbean Black Power as parodic only to dismantle that interpretation as myopic. The focus of my dissertation on the literature of black radicalism in Trinidad, Grenada, and the U.K. makes an important contribution to the field of Caribbean Studies in its demonstration of how literary forms bring into representation a global Black Power Movement that is thought to have failed as a viable political enterprise in the West Indies. It shows how Collins's and Lovelace's complex interpretations of Caribbean Black Power counter and broaden Naipaul's and Selvon's oversimplifications of the movement.

The dissertation of Robert Kyriakos Smith is approved.

King-Kok Cheung

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2020

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To my students, I am immensely grateful to you for teaching me.

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VITA

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Introduction

"Representing Radical Politics in Anglophone Caribbean Literature After Independence" examines the depiction of black radicalism across multiple works by V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Merle Collins, and Earl Lovelace—the first writers of fiction to address the emergence of Black Power in the Caribbean. These authors repurpose, expand, and revise their portraits of Caribbean resistance movements in the wake of decolonization and in so doing betray the limitations inherent in the literary forms that their representations take. I argue that reading these authors alongside each other illuminates a myriad of formal difficulties that prevent Afro-Caribbean revolutionary struggle from being portrayed as something other than mere mimicry of Anglo-American forms. When read in turn, each author illustrates the evolving search for a form amenable to the fictive depiction of a radical politics indigenous to black West Indian culture. Collectively, their works either manifest or challenge the inability to recognize the uniquely Caribbean relationship of blackness to radicalism due to the region's politics being seen until the 1980s as imitating or secondary to British or African American modes. The dissertation finds that, respectively, the authors' testing of literary forms moves from mimicry to parody to allegory before culminating in Lovelace's most recent novel, *Is Just a Movie* (2011), a work of historiographic metafiction[1] that spotlights the representation of Caribbean Black Power as parodic only to dismantle that interpretation as myopic. The focus of my dissertation on the literature of black radicalism in Trinidad, Grenada, and the U.K. makes an important contribution to the field of Caribbean Studies in its demonstration of how literary forms bring into representation a global Black Power Movement that is thought to have failed as a viable

[1] On "historiographic metafiction," see Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning to theorize postmodernism," *Textual Practice* 1, no. 1 (1987), 12.

political enterprise in the West Indies. It shows how Collins's and Lovelace's complex interpretations of Caribbean Black Power counter and broaden Naipaul's and Selvon's oversimplifications of the movement. If authorship is ownership, Collins and Lovelace can't risk ceding to Naipaul and Selvon sole proprietorship of representations of black radical politics in the Caribbean.

The adjective "black" is so powerful that as much as it saturates the historiography of the people of the African diaspora, it also obscures the gradations of black lived experiences. When the similarly overdetermined term "Black Power" conjures most immediately U.S. history, it likewise subordinates the multiple, contemporaneous, consciousness-raising struggles by people of Afro-Caribbean descent in the Caribbean and Great Britain. I argue against a diffusionist model that treats Black Power as a phenomenon originating in the United States and then spreading to the rest of the world for other black people to follow and mimic. I turn to Caribbean and black British history and literature to elucidate what is missing from the U.S.-centric discussion of Black Power, for the lessons to be learned from a multinational approach are what make a Global Anglophone lens valuable.

This dissertation joins several recent historiographies of black radical politics in the West Indies. Kate Quinn and other contributors to the critical anthology *Black Power in the Caribbean* (2014) rehabilitate the history of Black Power in the region, which by 2010 had grown moribund. Quinn's introduction to the book begins with a description of an unhappy Black Power anniversary:

> February 2010 marked the fortieth anniversary of Trinidad and Tobago's Black Power uprising. To commemorate these events, a conference, "Black Power: Reflections, Relevance and Continuity," was held at the University of the West Indies—St.

> Augustine. Many of the conference participants voiced despair about how little public knowledge and information there was on this period of Caribbean history, how Black Power continued to be viewed with suspicion and even hostility, and how young people—studying on the very campus where the sparks of Trinidadian Black Power ignited—knew so little about it. The conference ended with an urgent plea for the preservation of this history as some of those who were involved in the movement grow old and pass away and their personal archives lie unused.[2]

The conference's anxious stocktaking recommends that the history of Black Power in the West Indies must soon be placed in the charge of younger conservators given the senescence that threatens original participants in the movement. This anxiety accounts for the conference's theme of "continuity." When the under-informed public and the raised hackles against Black Power explain the idle archives, what must be dis-continued are the paranoid readings that guarantee the "suspicion" with which "Black Power continue[s] to be viewed." Quinn herself does not read from a suspicious stance when she argues that, "As is well known, a more 'orthodox' class analysis came to dominate the radical leftist groups of the Caribbean in the 1970s. The subsequent failure of the orthodox option (embodied in the implosion of the Grenada Revolution) may suggest that the contribution of Black Power to theorizing the dynamics of both race *and* class in Caribbean societies needs to be revalorized."[3] Significant for my dissertation's investigation into the interplay between Caribbean Black Power and literary form is Quinn's

---

[2] Kate Quinn, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Black Power in the Caribbean," in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014), 1.

[3] Kate Quinn, "Black Power in Caribbean Context," in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, 46 (emphasis in original).

recognition of the Grenada Revolution's potential as a figure, a synecdoche of the failed orthodoxy within West Indian radical left history.

Two monographs also published in 2014 have taken up the reclaiming of the legacy of black radicalism in Grenada. David Scott devotes much of his *Omens of Adversity* to the Grenada Revolution's "implosion" that Quinn places between parentheses. But the brief parenthesis in which the Grenada Revolution punctuates Quinn's essay befits what Scott argues has been "relegated to the margins of historical amnesia."[4] Parentheses may fit neatly around the Revo (the Revolution's affectionate diminutive) because it was relatively short-lived. However, Shalini Puri contends in *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present* that since melancholic attachments to the Revo continue to be experienced today, its historical dates of beginning and end only delimit it officially.[5] Those dates stretch from March 13, 1979—when the Grenadian people supported the New Jewel Movement in wresting power from Prime Minister Eric Gairy—to one of two dates in October 1983, one of which, the 19th, marks the assassination, by their own comrades, of the Revo's popular leader Maurice Bishop "and seven of his associates—namely Unison Whiteman, Jacqueline Creft, Fitzroy Bain, Norris Bain, Evelyn Bullen, Evelyn Maitland, and Keith Hayling."[6] It is also accepted that what veritably certified the Revo's death on October 25th was the United States' invasion of the island six days later, purportedly to rescue American medical students studying there. The "collapse, and aftermaths of the collapse, of the Grenada Revolution" is for Scott an event so disruptive that in

[4] David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

[5] Shalini Puri, *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present: Operation Urgent Memory*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014.

[6] David Scott, *Omens*, 17.

experiencing it one appreciates time as having been knocked out of sync with history.[7] Similarly, according to Puri, though official history has marked the end of the Grenada Revolution, temporally it remains a story in the midst of its unravelling, a "*current* event, a chapter with still unfolding consequences."[8] Though both Puri and Scott are primarily concerned with the lived experiences and repercussions of the Grenada Revolution, both scholars offer brief literary critical readings of one my dissertation's primary texts, Merle Collins's *Angel*, a novel that I give fuller treatment in Chapter 3. Judging by her work, I am confident that Puri would agree with Scott's assertion that "No one . . . can properly engage the historical problem of the Grenada Revolution without passing through the work of Merle Collins."[9] My dissertation follows that sage advice.

Black Power's Arrival in a Multicultural Caribbean Diaspora

A theme dispersed across the dissertation concerns the provenance of black radicalism in the West Indies. The most significant example occurs when both V. S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon regard Black Power as an African American ideology that West Indians uncritically borrow to combat their oppression. Neither writer recognizes that there was a large number of pan-African

---

[7] Ibid., 5. Scott elaborates that, "There is, I think a profound sense in which the once enduring temporalities of past-present-future that animated (indeed, that constructed, even *authorized*) our Marxist historical reason, and therefore organized and underwrote our ideas about historical change, no longer line up quite so neatly, so efficiently, so seamlessly, so instrumentally—in a word, so *teleologically*—as they once seemed to do. That old consoling sense of temporal *concordance* is gone. . . . Time, in short, has become less yielding, less promising than we have grown to expect it should be. And what we are left with are *aftermaths* in which the present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin" (6).

[8] Puri, *The Grenada Revolution*, 1.

[9] Scott, *Omens*, 174.

leaders in the U.S., from Marcus Garvey to Stokely Carmichael to Claudia Jones, who migrated from the West Indies or were of West Indian descent. Substantial Caribbean investment in Pan-African politics advanced the germ of Black Power in the United States. As Stuart Hall explains:

> In the US, . . . following the great migration of blacks from the Southern slave states to the cities and factories of the North, a host of Left, radical and black-pride movements sprang up, sponsoring a flood of activities, campaigns, organizations and publications in which West Indians played a significant part. Marcus Garvey took the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which he had launched in Jamaica in August 1914, . . . with him when he migrated to Harlem. His "black independence" philosophy inspired the first African American . . . mass political movement of modern times. Robert Hill . . . is of the opinion that [Garvey] produced "the first felt sense of national consciousness," both in terms of a wider black nationalism and as a powerful element which has run through Jamaican—and Caribbean—politics.
>
> This was matched by a host of different, politically diverse strands which developed in the Garvey years, including the . . . National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a variety of worker-, socialist- and Marxist-Leninist-oriented currents, as well as the vibrant cultural movements of the Harlem Renaissance. The Caribbean presence in these organizations was enormous.[10]

Before Hall charts the double migration northward of southern American blacks and black West Indians to contend that "black-pride movements sprang up" from an international convergence, he recalls the coming-to-racial consciousness of Afro-Jamaicans within the labor activism and

[10] Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (London: Lane, 2017), 39-40.

anti-imperialism movements that emerged in 1930s Jamaica. Indeed, as Hall notes, Marcus Garvey had been agitating for "Negro Improvement" in Jamaica as early as 1914. When Hall shifts his discussion to the United States, he demonstrates that America's similar history of black nationalism involved the physical and intellectual labor of West Indians. However, the fact of their immigration means that their contributions *as West Indians* are subject to impound by American history. Nevertheless, as Hall describes it, Black Power's rhizomatous growth across the globe refutes Naipaul's and Selvon's depictions of a unidirectional trafficking of Black Power doctrine from the United States to locations abroad.

If this were a debate solely about the geographic origin of Black Power, I would mention the fact that, as Hall has done, Merle Collins identifies a proto-Black Power moment in the West Indies in Grenada's plantation worker strikes in the 1950s. Likewise, for Earl Lovelace, Trinidad's 1970 Black Power Revolution is an essentially domestic extension of the island's recently won independence after a decades-long anti-imperialism campaign. But perhaps when Naipaul and Selvon ask us to consider Black Power an exogenous construct when it is invoked outside the U.S., they pose not so much a historical question but a rhetorical one. For in exoticizing the movement as something foreign to the UK and Trinidad, these two expatriate West Indian writers present a lyrical, I-you address, an apostrophe to Black Power in the Caribbean diaspora. Put otherwise, in the form and content of their work, Naipaul and Selvon effectively say to Black Power: "I am West Indian; you are not. I am (black) British; you are not." Consequently, as I will show, their representations of their inability to identify with the movement reflects a poetics of Black Power's history of alienating Indo-Trinidadians like themselves.

Chapter Summaries

There are several reasons why a dissertation on the representation of black radical politics in post-Independence Anglophone Caribbean literature might begin with the work of V. S. Naipaul. For one, Naipaul is the first writer with a sizable audience to publish fiction responding to West Indian modalities of Black Power at the time of the incipient movement. Though as an expatriate he is cut off from the region geographically and culturally in self-imposed exile in London, the Caribbean continues to vex him like a phantom limb. And wherever Black Power appears outside of the United States, Naipaul's view of it is quite dim. It is no wonder then that the author identifies an emptiness that is foundational to West Indian support for black radical politics.

The first chapter traces Naipaul's writings on Black Power across different genres, both fictional and non-fictional. The chapter analyses how his interpretation of the movement develops over each iteration. Initially he wrote a journalistic essay, "The Killings in Trinidad," recounting the 1972 murder of Gale Ann Benson, a white woman foreign to the island. Chief among the group of West Indian men responsible for her death was a man known variously as Michael De Freitas, Michael X, or Michael Abdul Malik whose connection to political radicalism was insubstantial in Trinidad and lacked bona fides even abroad for his notoriety as a Black Power leader in England. Nevertheless, this eccentric figure's involvement in Benson's death is what Naipaul uses to decenter Black Power's impact on social justice reforms in both Trinidad and the United Kingdom. When he describes the slaughter of Benson explicitly as a "literary murder" in his essay, the author previews his attempt to fictionalize the story of her death in his 1975 novel *Guerrillas*. In that novel he trains his viewfinder on the murder of a

white woman by black men in Trinidad to take a picture captioned "Caribbean Black Power" that is circumscribed by his revulsion to the movement.

Over the course of this chapter, I show how Naipaul takes Michael De Freitas as a representative example of what makes the author revolt against Caribbean Black Power. De Freitas was born in Trinidad in the early 1930s to an Afro-Caribbean mother and a Portuguese father. As a young man he emigrated to London, where he promoted himself as the Black Power revolutionary Michael X. He ingratiated himself with his namesake Malcolm X and also Muhammed Ali, Yoko Ono, and John Lennon. On the Internet there are photos of De Freitas with Lennon in which the musician offers locks of his hair for a charity auction in 1969. Lennon exchanged his hair for a pair of Muhammed Ali's autographed boxer shorts gifted to De Freitas by the boxer himself. The auction is a part of De Freitas's history of purporting to raise funds for Black Power causes only to keep the majority of the proceeds for himself. The photo of De Freitas and Lennon jointly holding aloft the musician's shorn hair encapsulates how De Freitas tried to profit from celebrity detritus. He also published a ghostwritten memoir and began drafting a work of derivative autobiographical fiction, both of which Naipaul cites to highlight De Freitas's pretentious self-invention. In "The Killings in Trinidad" and *Guerrillas*, Naipaul draws from De Freitas's history, autobiography, and novel to paint a mixed-race West Indian man's hybridized mimicry of English culture combined with an essentialized blackness as the definitive expression of Caribbean Black Power. In so doing, Naipaul illustrates his refusal to believe in a West Indian articulation of Black Power by decrying it as a corrupt and corrupting fiction.

Like Naipaul, Sam Selvon is an émigré to England from Trinidad where he never returned to live. Both immigrant writers may be said to have shut the door behind them on the

Caribbean, but at least for Selvon there is a transom above it through which he looks more fondly at his native land. Selvon is celebrated for transcribing the calypso idiom he imbibed in Trinidad into several novels, and my dissertation's second chapter reads the story of Black Power that he tells in three of them: *The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending,* and *Moses Migrating*. For Selvon, Black Power leaders are con men too. The suggestion is rendered most saliently via the American character in *Moses Ascending* named "BP" who is invited to England to promulgate Black Power and milks black Britons of their donations collected for the crusade. I demonstrate how in his novels Selvon adapts the indigenous art of Trinidadian calypso to represent Black Power's global movement as extrinsic and inimical to Afro-Caribbean life in the diaspora.

The trilogy features a black Trinidadian expatriate in London named Moses who treats the English language as a gift that he nonetheless takes pleasure in breaking up. In creolized language Moses describes Black Power in the UK and Trinidad as a beguiling disruption that threatens his already precarious relationship to British culture. In the second novel in the series, the material costs of Moses's foray into Black Power politics are too high. And in the last novel Moses overcorrects by entering a Trinidadian carnival competition in costume as a black Britannia, effectively advocating a blackened symbol of British power instead of Black Power. Perversely, Moses besmirches both Great Britain and the campaign for racial uplift in Trinidad, and his Anglocentrism disqualifies him from participating in the center of Caribbean politics. Furthermore, the travesty presented by Moses in drag as Britannia takes the marginalization of black women in representations of black radical politics and plays it for laughs.

In chapter three I discuss how Afro-Caribbean women's marginalization that is so garishly emblematized in Moses's transvestism is redressed in the work of Grenadian writer Merle Collins. Collins inspects a still suppurating wound in penning her 1987 novel *Angel* about

the Grenada Revolution within four years of its undoing. Titled after its heroine, whose name grows more ironic as she matures, Collins's fiction works as a salve by attempting to tell the salutary truth as it recounts how newly independent Grenada's self-destruction was compounded by foreign invasion. The novel condenses the island's recent history of colonialism, independence, and socialist revolution into a story of three generations of a Grenadian family. The narrative of the gendered violence suffered by the women in this family also ineluctably allegorizes the exploitative abuse Grenada has borne as an underdeveloped country. As such, Collins writes the national allegory that Frederic Jameson claims "all third world texts are necessarily."[11] But Collins's third-world novel demonstrates how the author takes advantage of being underestimated, for Jameson's thesis overlooks issues of feminism and gender difference that she treats as a problem with literary forms that are presumed to be nationalist and masculinist by default. Indeed, beyond national allegory *Angel* may also be slotted into the historical novel and Bildungsroman genres.

Significantly, most of *Angel* is written in the patois that offends Naipaul's ears. As Selvon had done in an earlier time, Collins takes oral forms unique to the Caribbean and transposes into a new key genres that are associated primarily with the literature of western Europe. Though it should be said here that Collins eschews parody—perhaps because, as we have seen, male writers have made parody their prerogative. Nevertheless, the blinding of one of Angel's eyes at the end of the narrative is Collins's final symbolic reminder that when its narrative form is limited to national allegory and its content discounts women's perspectives, the story of the Grenada Revolution can be only partially recouped.

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[11] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 5, no. 3 (1986), 69.

Chapter 4 closes the dissertation with a discussion of two Earl Lovelace novels. Lovelace is an author who comes to see Black Power in a new light after writing about it over several decades. In 1979's *The Dragon Can't Dance* he follows the same unfavorable route as his countrymen Naipaul and Selvon by making a stolen vehicle that doesn't travel very far into a symbol for Trinidadian Black Power. However, the experiments in literary form that he conducts in subsequent texts prime him to reshape his depiction of Trinidad's 1970 Black Power Revolution when he returns to the subject in his 2011 novel, *Is Just a Movie*. As a calypso-novel written in a creolized language that is particular to Trinidad (even more so than Selvon's), *Is Just a Movie* pushes orality to its limits to describe how Black Power ideology inflects the grammar of Trinidadian oral culture. This chapter reads the novel as Lovelace's implicit acknowledgement that *The Dragon Can't Dance* mis-assessed Black Power in Trinidad as an import. He presents in *Is Just a Movie* a thematic reprise that hails the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Stokely Carmichael, and Walter Rodney to retrace the global Black Power movement to origins in the West Indies.

While *Is Just a Movie* acknowledges these great men of Caribbean Black Power, it is not at the expense of women's equally important but largely anonymous contributions to the movement which indeed are exemplified by the novel's female characters. Their direct and reported speech takes up more space on the page to make the voices of such women more audible in *Is Just a Movie* than they were in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Via the metanarrative aspects of the later novel Lovelace repositions himself in relation to gendered representations of Black Power in Trinidad.

The metanarrative function in *Is Just a Movie* serves as a commentary on the problems of representing Caribbean Black Power. By means of the calypso as metanarrative, Lovelace

breaks the constraints of mimicry, parody, and allegory. From the first, the calypso was too innovative a genre to be designated a byproduct of colonial mimicry even as calypsonians parodied their nemeses mercilessly in song. At the same time the calypso was also too elastic an artform to produce only allegories. As I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, one simple way to distinguish Lovelace's calypso-novels from Selvon's is that, whereas Selvon devotes his creative energy to converting the calypso into a literary form, Lovelace's metanarrative approach allows him to present the calypsonian as subject and agent of history. I point to limitations in literary depictions of Caribbean Black Power to arrive at Lovelace who goes back over and redoes the stories that he previously told about the movement. Lovelace's example inspires me to direct readers' attention to how Black Power has been represented, and to offer a new way to interpret expressions of black revolutionary struggle in the Caribbean.

Chapter One

V. S. Naipaul, Mimicry, and the Fictionalization of Caribbean Black Power

> The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false. If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce. For the epic intention of the civilizing mission, "human and not wholly human" in the famous words of Lord Rosebery, "writ by the finger of the Divine" often produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe l'oeil*, irony, mimicry, and repetition. In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.
> —Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"

I begin my dissertation with a discussion of some of V. S. Naipaul's work leading up to his 1975 novel *Guerrillas*, which is the earliest example of Caribbean fiction that purports to provide a realistic depiction of Trinidad's brief but historically significant Black Power movement. Naipaul was an Indo-Trinidadian expatriate who emigrated to the U.K. in 1950 and remained there until his death in 2018. Not only was he famously Anglophilic; Naipaul also had, as Rob Nixon reports, an "almost reverential curiosity" about the culture of the American South.[12] These Anglo-American predilections explain his dismissal of Caribbean culture as derivative, which also chimes with his characterization of West Indian expressions of Black Power as plagiaristic of a superior U.S. model. In its fictionalization of the story of a real-life Black Power figure who was more of a grifter than a revolutionary, *Guerrillas* presents Black Power's presence in Trinidad and the UK as parasitic. In order to highlight the tendentiousness of this representation of Trinidadian Black Power, my chapter focuses on the process by which Naipaul transforms his anti-Black Power journalism into his novel *Guerrillas*. I attribute

[12] Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 164. An explanation for Naipaul's more positive view of the United States is offered by Gordon Rohlehr: "the lucrative rewards [Naipaul] received for his books in the American market softened somewhat his opinion of Americans and Americanization." See Gordon Rohlehr, *Perfected Fables Now: A Bookman Signs Off on Seven Decades* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2019), 147.

Naipaul's prejudice against the movement to the lingering effects of what Homi K. Bhabha has identified as "colonial mimicry," which refers to the process by which the colonized fashion themselves in the image of their European colonizers. The plot of the novel rehearses Naipaul's essay "The Killings in Trinidad" in which the death of a white woman named Gale Ann Benson was sensationalized as a Black Power murder. Naipaul succeeds in bringing much needed attention to the slaughtering of a young woman, but he oversteps in recasting her murder as a quintessentially West Indian expression of Black Power.

What most informs Naipaul's poor opinion of Black Power in Trinidad and in black Britain is the history of a biracial, self-styled Black Power leader from the West Indies born Michael De Freitas, more infamously known as both Michael X and Michael Abdul Malik. De Freitas was tried, convicted, and hanged for orchestrating Benson's murder. The early part of this chapter therefore tracks De Freitas's life story as it has been recounted in his ghostwritten autobiography concerning his conversion to Islam, titled *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X*, and in two subsequent biographies. Significantly, much of this material is what Naipaul himself consulted in his own research into De Freitas. The hundreds of pages across numerous texts devoted to talking about this man evince his attraction to several writers. Indeed, I also note De Freitas's brief appearances in memoirs by Diana Athill and Stuart Hall. However, as I will show, Naipaul and others attempt to disavow their attraction to De Freitas under the guise of debunking him. These writers work to reverse the mythologizing that begins to a large extent with De Freitas's memoir. This book that he produced in partnership with an Englishman named John Stevenson was misleading. I will demonstrate that it commences a pattern in which De Freitas is discursively reinvented after he collaborates, sometimes unwittingly, with another writer or writers. I then attempt to fact-check the details of *From Michael De Freitas to Michael*

X against the biographical accounts *Michael X: A Life in Black & White* by John L. Williams and *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* by Derek Humphry and David Tindall. This fact-checking proves especially difficult given De Freitas's penchant for dissembling. Repeatedly we see that writers respond to the challenge of De Freitas's fakery by analogizing him to a fictional character. I elucidate how this fictionalization of De Freitas, of which the man himself is largely responsible, anticipates Naipaul's treatment of him in two texts: the essay "The Killings in Trinidad" and the novel *Guerrillas*.

In my reading of "The Killings in Trinidad," I examine how the 1972 murder of Gale Ann Benson was a tragedy that Naipaul turns into a case study with which he makes fallacious generalizations about Black Power's emergence in Trinidad and the U.K. To supply some important context that Naipaul elides, I historicize Black Power in the Caribbean in the late 1960s and early 70s. In so doing I demonstrate how the speciousness of his argument previews his novelization of Benson's murder in *Guerrillas*, for Naipaul apprehends something at the scene of her death that he defines as "literary" and of a quality that is irresistible to the writer. I conclude the chapter by showing how Naipaul pursues to its limit the literariness of Benson's death and of the actors involved in it, especially Michael De Freitas. In close-reading *Guerrillas* I illustrate how the novel, in ostensibly representing a so-called Black Power murder, mostly records Naipaul's mimetic preoccupations.

Indeed, my goal in this chapter is to show how Naipaul reinvents De Freitas in the service of turning a radical project for black liberation into what the author describes as merely a sub-literary and parodic movement of dangerous fictions. I argue that, as an ideal "mimic man" in his embodiment of Black Power as an empty and parodic form devoid of original content, De Freitas is crucial to Naipaul's dismissal of Black Power as a derivative fiction. In other words,

Naipaul's marginalization of Caribbean Black Power depends on his selection of this marginal player as representative of the movement in Trinidad. Ultimately, the author takes the marginalization of black lives to the extreme by centering his supposedly Black Power novel on a white couple.

The Mimic Man at the Center of Naipaul's Work on Caribbean Black Power

Homi K. Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man" pays its debt to V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* by citing that novel's first-person narrator, Ralph Singh, who identifies himself as one. A "mimic man" can be any British colonial subject of color who, like Singh, is taught to be "English" in all other respects. Singh is counted among the "parodists of history," about whom Bhabha writes: "Despite their intentions and invocations they inscribe the colonial text erratically, eccentrically across a body politic that refuses to be representative, in a narrative that refuses to be representational."[13] English post-Enlightenment discourse has seduced colonials like Singh with narratives "rich in the traditions of *trompe-l'oeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition."[14] The mimicry by which they have been "appropriated" marks them as "inappropriate," and as parodists mimic men refuse representation in favor of repetition.[15] I point to these hallmarks of colonial mimicry because, I contend, they abound in V. S. Naipaul's post-colonial writings about Caribbean Black Power. The chapter will demonstrate how the

[13] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

[14] Ibid., 85.

[15] Ibid., 85, 88.

effects of colonial mimicry that Bhabha finds to be "profound and disturbing" shapes Naipaul's work on Black Power in the West Indies.[16]

Given Naipaul's inability to see the colonized as creators (for him, they are imitators only), it is unsurprising that he depicts a Caribbean-inflected Black Power as an empty form that Trinidad and Great Britain import to their detriment from the U.S. As Naipaul sees it, the proponent of Caribbean Black Power merely mimics U.S. Black Power in the same way that the educated colonial mimics whiteness. In its fictionalization of the story of an historical Black Power figure who was thoroughly disreputable, Naipaul's 1975 novel *Guerrillas* misrepresents Black Power's presence in Trinidad and the UK as a foreordained failure and a sham. In what follows, I trace Naipaul's transformation of his non-fictional writing into this novel in order to note the absence of a narrative form adequate to telling the story of Trinidadian Black Power. I demonstrate that the story that Naipaul tells ends up not being about Black Power despite its focus on a Black Power leader.

The plot of *Guerrillas* repurposes the crux of Naipaul's essay "The Killings in Trinidad" in which the author reports how the self-described Trinidadian Black Power leader known as "Michael X" conspired in the January 1972 murder of a white woman named Gale Ann Benson. Bookending its fictionalization as *Guerrillas* is the essay's first appearance in the London *Sunday Times* in 1972 and its republication in expanded form in the 1980 collection *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad*. In every iteration, Naipaul's representation of the Black Power movement in Trinidad is limited by the author's reliance on, if not mimicking of, British literary forebears. This adherence prevents him from addressing uniquely Trinidadian

[16] Ibid. 86.

expressions of Black Power. He also discounts both Trinidad's creolization of European languages and the oraliterary cultural production particular to the people of that island. To bolster his claim that Benson's is a "literary murder" by a West Indian of Portuguese and Afro-Caribbean descent, Naipaul alludes only to British literary texts and traditions even as he insists that Michael X was functionally illiterate. Although Naipaul hews to historical details, his works tendentiously misrepresent Black Power in Trinidad. The novel also casts doubt on Black Power's revolutionary potential by reducing it to the murder of a white woman and mentioning only a few black male characters incidental to the movement. In sensationalizing Black Power, it attempts to render it historically irrelevant.

A Literary History of a Man with Three Names

Before I discuss Naipaul's writings about him, I must offer a much more expansive literary history of Michael De Freitas-cum-Michael X-cum-Michael Abdul Malik. For simplicity's sake, let us begin by calling our subject "Michael Abdul Malik." His autobiography, *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X* (1968),[17] opens with an "Author's Note" that the mixed-race (European and Afro-Caribbean) but black-identifying De Freitas signs under his lately acquired Muslim name, "Michael Abdul Malik." Malik acknowledges that, besides himself, his autobiography has another author, a ghostwriter who materializes idiomatically as "a straight-looking English cat" anonymized as "John X" (7). Paradoxically, the majority of the "Author's Note" is given over to Malik minimizing his own claims to authorship. It admits that the autobiography is a translation of a transcription. What has been translated, by John X, is a black

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[17] Michael Abdul Malik, *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

vernacular English spoken by the book's subject, who is more popularly known as "Michael X." If his life-story is to reach a white audience, a translation of Malik's language is necessary for, according to him, "People the world over have always assumed that the English language of the black and the English language of the white is one and the same. This is a false assumption. There is a difference of both thought and expression which makes communication difficult" (7). Yet the translation of Malik's "black English" by the white man John X (né John Stevenson) means that communication between black and white may be difficult but it is not impossible.

In this first book-length public record of his life, Malik, somewhat to his detriment, entrusts another man to represent him. Malik describes his collaboration with John Stevenson as follows: "Over a period of two years, I spent many days with John, eating and drinking with him, going from place to place, talking. . . . All this time he was writing down what I had done throughout the years, getting my personality on paper, recapturing feelings I had experienced at various times of my life, selecting, constructing, complementing me" (7). Put otherwise, for the autobiography, Stevenson gives form to the content that Malik supplies. If a "difference of thought" between black men and white men proves "difficult," at least a black man's "feelings" are susceptible to a white man's "recapturing." This privileging of the recordability of the affective over the cognitive may explain why even Malik admits that the "me" that the autobiography presents is only Stevenson's "constructi[on]." On the one hand, the "selecti[ve]" Englishman John Stevenson, acting as "complement" to his biracial subject, whitens that subject by deracinating Malik's language. On the other hand, when Malik thanks Stevenson "for breaking the barriers of language and color" in order to produce "this document," he reminds us that Stevenson, in breaking racist taboos, only repeats discursively what Malik's white father and

black mother had done in order to produce their son (7). In this respect, fittingly the autobiography remains an interracial work.

Malik's autobiography begins with a characterization of his Afro-Caribbean mother, Iona Brown, and one his first statements about her is that she is from Barbados and that her ancestors were slaves. Barbados's history of slavery and British imperialism explain Iona's behavior towards her son. Blacks in Barbados, Malik avers, don't want to be black; they want to be English—that is, white. The first step to Englishness is the nicknaming of Barbados "Little England."[18] But the big[ger] island to which Iona emigrates first was not England but Trinidad. Though she brought with her from Barbados colorism and self-hatred, those colonial artifacts were doubtless already to hand in Trinidad. When Malik writes of Iona that "to my mother—who was one of the blackest people I know—the best people in the world were white" (9), the adjective "blackest" describes both Ms. Brown's dark skin and, pejoratively, her bleak worldview, exacerbated by the internalized racism that she stokes in Trinidad. Her misapprehension about white people warps everything that she does. If she cannot change her skin color, there is another way she can approximate Englishness; one step a black Barbadian can take towards "being English" is to speak it. When as a child Michael asks his mother to translate the patois of Port of Spain's market women, his mother tells him, "English [is] our tongue" (11). Her synecdoche—an "instance of metonymy" of which Bhabha speaks in "Of Mimicry and Men"—emblematizes how a black woman from "Little England" could be at least a little

[18] Jenny Sharpe explains that "Barbados was known as Little England because culturally it was the most English of all Britain's West Indian colonies." Also, "Barbados was called Little England because, unlike Britain's other West Indian colonies, it was not captured from or traded to the French, Spanish, or Dutch, and as a result its colonial culture did not have continental European influences." See Sharpe, "Thinking 'Diaspora' with Stuart Hall," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, 27, no. 1 (2018), 21, 42n2.

English, even as she fails to know "the difference between being English and being Anglicized."[19] Additionally, Iona finds in her biracial, light-skinned son a vicarious proximity to whiteness—she tells Michael and the neighbors that he is "a white man['s] child" (20). But the indifference with which Michael treats his light skin and the opportunities it affords him turns his mother against him.

In exemplifying how Michael is a product of what Bhabha would mark as Iona's "flawed colonial mimesis," Michael's ambiguous relationship to his mother is important to note, for I aim to demonstrate that Malik's history with his mother later shapes his relationship to England, the mother country.[20] As we shall see, Malik's autobiography repeatedly anthropomorphizes England as a woman. This personification of England starts with his mother, even if the only thing English about her is her tongue. The challenges to Malik's identity and masculinity that his mother poses when he is young anticipate England's effect on him in his adulthood. As a young man, Michael takes a job as a seaman, which occasions a visit to Liverpool, about which the author writes, "I was thrilled with the prospect of seeing the mother country. I didn't know then that it was the first step on the road to disillusion" (31). As Malik presents them, both England and Iona are mothers who disappoint him.

Upon emigrating to and settling in England in the 1950s, he finds racist landlords who refuse to rent to him and discriminatory employers who won't hire him. These racist white Britons, according to Malik, make abiding by the law unsustainable for people of color like him. Consequently, he becomes a hustler by accident, a ponce inadvertently when after registering at

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[19] Bhabha, *Location*, 89-90.

[20] Ibid., 87.

the Labour Exchange he learns that for "coloured people" the jobs to be filled are all unskilled and pay little. Rather than "hang around the Exchange all day, every day, the way some fellows did," Malik explains, "I started hustling. I didn't realize it at the time, but that's how you drift into it. There's no money and people must eat and the rent must be paid" (53).[21] He then asks us to believe that he happened into pandering after a white prostitute he comforts repays his kindness with £4 and change, takes him home, and installs him as her new pimp. To be fair, Malik recognizes his own fungibility for the prostitute, who had a history of fetishizing black men. But even if what he tells us is true (it likely isn't),[22] he is not to be understood as passively criminal. If the mother country is a welfare state that will pay him (but poorly) to hang around and not work, and the prostitute is a kind of Labour Exchange that will pay him (more lucratively) to hang around and not work, then this means that the unemployed Malik returns England's racist conduct by treating the nation as if it were a whore. His exploitation of the mother country is of a piece with his exploitation of women.

It might have been exceptional that in England the one white woman with whom Michael has an intimate relationship that is not transactional is Canadian. But because Nancy Bacal—the

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[21] Surely John L. Williams exaggerates when he writes that Michael "was undoubtedly a born hustler," but Williams makes a valid point when he adds that "the hustles that were open to him were circumscribed by race." See John L. Williams, *Michael X: A Life in Black & White* (London: Century, 2008), 3.

[22] In *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1977), Derek Humphry and David Tindall write: "Michael decided his easiest way to make money was by pimping. But his first attempt in London to coerce a woman into walking the streets and handing her earnings to him was a failure. A hotel chamber-maid called Rita thought she was in love with him but he did not share the feeling and only wanted to 'turn her out'—become a prostitute working for him.

In an attempt to demonstrate his hold on the girl he accused her of sleeping with men other than himself and would not accept her denials. He punched her face several times in the full view of onlookers in a club and shouted at her to go to his room immediately. She obeyed, but packed her bags and caught the train home to Liverpool" (16).

"strikingly attractive Canadian-Jewish girl"—who becomes his mistress has racist parents, Malik cannot generalize Canadians as tolerant (115-126). Nevertheless, it is the white English people who give him the most reasons to put little stock in interracial unions. According to Malik, the animus between blacks and whites nears a point of no return in England:

> The black man's distrust of the white man in this country, due to the white man's actions, has now reached a level where it may be irreversible. Sometimes I talk to West Indians who have white wives and regardless of what they might say to their wives in bed, they tell me: "They are white first and we must always remember that. When the chips are down they are white, and they will think about that first—and we're not in that mob."
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> . . .
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> As a result of this, I find I am very much against mixed marriages, not because I am against communication between black and white . . . but because it is so very difficult for two people of such different cultures really to get across to each other. (184-185)

Since black West Indian men confide in the author what they won't confess to their white wives, it appears that these men are more intimate with Michael *out* of bed than they are with their wives while *in* bed.

Suggested here is an Afro-Caribbean fraternity free of the racial and cultural differences between black husbands and their white spouses that create epistemological problems, even when both spouses belong to the working-class. In weighing in on his black male friends in interracial marriages, Malik maintains that "[t]hey and their wives don't know each other" (185). It almost goes without saying that for the black husband, when his white wife thinks of her whiteness first she becomes by definition a white supremacist. It also is significant that these black men speak of their interracial relationships in terms of games of chance played for money;

indeed, a wife's whiteness becomes most salient only when the wager has gone awry, "[w]hen the chips are down." But what is most important to note here is that Malik's conflation of "the white man in this country" with his black British friends' "white wives" is, like his Barbadian mother and Trinidad's mother country, another of Malik's assimilations of the nation of England to women of whom black men must be wary. For black men, white wives doubly warrant suspicion: because they are white and because they are women.

As we have seen, his black identity and racialized masculinity inhibit communication, and therefore cause tension, between Malik and whites, especially white women (and with a would-be white woman like his mother). But when he finds himself reflected in the American civil rights activist Malcolm X, whom he meets in London at a community center for West Indians, it is easy to understand why he is smitten by the black Muslim leader. When Malik writes that Malcolm "was saying new and interesting things about the black man and telling him to be proud he was black and . . . I felt eager to talk to him, quietly and privately" (127), the fact that Malcolm espouses the opposite of Iona Brown's shameful creed is enough to explain Michael's attraction to him. Michael is suspicious of women white and black, but Malcolm X he finds guileless because Malcolm "told the truth," Malik insists, "he always did" (129). Nevertheless, a problem arises when the minister is taken at his word, for it is Malcolm X who unintentionally may be responsible for the renaming of Michael De Freitas. As the author tells it, within days of their meeting each other, Malcolm invites Michael De Freitas to accompany him to Birmingham, England where he has agreed to speak to an Islamic student organization.[23]

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[23] In *Michael X*, Williams writes that "There was certainly a fair amount of common ground between the two men [De Freitas and Malcolm X]. On an obvious level they were both light-skinned—both had been nicknamed 'Red' in their youth. Both men had come up the hard way through the street-level world of the hustler; both had been pimps and low-level gangsters. Both

Malcolm asks the organizers to arrange hotel accommodations for his “Brother Michael,” but neglects to give Michael’s surname. As Malik recalls it, “The Islam student body probably interpreted what he said literally. They booked me in at the Grand Hotel as Michael X—and that was how Michael X came into being. I was not a ‘Black Muslim.’ The X was a mistake. When I eventually did become a Moslem, I chose a different name, but the mistake went on” (131).[24]

Though the author perpetuates this “mistake” with the title he (or someone at his publishers André Deutsch) gives his book, what is noticeable is Malik’s attempt to distance himself from the connotations for which the “X” functions as placeholder. For whether it was Malik or Stevenson who made it, surely the decision to place scare quotes around “Black Muslim” is significant, as is the alternative spellings (Michael becomes not a “Black Muslim”

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had been to prison” (110). But there all similarities end, even if for Naipaul the two men resemble each other.

[24] In *False Messiah*, Humphry and Tindall explain: “There are two versions of the story of how he [De Freitas] got his X. According to Michael, the X was gained accidentally. Malcolm had to go to Birmingham, in the Midlands, to make speeches and meet student and immigrant organizations. He invited Michael to join him and told the Islamic student body which was his host to book two rooms at an hotel. ‘I’ll be coming with my brother Michael,’ he said. They took it literally and booked Michael into the hotel as Michael X. In Michael’s version, a reporter from the *Sunday Times* was in the hotel foyer asking for Malcolm, only to be told by the reception clerk that he was engaged but that his brother, Michael X, was available. The reporter talked to Michael about this, and he explained what few people in Britain understood at the time, that ‘Brother’ was a term which black people preferred to address each other by rather than ‘Mister.’ But when the *Sunday Times* article appeared he was named as ‘Michael X.’ It was the fault of the press, Michael always argued.

The reporter’s version of the story is different. Lewis Chester is an accomplished journalist, who later became editor of ‘Insight,’ the *Sunday Times* investigatory team. He recalls that he first met Michael at an Indian restaurant during that Birmingham visit. Malcolm had been talking to about a dozen blacks over the dinner table. ‘He was almost luminous and everybody was basking in his aura,’ says Chester. ‘I said to a man next to me “What are you?” and he answered “I am his brother.” I thought he was being evasive so I asked him again and he replied, “Call me Michael X.” It was not something I would have thought of, and I considered it a bit of kidology but if that was how he wanted to be known that suited me.’ At that dinner party Michael studied Malcolm’s speech and manner intensely, hanging on every word” (48).

but an unqualified [no pun intended] “Moslem”). They signify Malik’s annoyance at being misidentified, placed into a category for the doubly marginalized. The “X,” which Malik stresses “was a mistake,” makes him so uncomfortable that, as we saw in the “Author’s Note,” he passes it onto his ghostwriter. But what is most problematic about the “X” is that it is the mark of an invented character for whom Malik is often “mistake[n]” by the press. The author’s contention is that “the press . . . refused to call me Michael De Freitas. They preferred to perpetuate the fiction of Michael X—a Black Muslim label whose militant ring was no doubt considered to have greater appeal to their readers. Even when I was converted to Islam . . . and chose the name Michael Abdul Malik, Michael X lived on as a public image” (140). Malik does have reason to protest. Because “Michael X” is, literally, someone’s misinterpretation of Malcolm X, it licenses not only the press but writers like Naipaul to dismiss Malik as, metaphorically, a poor translation of a black political leader.

“Michael X” names a mistake which in turn begets a fiction that, as he had anticipated, survives Michael De Freitas. Responsible for its survival, I will show, is the fact that several writers who take Michael as their subject, including Michael himself, opt to fictionalize him. His penchant for duplicity opens up space for his biographers’ fabrications, which explains why fiction has been a consistent approach to representing Michael Abdul Malik. We have seen how his autobiography can be read as an act of ventriloquism in which Michael’s speech is mediated through his ghostwriter, John Stevenson. Now I want to turn our attention to how Michael is made to speak through the fiction of his most recent biographer, John L. Williams. *Michael X: A Life in Black & White* (2008) opens with Williams’s apology “for taking the diabolical liberty of

including a fictionalized passage" in what is not a novel.[25] The passage Williams refers to here, a few pages of italicized text, is prologue to the biography.[26] Williams sets his fictional prologue on a beach in Trinidad on 11 February 1972. The narrative perspective is third person, focalized through someone called Michael. Death opens and closes the prologue: it begins with Michael contemplating the death of a "stupid little hippie girl" named Gale; and before it ends, Michael will witness the death-by-drowning of his friend Steve (7-9). The language is Standard English excepting the few lines of dialogue given to Michael which are ungrammatical—approximations of a black vernacular with a few of the words rendered phonetically. At its close Michael names himself thrice—Michael Abdul Malik, Michael X, Michael De Freitas—which itemizes in reverse the titles of the three parts into which the biography is organized. Given Malik's ignominious end, the prologue's penultimate line, "He would prevail, he always had," followed by the Arabic interjection "Inshallah," cannot be read as anything but wry (10). If, as Williams acknowledges, his prologue warrants an apology, it may be defended as but another example of the "liberty" other writers have taken with Michael's life story. As we shall see, in several texts about Michael, the doomed man of many aliases is scaled down into a vaguely Muslim rough character brought to narrative life by a writer more polished than Malik was himself.

"Michael X" has a long history of being treated like a literary device. In his biography's introduction, Williams notes the stock roles that Michael X has been assigned to play in other people's books: "some time in the 1980s, the 1960s hepcats started to write their memoirs. I read a few of them and noticed how often this Michael X appeared in them. Sometimes he was

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[25] John L. Williams, *Michael X: A Life in Black & White* (London: Century, 2008), vii. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[26] The events of Williams's prologue are reported in detail in *A False Messiah*'s chapter 14, entitled "A Mysterious Disappearance," pgs. 166-167.

portrayed as an outright villain, at other times as a lovable rogue; once or twice as a genuine idealist. However, he was always a minor character, the token black just visible in the background of the 1960s' tapestry" (1). Whether he is cast as unequivocally or redeemably bad, or in another form is rendered ideally, in several memoirs Michael X is consigned to the ground to set off some other more prominent figure. What accounts for Michael's minor status is the consensus that his investments in black radicalism were presumed to have been shady. Williams deduces that "most people who were involved in serious politics had no time for Michael. He'd used Black Power politics as a hustle, a way of making money, and they hated that" (3). But Williams also hints that invoking "Michael X" to name only a racially traitorous pimp who prostitutes Black Power may be a misreading: "Among the artists . . . whether black or white, on some level Michael was seen as one of them, as someone who was involved in a kind of creative play, endlessly changing his image, restlessly chasing after new ideas" (3). If we take the side of the artists' view of Malik, "Michael X" turns anti-racist activism into performance art. However, the artists' view brings us no nearer to the man who answered to that name, as it still perceives "Michael X" as artificial and subject to change.

It is especially significant that even his biographer treats Michael X like an invented character. I want to call attention to how Williams's figurations of his titular subject function. His preferred tropes turn "Michael X" into a guise. Consistently Williams analogizes Malik's Black Power leadership to a performer, particularly an understudy, one whose costume doesn't fit and whose dialogue is notable mostly for the style in which it is performed. As he pursues his subject, the biographer finds himself in the slippery position of writing a factual account of a pretender: "The more I researched the more it struck me that the trouble with Michael X was not that he was a bad or fraudulent or insincere Black Power leader—though he was, at various

times, all of those things—but that he was shoehorned into having to pretend to be a Black Power leader in the first place" (3). When he duly describes what precipitated Michael's arrest and imprisonment in 1968 under Britain's Race Relations Act—the speech Michael gives in Stokely Carmichael's stead at a Racial Adjustment Action Society meeting—Williams writes, "Michael decided to step into Stokely's shoes," and he gave "a speech that consciously echoed the more-militant-than-thou rhetoric of Mr. Carmichael" (156). Betrayed here is the penchant for mimicry that defines "Michael X." In the above citations the two shoe metaphors and the emphasis placed on Michael's parodic rhetoric present "Michael X" as having been all form and no content (of much consequence or originality), echoing the stance that we will see Naipaul take later in this chapter. The similarity of their approaches is symptomatic of their English frames of reference.

But Williams, to his credit, also intimates that it is racism that enables the figure of "Michael X" to assume so powerful a form that, retroactively, it empties Michael's former identity of import. Williams, like Michael's Barbadian mother, knows that "black" would be a misnomer if applied to the mixed-race De Freitas in Trinidad. It is the U.K., the mother country, that insists that "black" is the racial category that befits him. When his mother denies his (half)blackness and his mother country won't acknowledge his (half)whiteness, Michael disappears between two mothers' disavowals of his racial ambiguity. Following from Michael's contention that a lack of opportunity in racist Britain made him a hustler by necessity, it is arguable that Michael's response to prejudiced white people is to give them what they tacitly demand. Under the circumstances then, as Williams's tells it, the first step to becoming "Michael X" is what could be described as De Freitas's command performance as a "black-hustler":

> [Michael had] never been entirely accepted as black while growing up—certainly his mother had done her best to stop him from seeing himself as black—but once he came to Britain it had been made clear to him that black was what he was, at least as far as white people were concerned. . . . In some ways, then, the whole black-hustler persona he had developed in Britain was a kind of act—a deliberate reflection of the stereotypes that the white world seemed determined to lay upon him.
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> It isn't much of an exaggeration to say that Michael De Freitas was a man formed by other people's ideas of him. He understood that the white world saw him as black and he was continually figuring out what kind of black man they wanted and making himself into that black man, instinctively realizing that in doing so there would be plenty of opportunities for profit. (95)

When Williams writes that Michael's public face was a "reflection," he presents Michael as a surface with what may be merely an illusion of depth. Furthermore, as a reflection, the figure of "Michael De Freitas, the black-hustler" can be apprehended as nothing more than an inversion of what "Michael X" largely signifies: someone whose hustle is Black Power.

Although this chapter identifies the conflation of fact and fiction in writings about Michael Abdul Malik, I don't want to argue that in *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* (1977) journalists Derek Humphry and David Tindall fictionalize any part of their work. Theirs is a well-sourced, if not unproblematic, history of Malik and the crimes for which he was hanged. In my effort to demonstrate that to write about "Michael X" is to participate compulsorily in make-believe, I mention *False Messiah* because the pretense that surrounds Malik also circumscribes the book. *False Messiah*'s first chapter is titled "Pretending to be White," though what the title alludes to is Michael's deluded mother's claims to whiteness on

behalf of her half-white child. (Because Michael's parents never married, beginning the book in this way implies that [illegitimate] claims to whiteness put Michael on the road to ruin.) And Humphry and Tindall conclude their work by arguing, "The trouble with Michael was that he was always pretending. . . . [H]e was a fantasist" (216). Throughout the book, the authors portray Michael as someone unredeemable. Nevertheless, as the title suggests, it is difficult to tease out the truth about someone who has always been false.

Strangely, there are two false messiahs in *False Messiah*. The title of chapter 10, "The Divine Black Man," refers not to Michael X but to one of his followers, someone who called himself "Hakim Jamal" and, intermittently, "God." Jamal commands our attention as the African American lover of Gale Ann Benson, the woman whose murder Michael ordered (of which I will say more later). The true story of Gale Ann Benson cannot be told without Jamal figuring prominently. I say this because there is no character based on Jamal in the novel that Benson's death inspires Naipaul to write. This is not to say that Jamal has never been fictionalized. Humphry and Tindall explain that details borrowed from Jamal's adulterous relationship with actress Jean Seberg are legible in *Chien blanc* ("White dog"), the novel written by Seberg's cuckolded husband Romain Gary.[27]

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[27] Per Humphry and Tindall: "Hakim [Jamal] inveigled his way into a friendship with the actress Jean Seberg, whom he met while she was thinking of writing a book about black ghetto life in America. The meeting launched him on a lucrative career as a pet black man. It turned out that it was Seberg's husband Romain Gary who was actually writing the book which was published in France under the title *Chien blanc* ('White Dog'). It tells the story of how a white liberal couple go to America, get friendly with black militants, and are completely exploited. Although it is a clever piece of fiction, friends have identified fragments of Hakim and his escapades in the book.

Chien blanc did not spoil Hakim's friendship with Seberg and Gary—he could not read French anyway—and he frequently visited their home in Paris. Not to be outdone by Gary, he started writing a novel about his relationship with them and called it *The Sugar Coated Bullet*. It was never completed" (121).

What Michael and Jamal have in common extends beyond megalomania and appearing figuratively in novels written by famous men. Both men were criminals who professed to converting to Islam under Malcolm X's influence and who fashioned themselves after him in perverse redefinitions of "mimic men." Both had autobiographies published by André Deutsch and edited by Diana Athill. Both men appear in Athill's memoir about her friendship with Jamal titled *Make Believe* (1993), of which my paperback copy bears the subtitle or disclaimer, "A True Story."[28] Indeed, the resemblance between Hakim Jamal and Michael X proves uncanny for our discussion when we consider that Athill's "true story" about both men is told under the sign of "make believe." That Jamal and Michael are obverse sides of the same coin is implied in Athill's immediate responses to each: "I liked Hakim Jamal at once" (1), as opposed to "I didn't know Michael well, but disliked him" (4). Since, as Humphry and Tindall argue, "The trouble with Michael was that he was always pretending," it is unsurprising that the chapter in which Athill discusses Michael at length is titled "Hearsay." This chapter, which serves as her memoir's addendum, recounts Michael and Jamal's involvement in Benson's murder and relies on information gleaned, by Athill's own admission, entirely from newspaper accounts and Humphry and Tindall's book. Concerning Hakim Jamal's role in the killing of Benson, when Athill writes, "it *is impossible to believe* that Hakim did not know what was planned" (128, emphasis added), perhaps what Athill wants to "make believe"—but can't—is that Jamal was not complicit in Benson's death. Athill's inability to convince herself of Jamal's innocence explains her memoir's title. Additionally, Athill's title betrays what I have identified in Williams and

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[28] Diana Athill, *Make Believe* [1993] (London: Granta, 2004). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Naipaul: an impulse to entertain a fiction about someone partially responsible for murdering Gale Ann Benson.

Naipaul's "The Killings in Trinidad"

I turn now from a discussion of the texts that informed Naipaul's essay, "The Killings in Trinidad," to an examination of the essay proper.

Naipaul has said that in the early 1970s ideas for novels eluded him. The nonfiction he wrote instead includes a story about what he dubbed the "literary murder" of a woman named Gale Ann Benson.[29] According to Naipaul, his nonfiction at this time "bridged a creative gap . . . [when] from the end of 1970 to the end of 1973 no novel offered itself to me. That perhaps explains the intensity of some of the pieces, and their obsessional nature" ("Author's Note"). The title of his essay, "The Killings in Trinidad," makes Benson's murder only partially eponymous; for the essay concerns two murders, of which Benson's is the most salacious. *Guerrillas*, to be discussed subsequently, is Naipaul's 1975 novel that her murder also inspired, and five years later the author added a postscript to "The Killings in Trinidad" before republishing it in a 1980 essay collection. All of my citations below concerning this "literary murder" are taken from the 1980 version of the essay.

Naipaul explains that the orchestrator of Gale Ann Benson's murder, Michael de Freitas, renamed himself twice. Born in Trinidad to someone whom Naipaul dispatches as "an uneducated black woman from Barbados," de Freitas owes his patronym to a shopkeeper of Portuguese descent who after fathering Michael decamped to St. Kitts (26). It was as a "de

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[29] V. S. Naipaul, *The Return of Eva Perón with The Killings in Trinidad* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980) 73. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Freitas" that 24-year-old Michael came to England in 1957. In Trinidad he had been a seaman, but his résumé became criminal in Notting Hill where he worked, Naipaul records, as a "pimp, drug pusher and gambling-house operator; . . . [and] strong-arm man for Rachman, the property racketeer" (3-4 and passim). Thereafter, Michael's conversion to Islam Naipaul does not take seriously, not least because de Freitas parodies Malcolm X to take the same algebraic surname. In London, the race-man Michael X is more famous than the strong-arm man Michael de Freitas. Of the former, Naipaul designates him as a "Black Power leader," "poet," and "writer" only when quoting newspaper descriptions of Michael X as such; the citations then read as scare quotes. The suggestion is that the British press were credulous to connect Michael X to black political leadership and literature. As Naipaul tells it, journalists numbered among the many dupable people whom Michael in one way or another swindled. For example, in 1969 a rich patsy funds Michael's most ambitious con—a black commune in Islington. Its failure and "more trouble with the law" precipitated his flight back to Trinidad, under "the Black Muslim name of Michael Abdul Malik." The brief history Naipaul gives of de Freitas's London rise and fall enables "The Killings in Trinidad" to frame Michael's 1972 murder of Benson as an anti-white act that had been anticipated partly by a 1967 "anti-white speech he had made at Reading," for which "he was convicted under the Race Relations Act . . . and sent to jail for a year." His 1971 Trinidad homecoming therefore promised and inevitably delivered much worse.

Michael Abdul Malik, formerly Michael X but born Michael de Freitas, was not the only black man with a Muslim name to betray Gale Ann Benson. The African American lover she had followed to Trinidad before he played her false called himself Hakim Jamal. Like Malik and Jamal, Benson assumed another name. The new name she took scrambles together the letters of "Gale" and "Hakim." Naipaul reads the resultant anagram "Halé Kimga" as a cipher that, given

it “wasn’t a Muslim or an African name . . . suggests that in her madness there was an element of middle-class play” (6). Even if the name strictly speaking wasn’t African, its garish exoticism mimicked the African garb in which the white Briton clothed herself. As Naipaul describes it, Benson’s black radicalism was entirely ornamental. To have Benson on his arm likewise secures for Jamal, at least initially, Malik’s esteem until the prosthetic whiteness that Benson lends her lover starts to repulse Malik. “The Killings in Trinidad” hints that the only evidence to define Jamal as “an American Black Power man” is his Boston birth and Benson, the white woman over a decade his junior whom he degrades (5). The fact that both Benson and Malik admired the disreputable Jamal suggests to Naipaul that neither one was very bright. The author’s estimation of Malik as dull and impressionable explains Malik’s affinity for someone who, like him, was but another Black Power poseur. But Naipaul decides that what must have made Jamal attractive to “Benson, the twenty-seven-year-old English divorcee, in her self-created role as white-woman slave to Jamal’s black master” (56), is that Jamal fed best her perverse penchant to fetishize race sexually.

Naipaul finds that the only thing new about Michael is his Muslim name as Malik recycles old ideas in starting another black commune upon his return to Trinidad. When Gale and Jamal visit him in Arima just outside Port of Spain at the end of 1971, Benson’s presence arouses suspicion, which suggests that something distinguished her from Malik’s followers even as it is asserted that within Malik’s circle Benson was, as Naipaul discerns, “a fake among fakes” (6). Certainly, her strange artificial name and ethnic costume were inadequate to color over her ineradicable whiteness. But “Benson’s distinction in the commune,” Naipaul insists, was “her private cult of Jamal. Not her whiteness; there were other white people around, since for people like Malik there was no point in being black and angry unless occasionally there were white

people to witness" (5-6). Naipaul sees that the history of Malik's dependence on white spectatorship (and sponsorship) presages the commune's doom. The suggestion is that its association with another set of deluded white people promises the ultimate failure of Malik's second supposedly black commune.

Naipaul observes that at Malik's new commune there were other white people present, of whom perhaps the luckiest was a British woman named Simmonds (though the absence of her first name in the text just about reduces her to an anonymous white woman). "Total involvement" is how Simmonds describes her sexual affair with Steve Yeats, one of Malik's black lackeys (22). Her use of a return airplane ticket to England—after only a six-week stay—undercuts the photograph of her saluting Black Power in Trinidad and, like Benson's death, warns other white women to avoid "total involvement" with Afro-Caribbean men on their home turf. But perhaps what warned Simmonds to leave the island was her lover's suspicious death by drowning, obliquely another "killing" to which Naipaul's title refers.

As Naipaul understands it, the fact that Simmonds and others patronized Malik at all makes them complicit in feeding his black radical monstrosity. More broadly, Naipaul especially takes to task "people in England" for virtually inventing Malik:

> Malik was uneducated, but people in England had told him that he was a writer; and he did his best to write. There were also people who had told him . . . that he was a leader (though only of Negroes). So he had read books on leadership; and once, borrowing a good deal from what he had read, he had even written a paper on the subject. "I have no need to play an ego game," he wrote, explaining his position, "for I am the Best Known Black man in this entire [white western world *deleted*] country." . . . . But it was not always pleasant to be a leader. "Leaders are feared even by those closest to him . . . here

> one needs an Iron Hand for one may be tempted to placate the doubter with a gift, and the only real gift one can give is silence." Borrowed words, almost certainly; but Malik was made by words. (18)

That most if not all blacks are tractable is suggested by the text's parenthetical caveat that Malik was a "leader (though only of Negroes)." Indeed, according to Naipaul, Malik himself is an example of black tractability in being so easily persuaded that he could write. Ironically, Naipaul proves that Malik was no writer by taking his work seriously enough to reconstruct a genetic text, integrating into the citation Malik's emendations and reproducing his creative process only to doubt Malik's creativity and suggest instead that he cribbed liberally. Naipaul borrows Malik's words, his ungrammatical English, to remake him upon the page, and consequently Malik becomes Naipaul's literary monster.

In returning to Trinidad a year after the February Revolution of 1970, Malik might have been too late to do more than pander Black Power to dilettantes like Simmonds, derided by Naipaul as "the revolutionaries who visit centers of revolution, but with return air tickets, the people for whom Malik's kind of Black Power was an exotic but safe brothel" (29). For Trinidad's Prime Minister Eric Williams, the "racial enthusiasm" that brought him to power in 1956 had by 1969 grown unwieldy, in large part—and this is important to my argument—because it had gone global (39). Here, some historical context is necessary. Because it epitomizes the militant antiracist resistance that American Black Power inspired internationally, I would like to recall an incident involving the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Montreal, particularly since this event and what happened in its aftermath prefigure what Naipaul would later satirize. As such, it is an important example of what could be interpreted as the global overreach of black radical politics against which, as this chapter illustrates, Naipaul pushed back heavily.

In February 1969, West Indian students at Sir George Williams [now Concordia] University in Montreal alleged racist discrimination and demonstrated against administration and faculty. The student protests deteriorated into occupation of, and fire damage to, the university's computer center. Of the students Canada brought to trial for arson in January 1970, ten were Trinidadian. A month later the accused found supporters in Trinidad and Tobago's National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) and others who marched their show of solidarity in Port of Spain. That march makes 26 February 1970 doubly significant, for it marks the anniversary of the Sir George Williams incident and is the Trinidad Revolution's putative start date.

One day after the NJAC-led demonstration paraded from the Royal Bank of Canada to the nearby Roman Catholic Cathedral, "nine of the leaders were arrested; these arrests," Brinsley Samaroo remarks, "set in motion a wave of public protests."[30] Over the next two months across Trinidad and Tobago, the NJAC organized more meetings and marches. However, when on "March 12, over 6,000 Afro-Trinidadians marched into the largely Indian sugar belt of Caroni in Central Trinidad, to actively demonstrate for racial unity between African and Indian 'black people,'" the state prepared to stop the NJAC in its tracks.[31] The meeting in Caroni threatened to forge the immediate rapprochement between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians that many—among them Prime Minister Eric Williams's government—did not want. But even if sympathetic to the cause, most Indians nonetheless declined to shade themselves into the "black" of Black Power that the NJAC proffered. Perhaps the "black" of "Black Power" lacked nuance. Brian Meeks

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[30] Brinsley Samaroo, "The February Revolution (1970) as a Catalyst for Change in Trinidad and Tobago," in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014), 101.

[31] Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996), 21.

argues that the "very name the movement gave itself was . . . often a liability in the specific ethnic complexity of Trinidad and Tobago."[32] Meeks then cites Samaroo who imagines that the "Trinidadian Indian feels hardly welcome in a power demonstration" that signals the fist-pumping Black Panthers in the U.S. and an aesthetic imported from Africa but nothing from India.[33]

A second march to Caroni was planned for April 20, but in the interim the month of April was cruel. On April 6th young NJAC activist Basil Davis was "martyred" for the revolution when a policeman shot him dead. Davis's 30,000-strong funeral cortege on April 9 was impossible to police. On April 15 the state's refusal to permit Trinidadian native son Stokley Carmichael's homecoming from the U.S. furthered the public's ire. "It was during this period of heightened unrest," writes Samaroo, "that the leaders of NJAC, in collaboration with the university-based Society for the Propagation of Indian Culture (SPIC) announced the proposed march to Caroni and back to Port of Spain over April 20 and 21. The fact that this second march was supported by East Indians . . . signaled to Williams that the matter had gone too far."[34] Samaroo agrees with Ken Parmasad and Franklin Harvey that the prime minister called a state of emergency on April 21 deliberately to sow division before Caroni became a site of an Afro-Indo confederacy.[35] NJAC and Black Power leaders Williams then arrested and carted off to a Nelson Island prison for a brief detention.

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[32] Ibid., 22.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Samaroo, 102.

[35] Ibid., 105; see also Meeks, 30.

The state of emergency clashed with some obstinate sugar workers. In Port of Spain stones were thrown. But once the leaders of civil unrest were incarcerated and the materials of the people's resistance to military power were but stones thrown at police, it is no wonder that, in Meeks's apt phrase, "the mass movement crumbled."[36] However, rather than treat like enemies the Trinidadian people, a few of Williams's soldiers disobeyed orders. They revolted and repaired to Teteron Bay's army base where the state negotiated with the rebels in bad faith, later arresting every seditious officer. Though the soldiers insisted they wanted no irrevocable putsch, Meeks doubts that the insurgents had any chance of frustrating the state of emergency; for Venezuela and the United States had sent warships to shore up Trinidadian state power. Hindsight may consider the United States' mobilization of "2,000 marines to evacuate 1,000 American citizens" on Trinidad a rehearsal for Ronald Reagan's invasion of Trinidad's neighbor Grenada 13 years later.[37] In the event, however, under international threat after the mutineers' arrest, the two-month-old Trinidad Revolution stalled.

The abortion of the February Revolution after only two months which saw no meaningful change radicalized a few dozen youths. They called themselves the National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF) and absconded "to the hills of the northern range, from whence they waged guerrilla warfare against the establishment in the mode of the maroons, who had resisted slavery by escaping into the hills and carrying out raids on the plantations."[38] But most of these men soon died in police shoot-outs. Eric Williams's regime had won, prompting Gordon Rohlehr to

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[36] Meeks, 30.

[37] Ibid., 34.

[38] Samaroo, 103.

proclaim that in 1970, "Williams proved to be the perfect product of the repressive colonialism against which he had, two decades earlier, thundered."[39]

As we have seen, history records that by the late 1960s and early 1970s Afro-Trinidadians, as former subjects of the British Empire, were prepared to trade a former colony's grievances for the Black Power modelled somewhat after the resistance movement in the United States; and in the wake of the failed Revolution, they more than ever needed political activism that Michael X just could not give them. As I have outlined above, the history of the Trinidad Revolution is one in which Michael X does not figure; it also required much more than what Trinidad received from him: a Black Power-inspired "commune" that deserves the quotation marks with which Naipaul ironizes it—for it was mostly, if not all, talk.

Indeed, in "The Killings in Trinidad," the only thing Malik talks into any significance is himself. Naipaul supports this claim by likening Malik to a kind of incantation—he writes that "Malik was made by words, his and other people's" (51). Naipaul surmises that Jamal's part of the spell involved "turning Malik into an American, infecting [him], in the security of Trinidad, with the American-type racial vehemence Malik had so far only parodied" (59). If it appears that Naipaul would have had the "infect[ious]" Black Power movement quarantined in the United States, perhaps it is only because when it emerged in Trinidad it turned Malik not into an American but into a rather terrible novelist. The novel Malik writes anticipates Naipaul's fictionalizations of him and Gale Ann Benson: "'Nigger,' success as a kind of racial revenge: these are among the themes of the novel Malik was writing about himself in a cheap lined quarto writing pad . . . . At least fifty pages were written; and some of them survived the events they

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[39] Gordon Rohlehr, *Perfected Fables Now: A Bookman Signs off on Seven Decades* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2019), 18.

seem so curiously to foreshadow" (59-60). Thereafter, although what is meant by putting "Nigger" in quotation marks is not unpacked, verbatim quotes from Malik's solecism-riddled, cacographic, and poorly punctuated manuscript substantiate Naipaul's summation that "Malik had no skills as a novelist, not even an elementary gift of language" (88). But if the content of Malik's novel-in-progress is not worth the cheap paper it is printed on, its form is noteworthy: "The narrator is a thirty-year-old Englishwoman, Lena Boyd-Richardson" (60). Naipaul's exegesis of this text implies that Malik's first step in exacting "racial revenge" is to make a thinly-disguised Gale Ann Benson narrate his execrable novel. The result, Naipaul intimates, is much more masturbatory than it is literary, for when Malik focalizes his autobiographical fiction through what he imagines to be Benson's consciousness "his awe at himself grew" (47).

Given what appears to be the paucity of Malik's imagination, Naipaul's ascription of Malik's work to the genre of fiction helps to signify Black Power's presence in Trinidad as an imposture:

> Malik's career proves how much of Black Power—away from its United States source—is jargon, how much a sentimental hoax. In a place like Trinidad, racial redemption is as irrelevant for the Negro as for everybody else. It obscures the problems of a small independent country with a lopsided economy, the problems of a fully "consumer" society that is yet technologically untrained and without the intellectual means to comprehend the deficiency. (70)

Naipaul traces Black Power back to a United States origin to suggest he has no objection to it in situ. But in Trinidad, Black Power victimizes inapt "consumer[s]" keen to buy what is only a bill of goods. He then defines Black Power on the island as "a deep corruption: a wish to be granted a dispensation from the pains of development, an almost religious conviction that

oppression can be turned into an asset, race into money" (70). This pronouncement clarifies what the author means by "racial redemption." Beyond its nod to the definition of "redemption" as the conversion of paper money into coin, Naipaul's idea of "*racial* redemption" suggests that Caribbean Black Power pursues a kind of racial alchemy that attempts unsuccessfully to transmute the baser Afro-Trinidadian into something of more value.

Even if Malik was a hack writer, what happened to Gale Ann Benson deserves to be called a "literary murder," as Naipaul phrases it, not least because Malik and Jamal's conspiracy to kill her was an aesthetic decision to serve a larger plot. Naipaul determines that Jamal's reason for wanting Benson dead was cosmetic, for "Jamal, when he understood that Trinidad wasn't the United States, began to feel that in an island where the majority of the population was black, he didn't 'look good' with a white woman at his side" (73-74). In Trinidad, to have Benson's whiteness flank him makes Jamal appalling. And the race and class privilege that Benson represents likewise must have begun to embarrass Malik. Naipaul elaborates:

> [Benson's murder] was decided on by both Malik and Jamal. It was at the time when the two men were working on one another and exciting one another and producing "reams of literature." Jamal was writing his exalted off-the-mark "nigger" nonsense about Malik; and Malik, in his novel, with this Jamal-given idea of his power . . . was settling scores with the English middle class, turning the fascination of . . . "Lena Boyd-Richardson" into terror. (73)

Put otherwise, Malik and Jamal—each man the other's muse—wrote fiction that rendered real people as flat characters. This flattening of historical figures in fiction, as my argument will show later, is what Naipaul himself does in *Guerrillas*.

What explains Malik's failures as a novelist, Naipaul theorizes, is that his solipsism makes prose the wrong medium for his art. Malik "was too self-absorbed to process experience in any rational way or even to construct a connected narrative. But when he transferred his fantasy to real life, he went to work like the kind of novelist he would have liked to be" (88). Malik's scenario for Gale Ann Benson's murder earns Naipaul's exclamatory praise only because it marks Malik's better suited return to manipulating people instead of words: "Such plotting, such symbolism!" (88). As such, Benson's death was the political statement that Malik could not otherwise articulate.

Unlike the symbolism behind Benson's death—its subtext—which he has no trouble comprehending, Malik's novel manuscript tests Naipaul's reading skills. In Malik's novel Naipaul discovers a diegetic blunder: "There is a stumble in the narrative: the writer, without knowing it, suddenly loses his narrator, Lena. In a few connected lines the writer moves from the first-person narrative to third person and then back to first. But now it is Sir Harold, Lena's father's friend . . . who is the narrator" (62). Sir Harold's appearance means only that Malik's fairytale demanded a white knight. "There remains," however, "the mystery of Lena Boyd-Richardson, repelled, fascinated, involved, and then abruptly disappearing as narrator" (64). In the event we see that like Jamal, who Naipaul fears must have worried that his interracial romance sent the wrong message, Malik changed his mind about ventriloquizing himself through a white woman. This muting here of Lena Boyd-Richardson adds to the symbolism in the fatal stab wound Gale Ann Benson later receives at her throat. In implicitly connecting Benson to the narrator whom Malik "disappear[ed]," Naipaul suggests that Malik disposed of her because, as the white lover of a black man who discoursed on Black Power, Benson created a storytelling problem.

To murder Benson, Malik and Jamal recruited others. Most of the men directly guilty were black. What mitigates the criminal participation of two Indians, Naipaul speculates, is that Malik must have debauched them. These two were "Parmassar, an Indian boy who was glamoured by Malik and was a member of Malik's group" and "a well-to-do Indian of good family called Chadee, who had become mixed up with the commune in December" (78, 66). If Naipaul's intercession on behalf of Parmassar and Chadee asks us to inculpate only Benson's executioners, admittedly that leaves only three black men, named Kidogo, Stanley Abbott, and Steve Yeates. Kidogo was an acquaintance Jamal had summoned from the U.S. expressly to kill Benson. For the same reason, Malik's peremptory telegram to England retrieved underling Stanley Abbott. Already at the commune was Steve Yeates. Parmassar and Chadee watched Abbott subdue Benson while Kidogo slashed ineffectually at her with a cutlass. But Yeates, after confiscating the cutlass, inflicted her mortal wound. Perhaps he did so charitably, given the prolonged suffering Kidogo put her through. Even if that were the case, it remains inexplicable why Trina Simmonds, another of the commune's resident white women, upheld Yeates subsequently as "an excellent lover . . . compassionate . . . understanding . . . a wonderful man" (65). If nothing else her retrospective praise reminds us that, unlike Benson's, Simmonds's "involvement" with Yeates is an encounter that she survived. Quoting Simmonds is Naipaul's concession that not all Afro-Caribbean men are killers.

After Gale Ann Benson is hacked to death, Naipaul autopsies her in prose. He judges that "[h]er execution, on January 2, 1972, was sudden and swift" (6). But, as we shall see, "swift" inaccurately measures the time it took for Benson to die, which is drawn out in his account for dramatic effect. Naipaul continues:

> She was held by the neck and stabbed and stabbed. At that moment all the lunacy and play fell from her; she knew who she was then, and wanted to live. Perhaps the motive for the killing lay only in that: the surprise, a secure life ending in an extended moment of terror. She fought back; the cuts on her hands and arms would show how strongly she fought back. She had to be stabbed nine times. It was an especially deep wound at the base of the neck that stilled her; and then she was buried in her African-style clothes. She was not completely dead: dirt from her burial hole would work its way into her intestines. (6-7)

To Naipaul, Benson's defensive wounds indicate that being stabbed sobers her—it disabuses her of an un-inhibiting "security." When he counts these wounds, the author points to Kidogo's awkwardness with a cutlass even as he evinces Benson's admirable attempts at self-preservation. Finally, the fact that African kitsch becomes her shroud and the meaning behind the geophagia that the paragraph ultimately discovers make the description of Benson's death especially tragic. To add insult to injury, the hole in which Benson's corpse is interred the "well-to-do" Chadee fills partially with manure.

It could be argued that Naipaul then gives Benson an ungenerous post-mortem. For example, he remembers her as "shallow and vain and [as] parasitic as many middle-class dropouts of her time" (71). In calling Benson "vain," he at once complains about what he considers to be her excessive self-regard *and* emphasizes the futility of her resistance. For it would appear that she "dropped-out" before learning her lesson—that men like Malik and Jamal will play hosts only temporarily to "parasites" like Benson. Thereafter, Naipaul villainizes the victim, arguing that Benson "became as corrupt as her master [Hakim Jamal]; she was part of the corruption by which she was destroyed. . . . Benson was, more profoundly than Malik or Jamal, a

fake. She took, on her journey away from home, the assumptions, however little acknowledged, not only of her class and race and the rich countries to which she belonged, but also of her ultimate security" (71). In Trinidad, the empire that Benson must always represent by virtue of her class and race makes her attempt to play the slave carnivalesque—that is, "fake." However, I would argue that Naipaul's resuscitation of Benson, in the thinly veiled portrait of her in the novel *Guerrillas* (1975), can function as an attempt to save her from having *died* [in] "vain." This argument would help to explain the seeming paradox of why Naipaul's critique of an American-style Black Power in the U.K. and in Trinidad is animated by the figure of a white woman who, fatally, is not in her element.

How "The Killings in Trinidad" becomes *Guerrillas*

In this chapter's final section, my discussion of Naipaul's work culminates in a demonstration of how the narrative form of the novel that Gale Ann Benson's murder inspired, *Guerrillas* (1975), is prompted by historical *and* literary phenomena. This novel suggests for itself several provisional reading strategies—intertextual reflections (via allusions to *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *Clarissa*), hermeneutics of suspicion, and allegory—only ultimately to resist any but a deeply paranoid "parody of the history" of Trinidadian Black Power and its proponents.[40] Though the novel's title suggests that it will be about revolutionaries, it presents a narrative in which the characters allegorically represent colonial relations. Naipaul relegates his Michael X figure to the margins of *Guerrillas* by making a white couple the central characters of his ostensibly Black Power novel. Therefore,

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[40] Bhabha, *Location*, 88.

much of the following discussion of *Guerrillas* will pertain to its white protagonists. But first, let me sketch the story briefly.

It is relevant that even the barest plot summary of this novel makes impossible the avoidance of allusion, suspicion, and clumsy symbolism. As has been discussed, *Guerrillas* is based on the factual story of Gale Ann Benson, a white British woman murdered in Trinidad on 2 January 1972 by the Black Power "leader" known as Michael X. For the fictional version, Naipaul changes "Michael" to "Jimmy," renames Gale "Jane," and invents a character named "Roche," seemingly to make the names "Jane" and "Roche[ster]" suggestive for readers of Charlotte Brönte.[41] The West Indian island to which Jane follows her lover Roche from London lends itself to allegory by remaining unnamed.[42] At a commune called evocatively "Thrushcross Grange," Roche introduces Jane to Black Power radical Jimmy. Meeting Jane inspires Jimmy to write a semi-autobiographical novel that renames Jane "Clarissa," a name suggestive for readers of Samuel Richardson, especially since Jimmy menaces his own invented Clarissa with rape. Over the course of *Guerrillas*, Jimmy and Jane have two parabolic sexual encounters—the first anticlimactic and the second tragic: in the first, the black revolutionary ejaculates prematurely; in

[41] Maria Grazia Lolla offers that "The adoption of symbolical names . . . is a signal that the characters are meant to be fictional, not real people camouflaged, and to be vehicles of Naipaul's vision, elicited, not constrained by reality" (48). See Maria Grazia Lolla, "V. S. Naipaul's Poetics of Reality: 'The Killings in Trinidad' and *Guerrillas*," *Caribana* 1 (1990): 41-50.

For a description of the many correspondences between Michael X and Jimmy Ahmed, see John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction* (London: Hansib, 1987), 171.

[42] Gordon Rohlehr suggests that in not naming the island where his work is set, perhaps Naipaul's aim is "to indicate the . . . indistinctness of the island's emerging post-Independence identity" (146). See Gordon Rohlehr, *Perfected Fables Now: A Bookman Signs off on Seven Decades* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2019).

the second, he sodomizes and murders Jane. The above synopsis, which just skims over the novel's surface, is in keeping with the author's description of the woman whose murder inspired it—Naipaul wrote that Benson was "impenetrable."[43] To call a woman who has been stabbed to death "impenetrable" is in poor taste, but her impenetrability combined with Naipaul's taste in literature explains why the author's fictionalization of Benson depends so ponderously upon literary allusion.

Guerrillas's several allusions to other novels in the English canon may leave some readers flummoxed.[44] For example, if we read allusively the novel's first sentence—"After lunch Jane and Roche left their house on the Ridge to drive to Thrushcross Grange"—we find that one-and-a-half characters have been transplanted from a Charlotte Brönte novel ("Jane and Roche[ster]" from *Jane Eyre*) to a setting in an Emily Brönte novel ("Thrushcross Grange" from *Wuthering Heights*).[45] *Guerrillas*'s first sentence thus locates readers, by way of allusion, in England. A problem with our allusive reading is that Jane and Roche take their post-prandial drive in the Caribbean, not in England whence they came. "Thrushcross Grange" in Naipaul's novel names a 1970s Caribbean commune where young black men, apprehensive in both senses of the word, suffer Jane and Roche as intrusive and incongruous white foreigners. Accordingly, to begin reading *Guerrillas* allusively, then, is immediately to discover that English transplants

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[43] Naipaul, "Killings," 6.

[44] To explain how allusions function in *Guerrillas*, John Thieme writes that "Naipaul *develops* ideas inherent in the works to which he alludes to comment on the situation in Trinidad and the other societies about which he writes." Later, Thieme adds that Naipaul's "uses of allusion frequently reveal his characters' sense of their lack of a secure social world, while at the same time providing an index of the distance of his fiction from the novel of manners of . . . European societies." See Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, 11 and 13.

[45] V. S. Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

to the West Indies can create a disorienting reading problem. Multiplying this problem exponentially is the fact that while "[t]he names Jane and Roche echo the Jane and Rochester of *Jane Eyre*," as Neil ten Kortenaar notes, "an allusion to *Jane Eyre* set in the Caribbean is also an allusion to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a rewriting of the Victorian novel."[46] Kortenaar's remarks reiterate John Thieme's suggestion "that what Naipaul is attempting in *Guerrillas* is a reworking of one of the classic encounters in English fiction, especially since his white characters have been given the names Jane and Roche."[47] In venturing beyond *Guerrillas*'s first sentence, we may continue to map the spatiotemporal triangle that Kortenaar's and Thieme's arguments schematize, wherein Naipaul "echo[ically]" (in 1975) "reworks" Brontëan "encounters" (from 1847) that have been subjected already to Rhys's "rewrit[e]" (in 1966). But we also might try to resist such a reading, as the two Janes in question seem to do. Because *Guerrillas*'s Jane "hardly qualifies as a case of virtue under siege," one critic describes Naipaul's eponymous "rework[ing]" as a *reversal*, "an ironic inversion" of Jane Eyre.[48] The irony of an ex-colonial subject's allusion to a former imperial power's discourse is to be expected when we remember Bhabha's claim that "mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise," here between Naipaul's identity as a West Indian author and the history of the English literary tradition that he attempts to enter.[49]

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[46] Neil ten Kortenaar, "Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V. S. Naipaul and *Guerrillas*," *Contemporary Literature* 31, no. 3 (1990), 330.

[47] John Thieme, "'Apparitions of Disaster': Brontëan Parallels in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Guerrillas*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 14 (1979), 127.

[48] Anne R. Zahlan, "Literary Murder: V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*," *South Atlantic Review* 59, no. 4 (1994), 98.

[49] Bhabha, *Location*, 86.

There is another way in which Jane presents a reading problem. According to Roche, Jane is "very white, with a color that wasn't at all like the color of local white people. She was white enough to be unreadable" (8). In other words, it does not matter if Jane functions as a literary allusion when she, or at least her whiteness, can't be read. What Roche posits only bolsters this chapter's claim that Jane threatens a disorienting reading problem precisely because she is not "local" to the Caribbean.

Another of the novel's ironic inversions is that its characters with black skin mimic the unreadability of Jane's whiteness. At the fledgling commune that is Thrushcross Grange, there is a hut (an ersatz barracks) that the third-person narration, alternately focalized through Jane and Roche, scans and parses into beds, boys, and black blanks—surfaces that, on the one hand, reflect and, on the other, refuse to recognize the opaquely white Jane.[50] Within this hut, Jane finds that "Four or five of the beds were occupied. The boys or young men who lay on them looked at Jane and Roche and then looked up at the corrugated iron or at the opposite wall. Their shiny black faces were blank; they did nothing to acknowledge the presence of strangers in the hut" (8).

If, like Jane's very white skin, the boys' black faces, despite their shine, illuminate nothing, it might be because Jane and Roche barely glance at the young men, failing even to complete an accurate bed count. Then again, as I am arguing, the extent of the scene's presentation is such that black skin is but another unreadable surface. Whichever it may be, the relationship between reading and race exercises Jane just as much as it does Roche once Jane

[50] "Polyphonic" is how Johannes Riis describes *Guerrillas*'s "narrative technique." See Johannes Riis, "Naipaul's Woodlanders," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 14 (1979), 110.

meets Jimmy Ahmed, the commune's mixed-race (Asian and Afro-Caribbean) leader who, at the end of the novel, will have Jane murdered:

> The man was at first in silhouette against the white light outside. When he came into the hut he could be seen to be naked from the waist up . . . . As he came down the wide aisle between the metal beds, moving with short, light steps, he gave an increasing impression of physical neatness. The neatness was suggested by the slenderness of his waist, the width of his shoulders, by the closed expression of his face, by his full, closely shaved cheeks, by his trimmed mustache, and by his trousers, which were of a smooth, fawn-colored material, and tight, so that he seemed smooth and tight from waist to shoes. . . .
>
> Jane had been expecting someone more physically awkward and more Negroid, someone at least as black as the boys. She saw someone who, close up, looked distinctly Chinese. . . . His eyes were small, black, and blank; that, and the mustache, which suggested a mouth clamped shut, made him seem buttoned up, tense, unreadable. (9-10)

Jane's fragmentation of Jimmy into waist, shoulders, face, cheeks, mustache evinces how, as Bhabha argues, "Black skin splits under the racist gaze . . . reveal[ing] the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body."[51] It is also important that, in looking over Jimmy, Jane flattens him into a two-dimensional silhouette, measuring only Jimmy's length ("from the waist up," "from waist to shoes") and breadth ("the slenderness of his waist, the width of his shoulders"). The novel's description of him is another way of hinting that Jimmy is all form and no content. It is as though Jimmy presents only an illusion of depth, a *trompe-l'oeil* effect that fails to trick Jane's eye. And yet because she expects to read Africa, not China, in Jimmy's face, his physiognomy still presents Jane with a disorienting, or dislocating, reading problem.

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[51] Bhabha, *Location*, 92.

Nevertheless, what is at least partially “Negroid” about Jimmy are his eyes that—appropriately enough, given his biracial status—mirror the blank black boys even as they reciprocate the threat of unreadability that Roche believes Jane’s white skin might pose. If Jane is unreadable to Jimmy, however, it is because he turns blind eyes to her: “He nodded to Jane without seeming to see her” (10). Conversely it could be said that Jane’s vision also is impaired; for, ultimately, Jane’s scratching at the surface of Jimmy does not direct us out of the cul-de-sac of un-readability.

But, given her history, Roche does not expect Jane to be incisive when it comes to apprehending West Indians. When Jane and Roche were in London, evidently her penchant was blandly to summarize “West Indian bus conductors,” for example, as “efficient and good-humored and . . . subjected to much racial abuse.” Jane’s antiracist self-image, built on such thin description, Roche’s excoriating critique debunks:

> Jane said she had recently walked out of the house of a friend who had begun to say harsh things about “immigrants.” Roche could see her walking out of the house. He could see her making some abrupt gesture, sitting forward perhaps, and then, with this physical movement, finding herself committed to the whole action: picking up lighter, bag, gloves, getting into coat—swift, large gestures . . . . But he doubted whether she had left the friend’s house solely on account of the bus conductors; he doubted whether she had left the house at all. And though Jane said “Nothing would ever induce me to talk to her again,” he doubted whether there had been any serious breach. (90)

Picturing Jane gesticulating in her gloves and coat—surfaces upon surfaces—Roche guesses that Jane’s response, if there was one, was more volitional than intentional. Intentions would speak to her psychology; but Roche’s imagination only gestures towards Jane’s interiority, because

what Roche triply doubts is that Jane has any depth. He pinpoints within Jane what one critic has called "[t]he collation of the inability to see beyond the surface of things, and the concomitant failure to manufacture a position, which is, in fact, the necessary result of forsaking depth for surface."[52] Certainly Roche does not believe that the gloved and coated Jane of his conjecture, protected beneath her "surface of things," speaks from tactile experience with West Indian bus conductors. The suggestion is that Jane's insulated knowledge of and sympathy for West Indians is not even skin deep.

When he cannot credit her words and actions, it is no wonder that Roche should think Jane unreadable. Nevertheless, *Guerrillas*, like colonial "texts rich in the traditions of . . . repetition" repeatedly stages Caribbean, but also racial, foils against which Roche attempts to read Jane.[53] The question of how Roche may best read Jane remains open. Roche's skepticism and the fact that "[n]o one believed in her passion" recommend that he approach her with what might be described as a hermeneutics of suspicion:

> At Mrs. Grandlieu's one evening Roche had seen the young wife of a lawyer grow silent as Jane had talked on; and then the young woman, a pretty brown-skinned woman, neat in a tight-waisted blue dress . . . had refused to acknowledge Jane's presence. This was done quietly; not many people would have noticed; but Roche, contrasting the woman's neatness and gravity with Jane's gobbling talk and nervous manner which now began to appear strident and hysterical—and Jane that evening was in a sack dress made of a kind of striped North African sacking—Roche for the first time, and to his great surprise,

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[52] Toral Jatin Gajarawala, "Fictional Murder and Other Descriptive Deaths: V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* and the Problem of Postcolonial Description," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 42, no. 3 (2012), 302.

[53] Bhabha, *Location*, 88.

> began to detect in Jane a physical gracelessness. Jane talked on; she seemed not to be aware of the effect she had been having. But she did know, and she had been wounded. (94-95)

Once again Jane and a West Indian who repudiates her are hinged together into a diptych in which each is presented as the inversion or ironic mimic of the other, but in this instance the juxtaposition renders Jane readable. Indeed, it is only her encounter with a "pretty brown-skinned" woman that makes manifest (to Roche, anyway) Jane's latent "hysteri[a]" and "gracelessness." It is conceivable that though Jane "talks" throughout the dinner party, the narrator's failure or refusal to record her verbatim suggests that what she says is not worth reading. Instead, the reader can interpret only Jane's surface appearance—the exotic sack in which Roche's memory dresses her—which again results only in a white woman's disorienting relocation—this time to North Africa. The dinner party is but another scene in which Jane functions as only a cipher in the novel with no hint of depth, reduced to a silly white woman out of her element. The fact that Jane is "wounded" by an almost undetectable rebuff confirms Roche's suspicion that Jane is superficial.

Of course, depicting Jane as superficial makes it easy for anyone to slight her. But this metaphorical death by a thousand cuts that Jane experiences on the island is significant in that it foreshadows her fatal stabbing. The racial politics at stake in this novel mean that the contempt with which Afro-Caribbean characters treat Jane specifically, and white women from England generally, must not be taken lightly. Indeed, we find that the antipathy to Jane by black

characters like Adela,[54] Roche's maid, evokes suspicious readings that can be particularly instructive:

> Adela was young but devout. She was plump and healthy, but she went to all the faith healing meetings that itinerant Southern American preachers held in the city. It had at first amused Jane to hear of these meetings . . . But Jane had soon regretted the encouragement she had given Adela; for Adela, when she understood that Jane and Roche were not married and were living "in sin," became permanently annoyed. In her white uniform, on which she insisted, she walked through the large house like a Friday night woman preacher, filling the rooms with her annoyance, and looking for fresh signs of sin. (55)

Ironically, though it is Adela who is insubordinate, the blameworthy one in this exchange is Jane. The lesson to be learned from all this is that West Indian blacks are not to be given "encouragement," at least not by white women away on holiday looking to be "amused."

Moreover, the novel construes white women's turn to black people for amusement as perilous. When Mrs. Stephens, the mother of one of Jimmy's commune boys, apprises Roche of this peril, her theory that "White women marry their own. But they like the Negro men" also implies that white women do not like the white men they marry, and they do not marry the Negro men they like (107). These faithless women Mrs. Stephens blames indirectly for her son's delinquency as she laments England's and China's influence upon the West Indies. About her son she protests, "Knolly was a good boy. . . . When he was here I always used to see a few cents. I don't know what kind of sweetness he find up by that Chinee man. I don't know how he

[54] "Adela" is perhaps another dark allusion to *Jane Eyre* in that her name recalls "Adele," Rochester's illegitimate daughter. As such, it is fitting that she points here to *Roche*'s extra-marital relations.

could believe that other people could look after him when they can't even look after their own" (106). Her boy's errancy has cost Mrs. Stephens money, for which she blames Jimmy, "that Chinee man." The import of her [mis]racialization of Jimmy is that the problem he presents—as with the most salient problems in this novel—is not indigenous to the Caribbean. The sweetness she thinks her boy has found in another embitters her. But what partially absolves Jimmy for Mrs. Stephens is the fact that England has spoiled him on a diet of "rotten meat," her epithet for white women with a taste for black men. According to Mrs. Stephens, such "rotten meat" "is what they feed up that Chinee man on in England. That is the only sweetness he know. That is what they feed him up on and then they send him down here. Parading through the town with their tight pants sticking up in their crutch. They *stink*, Mr. Roche. They stink like rotten meat self" (107). Mrs. Stephens's "crutch" is but another word for "crotch," but her use of the former emphasizes that for these women sex is a prop, the inappropriate means by which they support themselves. When Mrs. Stephens accuses British white women of preparing Jimmy to poison the Caribbean, what might account for her logic is England's long history of exporting to its colonies inferior and potentially dangerous products. In this respect, the targets of Mrs. Stephens's racially inflected misogyny also function as "instances of metonymy" for the [former] Mother Country.[55] Though Jimmy Ahmed is born in the West Indies as Jimmy Leung, being the biracial son of a Chinese father debases, in Mrs. Stephens's eyes, his identity as West Indian, even as the novel describes her as a "well-proportioned mulatto woman" (102).[56] And as it is the site of his radicalization and Islamization, his affiliation with England only further taints him as

[55] Bhabha, *Location*, 90.

[56] In this novel, "well-proportioned mulatto woman" could describe Mrs. Stephens's body-type and/or her racial mixture.

"other"—or, as Bhabha would have it, Jimmy's appropriation by England makes him inappropriate on the island—giving Mrs. Stephens more reasons to repudiate him.

"That is what they feed him up on and then they send him down here": the final deictic element of this sentence—"here"—needs unpacking. The novel's nameless setting makes "here" impossible to pinpoint, which helps obfuscate Jimmy's exact origin. Mrs. Stephens further muddies the water when she acknowledges only Jimmy's Chinese father and the British white women who, so to speak, nursed him. Mrs. Stephens's subtle disavowal of his Caribbean origin is in keeping with the novel's insistence that originality is not something that Jimmy can claim here in the West Indies. For example, that Jane reads Jimmy's political "philosophy" on "duplicated sheets" emphasizes the fact that even his commune's manifesto is a copy (10). Hinted at again here, of course, is Jimmy's mimicry and repetition.

What also remains at question here is exactly what Jane and Roche are doing on the island in the first place. In the job for which he has come to the West Indies, Roche "was a doer of good works, with results that never showed, someone who went among the poor on behalf of his firm and tried to organize boys' clubs and sporting events, gave this cup here and offered a gift of cricket equipment there. He worked with Jimmy Ahmed, whom he took seriously, more seriously than the people who gave Jimmy money; he bribed slum boys to go to Thrushcross Grange" (47). The fact that the outfitting of cricket teams is no match for the problems that vex the island shows up the work Roche does as thoroughly vacuous. Paradoxically, if "Thrushcross Grange" names a place that he must bribe "slum boys to go to," then his inducements accomplish only the further impoverishment of young men who already are poor, a job description which clarifies why the company that hired Roche for such "public relations" work can be analogized to "a firm of colonial shopkeepers" (44). Moreover, if those who subsidize Thrushcross Grange

apparently consider it trifling, then Roche's bribing of slum boys to furnish the commune indicates ironically that he discounts them; it also discredits the claim that he takes Jimmy seriously and explains why Jimmy insists on calling Roche "Massa." This contempt for the island's slum boys under the guise of charity marks Roche and Jane as tourists. Indeed, Jane's mortal flaw is her ambivalence to being interpellated as a tourist. We see this in the early pages in Jane's first meeting with the slum boy Bryant whom Jimmy in the conclusion of the novel will recruit to kill her:

> She [Jane] heard a hiss. It was one of the street noises she had grown to recognize on the island. It was how a man called to someone far away: this hiss could penetrate the sound of traffic on a busy road. The hiss came from a boy on one of the beds. She knew it was meant for her, but she paid no attention . . . .
>
> "Sister."
>
> She didn't look up.
>
> "White lady."
>
> She looked up.
>
> . . . [T]he boy . . . said more loudly . . . "Give me a dollar." (11-12)

It would be a mistake for Jane to answer to "Sister," because it is too intimate an address; the closeness it would suggest would make the hiss inappropriate to the occasion. "White lady" succeeds in eliciting her response because it justifies the necessity of the hiss, explains why it was "meant for her": in the Caribbean, it is her polarizing identity as a visiting white lady with money that positions Jane as "someone far away" from the poor young black man who importunes her. Ironically, the gulf between Bryant and Jane is most visible when they are proximate to each other.

The maintenance of distance is what the [mis]readings that pervade this novel recommend. For when characters try to bridge distances between each other, problems occur. For example, the narrator recounts the problematic first meeting between Roche and Jane in London:

> He had just published a book about his experiences in South Africa. He had been arrested, tortured, tried, imprisoned, and then, after international protests, deported, his assets in the country frozen. He had made little impression on her at their first meeting. But later she had read his book, and she had then approached him through his book. And this was soon to strike her as strange, that she should have assumed from his book and the experiences he described in it that she knew him. (43-44)

Given that his South African experience is so readily synoptic and as such is indistinguishable from any number of apartheid resistance narratives, it makes sense that so much about Roche still eludes his book's reader. The harsher critique of the book is made by Meredith, an Afro-Caribbean solicitor and part-time radio program host who grills Roche about "our trouble here," Meredith's circumlocution for the incendiary racial climate on the island. When Meredith speaks on behalf of the West Indies that "We are too vulnerable to other people's ideas. We don't have too many of our own" (200), he identifies ideological gaps that Roche's book cannot fill. For as he lectures Roche, "the guerrilla activities you describe in your book, the little acts of sabotage—they really cannot be compared with the guerrilla activities of other people in other countries" (205). Meredith's argument provincializes Roche's radical political history to insist that it is not portable. If Jane's objection to the book is that it tells us about "experiences in South Africa" but not about Roche, then Meredith's analysis only extends Jane's reading: Roche's book tells us about a South African experience but not about anything else. Taken

together, Meredith and Jane's book-review finds that Roche's guerrilla activities have little utility outside South Africa. Roche's book therefore can be read as a case study for Meredith's claim that one country's subversive anti-racist resistance movements "really cannot be compared with . . . [those of] other countries."

If we take Meredith's claim as the novel's thesis, we can begin to make sense of how Naipaul's foreign, white protagonists and allusions to English literature are to function in a novel that ostensibly is about Black Power and revolution in the Caribbean. Everything and everyone not native to the islands is depicted in *Guerrillas* as conspicuously incongruent to the project of Caribbean independence and black self-awareness. In this respect, foreign influence, be it from the U.K. or the U.S., is indistinguishable from interference. The following dialogue between Roche and his maid Adela provides an exemplary case for Meredith's implicit argument that the achievement of racial uplift in the Caribbean requires only indigenous gestures that foreigners need not touch:

> She [Adela] said, "You know Dr. Handy Byam, Mr. Roche?"
>
> He had seen the posters for this latest American evangelist, but now he was confused by Adela's aspirates and wasn't sure whether the evangelist's name was Andy or Handy.
>
> "I feel so good, Mr. Roche, after last night. So good. Handy Byam say he wasn't going to heal anybody with his own hands. Last night he say the people have to do their own healing now and he is just here to guide them. He say that Israel is in her glory and the power is now on the Nig-ro people. He ask us to turn to whoever was next to us and to hold their hands and to pray and pray hard, so that every man would heal his neighbor." (113)

Over and above Adela's petition to Roche, what also recommends Dr. Byam in this novel is that "the power . . . on the Nig-ro people" of which he speaks models a Caribbean Black Power that has no need for American aid; for what most distinguishes him and his program, and suggests why both are effective, is the fact that the guidance he offers is decidedly hands-off, unlike the methods of, say, Jimmy Ahmed, whom Meredith imagines "in the bush buggering a couple of slum boys" (137). Of even more importance in this example is that "American" describes Handy the evangelist but not the remedy which, in the West Indies, is already at hand. "The Nig-ro people" of the Caribbean, Handy insists, can "do their own healing."

Here we see how this ex-colonial's Caribbean novel, with its allusions, Standard English, and tropes favoring British literary traditions, illustrates Bhabha's claim that "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."[57] On the one hand, the novel can be read as an act of mimicry in that Naipaul in many respects "*repeats* rather than re-presents" his previous invidious argument about Caribbean Black Power and his misogynistic depictions of the white women involved, even peripherally, to the movement. *Guerrillas* finds that a proliferation of flat characters and the deployment of what could be described as the codex form of hyper-fictionalization (that is, the further fictionalization of characters whom others have invented—Michael X, Jane, Roche) is necessary to expose Caribbean Black Power as a false front for criminal activity and a fraud. On the other hand, in painting Jimmy Ahmed as a mimic man who first fictionalizes and then kills the embodiment of the Mother Country who aids and abets her subversive subjects, the novel suggests that colonial mimicking of an imperial power promises a dead end. Ultimately, then, *Guerrillas* is against mimic men.

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[57] Bhabha, *Location*, 85.

In this chapter, I have tried to elucidate how Naipaul's connection of Caribbean Black Power to Gale Ann Benson's murder is spurious given that he presents the Movement allusively and incongruously through the depiction of interracial relationships in which the characters involved are represented through racist and sexist stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is useful to return to works of this kind in order to demonstrate the lingering colonial structures hidden in postcolonial literary representations. These structures are so tenacious that they even support much more sympathetic portraits of Afro-Caribbean men, as we shall see in the following chapter on Sam Selvon's humorous Moses Trilogy.

Chapter Two

Sam Selvon's Moses Trilogy: Using Parody to Defuse Black Power

> What happened was that the Black Power movement originated in America, shifted down from the U.S. and invaded the Caribbean. But so many races lived more or less harmoniously that Black Power did not spark anything there. My conception of Black Power is that it never really did anything much in the Caribbean because people had been living together for years and they treated it as something temporary. What shall we do with a Black Power movement?—Everyone is black, you know, even the Indians and Chinese. We didn't have the conditions for the problems of the U.S. No direct oppression and segregation. Since independence, blacks have been in power and this has been swept away. There are still some groups with some sort of segregation—but nothing that concerns the U.S. meaning of Black Power. In the University in Jamaica, it was picked up as a sort of gimmick. But even Jamaicans did not take it to heart. It has not lasted.
> —Sam Selvon[58]

This chapter examines the portrayal of Black Power in Sam Selvon's Moses Aloetta trilogy—*The Lonely Londoners* (1956)*, Moses Ascending* (1975)*,* and *Moses Migrating* (1983)—all novels indebted to an oral storytelling tradition indigenous to the Caribbean: the calypso. Calypso is a musical artform that developed in Trinidad, as Gordon Rohlehr explains, "out of a complex of African song forms and via the absorption of varieties of European, West Indian, Latin American, North American and, later, Indian musics. . . . Calypso music today still performs most of the functions of its ancestor musics: celebration, censure, praise, blame, social control, worship, moralizing, affirmation, confrontation, exhortation, warning, scandal-mongering, ridicule, the generation of laughter, verbal warfare, satire."[59] Selvon's novelistic adaptation of the calypso form to represent West Indian expressions of Black Power has the additional merit of incorporating Caribbean oral culture in literary works. Selvon has been

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[58] Qtd. in Michel Fabre, "Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations," in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 74.

[59] Gordon Rohlehr, "The Calypsonian as Artist: Freedom and Responsibility," *Small Axe* 9 (2001), 1.

rightly lauded as one of the first authors to write novels in (a modified) creole, like his trilogy that charts the journey of a Trinidadian expatriate named Moses from Trinidad to London and back. Although creole speech had appeared in West Indian literature as far back as the nineteenth century, Selvon was the first to make it part of the narration.[60] Using creole for narrative and not just for dialogue was a radical move for literature written prior to decolonization. The trilogy borrows the language of creole and the structure of calypso, a lexicon and genre appropriate to its hero. But, as this chapter shows, the limitations of the hybrid calypso-novel form become apparent when it is broadly applied to the representation of Black Power politics in the Caribbean diaspora. I argue that because Selvon's interpretation of the calypso-novel genre increasingly depends on parody, its depiction of Black Power can render the movement only as parodic, which, while not quite the same as Naipaul's mimicry, similarly reproduces racial and sexual stereotypes. The hybrid form of the novels complements their content to suggest that black British and Trinidadian culture can't help but creolize Black Power into a burlesque imitation that inevitably pales in comparison to the black radical politics practiced in the U.S.

In what follows, I begin with an overview of the trilogy's critical reception and the conundrum that Selvon's work presents: commentators find that the author's attitude to women and to black radicalism is frustratingly opaque when the parodic form of his novels undermines

[60] Trinidadian writer Merle Hodge qualifies Selvon's achievement by writing that "In Trinidadian literary history, the Creole voice, though marginalized, was present in written fiction for more than a hundred years before Sam Selvon, who tends to be seen, erroneously, as the person responsible for introducing Creole into our literature. The achievement of Selvon with regard to language is that he used Creole for **narration**. Up until Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956), the use of Creole was restricted to dialogue, and the West Indian narrative voice was Standard English largely untouched by the first language of the West Indian population" (1). See Merle Hodge, "The Language of Earl Lovelace," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2006).

even his sympathetic treatment of his subjects. Increasingly over the course of his trilogy, it is as though Selvon feels a sympathy for his characters that can't be fully expressed. I'll explore the first novel in the Moses series, *The Lonely Londoners*. Appearing in 1956, this novel introduced readers to the trilogy's hero via the creolized English of an omniscient narrator whose perspective Selvon then arrogates to Moses himself for the two sequels. I demonstrate how Selvon tells the story of a largely homosocial, black, male, immigrant Britain in an idiom that braids together Standard English and Trinidadian dialect. His innovative language created out of a mix of cultures is necessitated by the interracial encounters that the novel illustrates. Selvon proves how amenable the English language is to the integration of West Indian expressions. This linguistic triumph raises the question of why the England that his Afro-Caribbean characters negotiate finds it exceedingly difficult to assimilate them.

Testing the Limits of Parody

The critical consensus on the Moses novels is that Selvon writes as a parodist who hits various targets, not always innocuously. Several critics agree that when he pokes fun at Moses, Selvon conjures Jonathan Swift's Gulliver.[61] For another critic, whose argument is predicated upon reading the main character's life as "a parody of an odyssey," Moses ludicrously impersonates Ulysses.[62] Going in the abstract direction, Maureen Warner-Lewis's critique of

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[61] See, for example, Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood, 1992) 105; Roydon Salick, *The Novels of Samuel Selvon: A Critical Study* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), 154; Clement H. Wyke, *Sam Selvon's Dialectical Style and Fictional Strategy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 104, 112.

[62] John Stephen Martin, "The Odyssey of Sam Selvon's Moses," in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 108.

Moses Ascending determines that Selvon's parody extends to "the symbiotic relationship between the migrant and his host culture, indeed between West Indian and European cultures, and at a wider level, between the Third World and the developed metropole."[63] Warner-Lewis deems "flattering" Selvon's send-up of these "symbioses."[64] By the time we get to the third book, *Moses Migrating*, Selvon makes light of his own previously published material. According to Jeremy Poynting, "There are at least two episodes in this novel which parody more serious scenes in earlier novels."[65] Arguably, the author's self-mockery occurs as early as *Moses Ascending*, a novel that Roydon Salick calls "a vehicle for a roundhouse criticism of man. No one comes up smelling roses in this savage exposé of the futility of man's hopes and aspirations."[66] As we can see, virtually no subject, including the author himself, escapes Selvon's satiric treatment. However, in this chapter I want to investigate particularly the effects of Selvon's parody of women and the Black Power Party. As Swift Dickinson contends, "The question readers face is how to receive such problematic satire, which often targets women and politically engaged blacks."[67] While Dickinson uncovers Selvon from behind the mask of his principle character, Curdella Forbes's more equivocal conclusion is that Selvon is a "virtuoso calypsonian who eludes definition," and his "*Moses Ascending* becomes another inscrutable text

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[63] Maureen Warner-Lewis, "Sam Selvon's Linguistic Extravaganza: *Moses Ascending*," *Caribbean Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1982), 60.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Jeremy Poynting, "Samuel Selvon, *Moses Migrating*," in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 264.

[66] See Salick, 135.

[67] Swift Dickinson, "Sam Selvon's 'Harlequin Costume': *Moses Ascending*, Masquerade, and the Bacchanal of Self-Creolization," *MELUS* 21, no. 3 (1996), 84.

in the calypsonian's linguistic repertoire."[68] As I will show, what partially explains the inscrutability of Selvon's political stance is that in his novels the author decries racist Britain even as he constructs a highly cynical depiction of Black Power as mostly a confidence trick.

I begin my demonstration of the inadequacy of the calypso novel as a literary form for representing Afro-Caribbean radical politics with *The Lonely Londoners*, wherein Selvon not only innovates the English language but also maps or opens up for readers an occluded London. The novel's language combines a broadly Caribbean dialect with Standard English. The Caribbean dialect's assignment of new meanings to old words like "test" and "lime" extends to the definitions of "Britain" and "London," or at least what such terms mean to Selvon's black immigrant characters. To explain his linguistic innovations, Selvon claims that he "strove for verisimilitude" in his representation of West Indians in England.[69] The effect of Selvon's modified creole is that it makes the experience of alienation accessible to eyes and ears more accustomed to reading Standard English. Such readers are othered by the text; they must be initiated into it. At the same time, the very hybridity of the prose, occasionally phonetic spelling, and instances of unconventional syntax call attention to the language as something fabricated. As if in stark contrast to the false picture of Britain that had been disseminated and defended globally (of which each immigrant character is painfully disabused in turn), not once does *The Lonely Londoners* let us forget that what we are reading is fiction. It is a novel that makes the most of fiction's ability to approach the truth obliquely. Even the omniscient narrator's sporadic hyperbole to describe the antagonism between white and black Britons is nevertheless

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[68] Curdella Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 2005), 101.

[69] Qtd. in Fabre, 66.

appropriate to the discussion of the problem of racism in mid-twentieth century Britain. Indeed, the novel shows how deeply hurt and surprised black West Indians are to find England and her people moated against them.

This chapter demonstrates how Selvon's wry indulgence in racist stereotypes with some of his flat characters gently reminds us of the flimsy shallowness of certain received ideas surrounding race. From sloganeering to apostrophe, *The Lonely Londoners* delights in puncturing racist rhetoric and unsettles the pertinacious metaphors that equate white skin with purity and black with contamination. Upending what Angela Davis calls "the myth of the Black rapist," *The Lonely Londoners* presents a world in which white women menace black men.[70] If Selvon plays the sexual fetishization of race for laughs, it is only because, as his novels regularly demonstrate, comedy is a way in which unbearable racism can be made light. Yet Selvon also suggests that humor as a tool with which to fight racist oppression has its limits, for a habit of clowning may enervate the jester. And in the most serious moments of *The Lonely Londoners*, the narrator knows that the black male immigrant's ability to anglicize himself successfully is impossible. In this way, the novel does not anticipate black pride so much as it understands its black immigrant characters' efforts at assimilation to be futile.

My chapter will then show how the Black Power subplot that Selvon gives the second novel in the series, *Moses Ascending*, portrays the Movement as incidental to black British life. The brief and superficial attention that Selvon pays Black Power is appropriate to his contention that the Movement is a fad, illustrated most colorfully in the novel in the trendy attire worn by the character Galahad. Selvon also criticizes as insufficiently radical Black Power's failure to bring *all* people of color into its fold. Indeed, he sketches it as one of several jockeying factions

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[70] See chapter 11 of Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage, 1983).

converging in England, a symptom of what the narrative portrays as the growing Balkanization of Great Britain. Likewise, in hailing from several nations, the tenants who rent rooms in the decrepit mansion that Moses acquires represent London's, and more broadly England's, precarious multiculturalism. As depicted, not only does Black Power's emergence in Great Britain threaten to turn the country into an annexation of the racially-divided United States, it errs in not acknowledging the specifically Afro-Caribbean relationship to British history. Indeed, perhaps the best evidence the novel offers of Black Power's lack of viability in England is the U.S. contingent's egregious mistake of failing to understand that black Britons are not, strictly speaking, considered English.[71] Finally, Black Power's proscription against dating white women, even if listlessly enforced, is shown in the text to provide the movement little purchase in Black Britain. For in *Moses Ascending*, in the showdown between Black Power and the prospect of interracial sex, the latter always wins. But perhaps this is only because when in the novel Black Power is embodied in a black female proponent, Moses's comely nemesis Brenda, it is difficult to differentiate a critique of the Movement from outright misogyny—for Brenda in the end betrays Moses, thereby suggesting that Black Power is a dangerous seductress.

And yet we cannot say with certainty that Selvon is anti-Black Power when in both *Moses Ascending* and its sequel *Moses Migrating* he makes mockery of a black man who mocks it. This chapter's final section finds plausible the suggestion that when he criticizes it constructively Selvon is implicitly pro-Black Power in theory. He helpfully reminds us that black Britons are not a monolithic constituency, and his novels illustrate that Black Power must try harder to court and convert Afro-Saxons like Moses.[72] This is not to say that Selvon's

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[71] It is noteworthy that Moses makes this same mistake in *Moses Migrating*.

[72] "Afro-Saxon" is Edward Kamau Brathwaite's coinage. See Edward Brathwaite, "Timehri," *Savacou* 2 (1970), 37.

critique doesn't have its blind spots. Writing the Moses novels from England and then from Canada, Selvon professes no encounters with black radical movements indigenous to the Caribbean other than Rastafarianism. For example, in the interview quoted above he makes no mention of the February 1970 Trinidad Revolution nor the Grenada Revolution, which was concurrent with the writing of *Moses Migrating*. Instead, the story of Black Power that Selvon tells in this chapter's epigraph—a story that begins in the United States—renders the movement as a tentacular figure whose arms then extend to a global reach, touching black people across the African diaspora. Selvon's rhetorical question also cited in the epigraph: "What shall we do with a Black Power movement?—Everyone is black, you know, even the Indians and Chinese," nods to the gradations of "black" he finds wanting from the Afrocentric Black Power he critiques.[73] Repeatedly across the three novels, Selvon suggests that although for black Britons the struggle for racial uplift is warranted, the form that struggle has taken—Black Power—has its limitations, which brings us back to the dissertation's larger argument, that in the 1970s and early 1980s the literary representation of West Indian expressions of Black Power was in search of a form well suited to the charge. As we shall see, Selvon's work, in its promulgation of parodic forms only, contributes to an inability to take Black Power seriously as a global movement.

[73] Selvon's suggestion that "Everyone is black, you know, even the Indians" may have had more traction in Britain than in Trinidad. Mark Stein writes, "In the British context, the adjective ['black'] still frequently refers to a rather wider group than in the American context. According to the concept of *political* color, 'black' refers to 'people of color,' people with an African, African Caribbean, or South Asian background. But the inclusion of South Asian writers under this heading is contested." See Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 8.

Black Britain Before Black Power in *The Lonely Londoners*

As we make our way through the first novel in the series, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956),[74] if we listen carefully to what we read, or note how the word "Britain" appears on the page, we may consider that Moses and his cohort of "fellars" from the Caribbean and Africa reside not in Britain in the mid-twentieth century but somewhere called "Brit'n." The word's phonetic orthography, with an apostrophe marking the elision, makes legible the idea that these men have migrated to a country that has core elements missing from it. The contraction might also suggest that the setting of the novel is not actually Britain but a parody of it. Likewise, when the narrator opens the action by locating it in a London that "had a kind of unrealness about" it "as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet" (23), the novel implicates itself as a parody of the city. Others have argued that what Selvon depicts isn't London proper but an "invented" London, a "Black London" that, as Mark Looker writes, is "culturally and linguistically constructed."[75] Here, Looker reiterates a claim posited by F. Gordon Rohlehr who argues that "through imposing their language on the great city," Selvon's characters "remake it in their own image."[76] Nevertheless, when the city as encountered by people of color is barely habitable, it is no wonder Selvon chooses to parody London, thereby suggesting that the metropolis that black immigrants experience is but a poor imitation of the city. It proves to be

[74] Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (White Plains: Longman Publishing Group, 1985); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[75] Mark Looker, *Atlantic Passages: History, Community, and Language in the Fiction of Sam Selvon* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 62.

[76] F. Gordon Rohlehr, "The Folk in Caribbean Literature," in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 41.

nothing like the London that Lord Kitchener describes in "London is the Place for Me," in which the calypsonian sings:

> To live in London you are really comfortable
> Because the English people are very much sociable
> They take you here and they take you there
> And they make you feel like a millionaire
> London that's the place for me

Lord Kitchener's calypso perceives England as the mother country, whose acceptance of her subjects is complete, and belongs to the legacy of colonial mimicry that Selvon is critiquing via his depiction of a London that is no place for black men. Indeed, like "Brit'n," Selvon's "unreal" London has gaps that only the fellars can appreciate. For its black residents, the city is divided into two parts: areas that accommodate them and areas that won't. "Brit'n" is therefore the sign of the contracted (in both senses of the word) mother country given over grudgingly to her colonial subjects.

In this parodic setting, West Indian ubiquity in Brit'n of which the narrator speaks is exaggerated. The narrative would have us believe that the odds are against any Briton who wishes to avoid West Indians and the oblique threat of contact presented by a black person, who is described with a racist epithet in the text: "any corner you turn, is ten to one you bound to bounce up a spade," the text insists (24). But history and Selvon's subsequent novels reveal as misguided the narrator's disbelief that England would ever ban the West Indian migrant admittance.[77] Indeed, when the novel opens, parliamentary debates about immigration indicate

[77] Anne Walmsley notes that: "1961 was the last year in which West Indians could enter Britain freely as British citizens." See Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992), 26.

that an influx of black foreigners is beginning to test British diplomacy. The narrator describes the controversy as "the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country" (24). It is important to pause over the position that the English don't "make rab" over the arrival of West Indians. The specific objection to West Indians in England is that there are too many of them. Couching it as a problem of proportion is one way that Selvon describes the relationship between white Britons and black immigrants as improper, inconstant, and unequal.

However, Moses's relationship to other black immigrants, like the newcomer and fellow-Trinidadian Galahad, may be described as compulsory stewardship. Within the first few pages we learn that Moses has been in London for about a decade when a letter from Trinidad conscripts him into meeting another expatriate and helping to settle him in town. In gathering Galahad under his wing, Moses also initiates the reader into the world of *The Lonely Londoners*. Therein, "Brit'n" gives black immigrants much to weather. Upon arrival Galahad finds in London a hostile climate, whether in the form of the fog that meets him at Waterloo station or in the "kind of atmosphere [that] hit Galahad so hard" in the Ministry of Labour building where he seeks work (45).[78] At the Labour Exchange, the men, white and black, with whom Galahad competes for employment share his plight. The common interests of the underemployed hint at the untapped potential for solidarity between black immigrants and working-class whites. Nevertheless, Moses explains to Galahad that it is debatable whether or not blacks are treated better in Britain than in the United States. The white British characters, behaving as though

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[78] Galahad's oppressive experience at the Labour Exchange matches Michael De Freitas's recollection of his own attempt to find honest work. See Michael Abdul Malik, *From Michael De Freitas to Michael X* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968), 52-3.

racism can be practiced tactfully, sometimes make it difficult for the novel's blacks to find offense. The tacit question, then, behind Selvon's title is, Who or what is responsible for the Londoners' loneliness? If, as it has been for the novel's principle players, London sequesters you into a basement flat or bed-sitter "in a grim place like Harrow Road or Notting Hill" (74), you might think that there is no communication between the city's discrete neighborhoods. Moses and Galahad are especially surprised to find that, unlike the more thoroughly creolized Trinidad, England appears to be an island that breeds insularity.

As Moses advises Galahad, there are unfavorable implications for all black male Britons in Moses's complaint about his friend Cap, a womanizing Nigerian who refuses to work or pay his debts. Of course, Cap's refusal to work also explains why he cannot pay his debts. According to Moses, it "is fellars like [Cap] who muddy the water for a lot of us. . . . One worthless fellar go around making bad, and give the wrong impression for all the rest" (51). Since "the Water" is also Moses's diminutive for the Bayswater area of London in which he lives, his turbid metaphor suggests that even for men like Moses, the stereotype of the wanton lazy black man follows them home. The narrow scope afforded Moses and his compatriots is a consequence of the parochial English imagination that collapses great differences and distances between Caribbean islands—thinking that Trinidad, for example, is indistinguishable from Jamaica and mistaking a Trinidadian for a Jamaican (or a Nigerian). Put another way, in a novel wherein white people discriminate against black men indiscriminately, no black man escapes caricature.

The novel brilliantly addresses the ineluctability of racist encounters in the city—which must contribute to the Londoners' loneliness—when Galahad apostrophizes his skin's dark color, as though it were a thing separate from himself. Literally driven to extremity by prejudiced

white people, “Galahad watch the color of his hand, and talk to it, saying, ‘Colour, is you that causing all this, you know’” (88). He then laments his lack of options even as he acknowledges that, for him, becoming white is an impossibility: “Why the hell you can’t be blue, or red or green, if you can’t be white?” (88). Absurdly, Galahad projects blame for his misery onto black skin just as a racist white person would. And yet he also recognizes that he has projected fault onto something that is guiltless: “Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world!” (88). Galahad’s apostrophe to blackness reveals his greenhorn status. The following anecdote from the novel indicates that someone as established as Moses understands that with more time in London a wiser Galahad will better choose his battles: “Moses was in a evil mood, because a new friend did just get in a thing with some white fellars by Praed Street . . . . The friend was standing up there reading in the window about rooms to let and things to sell, and it had a notice saying Keep the Water White, and right there the friend start to get on ignorant (poor fellar, he was new in London) and want to get in big argument with the white people standing around” (89). As its slogan recalls Moses’s fears about the wrong impression Cap gives of blacks, the offending notice betrays a racist white interest in not “muddying” the Water.

Although the setting of *The Lonely Londoners* predates the Black Power era, it is important to the present discussion because the novel limns the interracial contests that seeded the ground for Black Power’s emergence in Great Britain. As we have witnessed in Galahad’s address to the color black, the idea that black skin can be cathected with a kind of power has not gone unnoticed by Selvon’s characters. For example, in *The Lonely Londoners* white women treat black men as if they were talismans (although it must be admitted that across Selvon’s

trilogy, the relationship between white women and black men is one of mutual fetishization).[79] Moses protests that on New Year's Eve, white women want to kiss him because they believe that, in so doing, "they will have luck for the whole year" (132). On another occasion a white woman ushers Moses to a club where, as the only black man in attendance, he is treated as an expedient to everyone's "jolly good show." The white people about him act as though his presence alone grants them access to "big thrills" (109). These exoticizing safeguards against misfortune and boredom that whites, particularly women, take with Moses expose the misconception that West Indians carry with them wherever they go the spirit of Carnival.

Accordingly, given that mutual exploitation structures every interracial pairing in *Lonely Londoners*, it is to every character's detriment that the novel's black men covet white women exclusively. The one exception is Lewis, the jealous husband who beats his black wife Agnes. Consequently, black women in the novel are either objects of violence (like Agnes) or avoidance (like Ma and Tanty, the mother and aunt who have come from Jamaica to ambush their boy Tolroy in London). Tanty worries that England's white women are black male immigrants' biggest draw. On the one hand, the aforementioned Cap proves Tanty correct as he makes more of an effort to secure himself a white woman than he does a job. On the other hand, making lucrative interracial dalliances is for Cap a kind of job. Behind Tanty's warning to Tolroy about white women, "They will catch up with you in this country!" (73), is the fear that distraction is the gravest threat that such women pose for black men. They deflect black men's attention away from more important matters, like, for instance, the "big discussion on the colour problem" held Sunday evenings near the Marble Arch (98). Indeed, white women prove so enchanting that, by

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[79] For more on interracial sex in *The Lonely Londoners*, see Kate Houlden's "Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*: White Sexual Desire and the Calypso Aesthetic," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 20, no. 2 (2012): 24-37.

Moses's account, they have a siren's hold over Galahad; Moses tells him: "You hit two-three white women and like you gone mad" (133). In every pairing, a black male character's relationship with a white woman points to some defect on his part, the most benign example of which is Galahad having to convince the white woman he dates that his accented speech is English. Given that most of the novel's black men share the same erotic interest, the stereotypical figure of the oversexed black man who lusts after white women predominates. This stereotypical figure is called by different names—Moses, Galahad, Tolroy, Cap, etc.—throughout the text. But Selvon's white women characters fair no better.

Beyond limiting them to a stereotype, Selvon also flattens some of his characters with the names he gives them. Many of the novel's black immigrants are known only by nicknames that obscure their origins. Once the Trinidadian Henry Oliver is sarcastically knighted as "Sir Galahad" by Moses early in the novel, he is "Galahad" thereafter. The irony of his nickname proliferates when, within nine months of his arrival, Galahad produces a mixed-race and out-of-wedlock son who, as "Galahad junior," also perversely alludes to the purest and most virtuous knight of the Round Table. The character "Five Past Twelve" is so named because his skin is a tinge blacker than midnight. Here Selvon critiques black self-deprecation, an artifact of colonialism awaiting Black Power's re-appropriation of "black" as beautiful. The name is to be understood as pejorative for it betokens the colorism that has shadowed him from Barbados to Trinidad to England. The blanching effect of the "four or five white chicks holding onto him" without whom "Five never fail to appear" betrays Five's compensatory attempt to distance himself from the color of his skin (112). Another character's nickname, "Big City," is particularly useful to Selvon as a pun. When Big City exhorts Galahad to make a public speech about his experience of racist abuse, Galahad's imperative, "Give me a chance, Big City," may

be read either as a response to his friend's needling or as another of his apostrophes, this time to London (99). This rhetorical equivocation sometimes extends to the novel's treatment of racism. For example, when "Big City start to exchange words with Galahad, and all the people looking at the two of them and laughing," the impetus behind their exchange, the fact that a foreman has called Galahad a nigger, is publicized but not taken seriously by Big City (99). This is but one of many instances in which, for all its "verisimilitude," the novel swerves to mount a farce. Then again, the novel's particularly abrupt tonal shifts also hint that tempering the experience of racism with farce can serve as a coping mechanism for lonely Londoners. It is another polysemous way in which comedy functions in Selvon's work.

Sometimes funny nicknames are the means by which the novel's black characters are individuated, marking them as conspicuously not-English and suggesting the impossibility of their assimilation into the dominant culture. But Selvon also implies that in essence, English culture refuses the assimilation of even mimic men with conventional names, like Moses's friend Harris whose black face betrays him as Other though his comportment as an Englishman is faultless otherwise. When Cap, the incorrigible Nigerian, is called a "darkie," we can easily guess what motivates both Harris's and Galahad's attempts to make themselves less conspicuous, to "dress like Englishmen, with bowler hat and umbrella, and the *Times* sticking out of the jacket pocket so the name would show" (140). The colorful nicknames, epithets, and failed mimicry of Englishness signal that the lonely Londoners, however they present to a white public, are obstinately black. When the closest blacks can come to Englishness is parody, perhaps the next step beyond an obstinate blackness is a militant one.

The biggest limitation of the depiction of black Britons in *The Lonely Londoners* and its sequels is that it takes few steps beyond parodic comedy, which in the following sections we will

see appears to be the default position of Selvon's calypso-novel trilogy. Indeed, Kenneth Ramchand argues that "in his later novels Selvon uses comedy to evade troubling issues," which marks a reversal from the tack taken in "*The Lonely Londoners* where comedy is used for the opposite of evasion."[80] Victor Ramraj finds that by the time we get to the last novel in the series, *Moses Migrating*, in which a patriotic Moses parades himself in costume as Britannia, "Selvon discourages [readers from] taking Moses's frantic militancy seriously, playing it simply for laughter as an end in itself."[81] But as early as the first novel in the series, the eruption of laughter might appear somewhat forced. In what could be understood as a description of the "plot" of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses's review of the novel's events subordinates solemn linguistic forms to what is funny: "Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in one spot" (141).[82] Moses's retrospection reveals the constructed inertia of the plot: the novel's collection, without progression, of tragicomic "ballads" and "episodes" formalizes the suspended predicament of the black immigrant in 1950s London; or, as John Thieme contends, "the characters are caught in a kind of cyclic determinism

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[80] Kenneth Ramchand, "Comedy as Evasion in the Later Novels of Sam Selvon," in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 85.

[81] Victor J. Ramraj, "The Philosophy of Neutrality: The Treatment of Political Militancy in Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*," in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 83.

[82] About the entirety of this quoted passage Margaret Paul Joseph writes that it "exactly describes Selvon's writing. He laughs with his characters but the tears are never too far from the surface." See Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 93.

which prevents them from achieving meaningful self-fulfillment."[83] In other words, the folly behind the characters' constant questioning of "what-happening" is the certainty that nothing much ever does.

Incidental Black Power in *Moses Ascending*

In *The Lonely Londoners* the search for accommodation in London open to black men, be it from landlords or white women, is the dominant activity of the novel. Once one such accommodation (Moses's "mansion" in Shepherd's Bush) is secured in the sequel, *Moses Ascending*, into that space moves Black Power.[84]

In *Moses Ascending* Selvon describes the Black Power scene in London that the characters in Naipaul's works discussed in my previous chapter have left behind. The novel's first-person narrator is Moses, two decades after he was introduced in *The Lonely Londoners*.[85] Throughout the novel Moses purports to be writing his memoirs. However, according to Selvon, we are not to read the text of *Ascending* as Moses's work.[86] It should be admitted that the

[83] John Thieme, "'The World Turned Upside Down': Carnival Patterns in *The Lonely Londoners*," in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 59.

[84] Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[85] The first-person narration of both *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* marks a switch from the omniscient, third-person narration of *The Lonely Londoners*. When Moses assumes the narration, it is as if the calypso-novel *The Lonely Londoners* produces Moses, the calypsonian. Or perhaps Selvon hints that Moses merits a greater stake in the franchise after his foothold in England grows more secure with his acquisition of property.

[86] Some commentators seem to think that we should read *Moses Ascending* as the memoirs that Moses claims to be writing throughout the narrative. But Selvon would disabuse them of that notion. As Selvon explains, "The book really says how he [Moses] tries to write his memoirs but he never really got down to it; he was always involved with something else. . . . I don't think that

adjective in the title *Moses Ascending* belies the arc of the novel's plot. Strictly speaking, given that the novel also details Moses's steep descent, its plot does not arc but peak. Moses's thirty years in London after immigrating from Trinidad in the 1940s culminate in his possession of a Shepard's Bush "mansion" he then divides into bedsits. His friend Galahad's comparison of this mansion to a house built with playing cards is prescient, for when Moses lets out its rooms he plays and loses a veritable game of chance. Moses's first tenant, though he collects from him no rent, is his "man Friday, a white immigrant name Bob from somewhere in the Midlands, who came to seek his fortunes in London" (10). It would be negligent to gloss this description of Bob without remarking upon the diversity of his racialization. "Man Friday" is, of course, an allusion to Robinson Crusoe's Carib servant; "white" nods to Bob's European ancestry; and "immigrant" is later colored by Moses's synonym for "somewhere in the Midlands"—coal country that he redubs "the Black Country" (38). When Moses avers that "It was by the sweat of my brow, so do not jealous me, dear R[eader], now that I can afford a few little luxuries, such as having a white man as my au pair" (16), his French exoticizes Bob further. The cumulative effect of his description of Bob is that, just as white British nativists had feared, Moses, the black immigrant, takes the English out of the Englishman.

In hailing from Africa, Australia, Barbados, Britain, Cyprus, and Pakistan, Moses's other tenants globalize his house. Two of them, Brenda, a young black Briton, and Faizull, a Pakistani, also annex it. Brenda defies her landlord to run a Black Power cell from the basement, which makes the radical newspaper she publishes there a doubly underground one. Similarly, a

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Moses would have been the type of character who, even if he were completely isolated, would have been able to do very much writing." Qtd. in "Samuel Selvon Interviewed by Alessandra Dotti," in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 126.

few rooms on the upper floors of the mansion double as stations through which Faizull smuggles into England his fellow Pakistanis. The house's occupants and their activity attract police scrutiny that Moses dreads but does not question: "Black Power in the basement . . . and Pakis in residence—no wonder my house is under surveillance!" (39). Indeed, a policeman has noted a group of Black Power demonstrators emerging from Moses's basement, and his description of them as "suspicious characters" conflates black radicals with a whodunnit's dramatis personae (38). Part of the reason Moses accepts the risks to which he is put is that, per Galahad, the middling memoirs that Moses ostensibly is writing need incident. His friend's ambiguous suggestion emboldens Moses to pretend that it is not merely for graft but to please Galahad that he aids and abets Faizull:

> "In a roundabout way, Galahad, you have caused this impasse."
>
> "Don't accuse me, I never told you anything about those bloody Pakis," he rejoined. "I meant Our People. If you had stuck to your own kind, you wouldn't of been in this shit." (86)

Like Naipaul—for whom, as we have seen in chapter one, the malign influence of Michael X exculpates his Indo-Trinidadian accomplices—and also, ultimately, like Trinidadian Prime Minister Eric Williams, Galahad here bristles at brown and black solidarity. Directed to "Our People" who are to be found in Brenda's Black Power basement headquarters, Moses discerns that "It look as if Fate had me shuttling 'tween Pakis and blacks, and I thought that while I was down here I might as well avail myself of the opportunity to do some research" (90).

Moses's oscillations between South Asians and blacks tell only part of the story. To complete the picture, we must take into account the novel's triangulation of Pakistani immigrants, Black Power militants, and the white factotum (and eventual usurper) Bob as three

homologous enemies of Moses's peace. From every angle Moses is besieged, and consequently Black Power is equated to other invasive factors that contribute to his alienation.

Moses seems to share Naipaul's contention that Black Power does not travel well outside of the United States. Both Naipaul's and Selvon's texts would demystify Black Power for those uncritically sympathetic to the cause. But the tenor of Selvon's novel's argument is funnier than Naipaul's. Undoubtedly this is partially because Selvon's titular protagonist, like the author himself, does not take Black Power seriously. What may explain Moses's disinclination to join the movement is the fact that Black Power is liable to make a bad first impression—as is evident in his friend Galahad's appearance in "Black Power glad rags," which Moses describes as follows:

> Starting from foot to head, he have on a pair of platforms, yellow socks, purple corduroy trousers, a leather belt about six inches broad with a big heavy brass buckle and some fancy, spiky chunks of metal studded in it ("That's my weapon. Look." He haul the belt right out of the loops and wield it like a Viking. "I will slaughter a white man one day.") He have on a pink shirt. On both hands, he had on a battery of chunky signet rings, wearing them on unconventional digits. Round his neck he had a heavy chain like what peasants in Trinidad tether their cattle with. And on top of his head, he had on a navy-blue wool cap, pulled down over his ears. (16-17)

Moses's dressing-down of a harlequinesque Galahad is what results when doctrinaire anti-white sentiment and Black Power's privileging of color dictate one's wardrobe. When Black Power fashion considers complimentary only accessories that can be weaponized, however dubiously, the effect is more pantomime than paramilitary. Therefore, for Moses, Black Power's show of force is mostly laughable. Even its fist-pumping salute is, according to Moses, only an

"intimidation trick" (23), a thoughtless feint with expected repercussions, as when it "appear that a chap was raising his fist to make the power sign, and he accidentally cuff another in front of him, who turn round and cuff him back" (42-43). In Moses's description, British Black Power men don ridiculous outfits and make menacing gestures that guarantee mishap. As such, Selvon's depiction is but another way to turn black British but foreigner-aping ("like a Viking") radical activists into clowns.

Galahad's attempt to embody a particularly American brand of Black Power that does not quite fit can be put down to a failure of translation. When Black Power appears in Great Britain, its political pivoting between the United States and Africa is something that Moses finds strangely decentering. "When Black Power come into vogue," Moses remembers, "Galahad was one of the first to rally to the colours . . . . An American visitor from the Deep South indoctrinate him, and he became a rabid disciple, calling everybody Brother and Sister and advising them to change their names from Churchill or ffoulkes-Sutherland [*sic*] to Obozee and Fadghewi or some other African names what I can't spell" (19). Here we find that America's undue global influence ironically opens the door to the Africanization of England. In this way, Black Power's arrival in Britain furnishes people of African descent another opportunity, as Jamaican poet Louise Bennett put it, to colonize England in reverse. This reverse colonization, unsurprisingly, involves a rewriting of history (the changing of surnames) and the learning of a new language and a new orthography.

In contrast to Galahad's appearance, Moses's encounter at a Party meeting with a Black Panther, "BP" as he is called, "from the States . . . [who] wasn't dress up in Black Power paraphernalia nor armoury, but in a nice dark gabardine suit" suggests unsubtly that an American

is better suited to represent Black Power (100).[87] Moreover, that BP's donation to the Party, one American dollar, is unacceptable as currency and, at any rate, is not worth much, evinces that American Black Power has little to offer Black Britain. To make matters worse, when later it is reported that BP has absconded with the Party's funds, his betrayal insinuates that U.S. intervention into British Black Power only bankrupts it.

It also does the British faction of the Movement no favors when Selvon's representatives of Black Power, e.g. Galahad, conflate opportunism with the struggle for racial justice. That self-interest most motivates Galahad, Moses announces in the novel's first paragraph: "It was Sir Galahad who drew my attention to the property. He was reading *Dalton's* [*sic*] *Weekly*, as was his wont, looking for new jobs; roaming through bedsitter land; . . . musing on the lonely hearts column to see if any desperate rich white woman seeks black companion with a view to matrimony; and speculating when he come to the properties-for-sale page, buying houses and renovating them to sell and make big profit" (7). Two senses of "commerce"—the practice of buying and selling; and as an archaic term for sexual intercourse—direct Galahad's reading. Linking what capture his eye in the weekly is the serial grouping that makes all of the news items virtually synonymous. A desperate white woman, for Galahad, could also be described as a possible new job; and prospective matrimony has the potential to turn a black companion into a property-for-sale. Indeed, given Galahad's penury, his unemployment, and his vagabondage,

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[87] The historical event that connects this scene in *Moses Ascending* to "The Killings in Trinidad" and *Guerrillas* is described in Stuart Hall's memoir, *Familiar Stranger*. Hall records that "After an early visit to London by Malcolm X there occurred the attempt to establish the first broad-based, black anti-racist organization in post-war Britain. And it was hearing Malcolm tell the story of his own conversion from street hustling to politics which inspired Michael De Freitas to rename himself Michael X, leading ultimately to the tragic events in Trinidad which culminated in Michael's execution for murder." See Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (London: Lane, 2017), 261.

“musing on the lonely hearts column” is but preparatory to renovating himself to sell and make big profit. Elsewhere in *Moses Ascending*, this kind of expediency defines black men’s sexual interest in white women. On the one hand, the consciousness-raising among the “new generation of Black Britons” Moses observes means that “Whereas it used to be the top of the social ladder to be seen escorting a white piece in the Dilly or the Circus, brothers are scorning that sort of thing nowadays” (21, 22). On the other hand, given the repressive conditions under which they live, black men in Britain simply cannot afford to forsake interracial dating—as Moses explains, “Like how an intrepid mountaineer still have a safety rope lest he bust his arse scaling the heights, so those who cry Black Power loudest usually have a white woman in tow, whether as lifeline or whipping-boy I leave to you” (130). Of significance here is that Moses moots the possibility that black men’s use of white women, be it for self-preservation or scapegoating, may have Black Power’s implicit consent. But as Moses’s and Galahad’s former conquests can attest, Black Power need not have come to England all the way from America to sanction black males’ instrumentalization of white women. Whether or not Black Power makes concessions for black men’s sexual conquests of white women, one aspect of the movement, according to Galahad, is beyond dispute: “you must not forget the struggle” (17). But after devoting roughly two-thirds of its pages to it, the novel forgets the struggle. Well before the plot’s denouement, Moses’s participation in the Black Power movement comes to a complete stop.

As had been the case for Naipaul’s Jimmy Ahmed (see chapter one), Black Power does not sustain Moses’s interest once a white woman diverts him.[88] This diversion is one point in a

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[88] Others have compared Moses to Jimmy Ahmed, like Edward Baugh who writes that “A Jimmy Ahmed must necessarily come to a sordid, untimely end, but a Moses is just as real as Jimmy, and Moses is a survivor.” See Edward Baugh, “Recent Caribbean Writing: *Moses Ascending*,” in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 138.

love triangle involving Moses and a white couple: Bob and his fiancée Jeannie. After Bob catches him "scrubbing Jeannie's back in the bath" (Moses's description may have sanitized an illicit activity), a penitent Moses offers Bob his "penthouse" apartment. But Moses's demotion does not stop there, for Bob's old room he must then forfeit to Brenda, the Black Power virago, lest she turn him in to the authorities for the "trafficking of illegal Paki immigrants" (146). His relocation to the basement where Moses is "reduced to living as a tenant in [his] own house, with Robert holding the reins and cracking the whip" makes his humiliation exquisite (143). Jeannie is, however, undaunted, for, as Moses explains, "she saw no reason why I could not continue to scrub her back as opportunity knocked, but I was incapacitated by the stringent punishment for any infringements of the Master's regulations" (144). Moses again echoes Naipaul's Jimmy, but to comical effect, when addressing as "master" the white man he cuckolds—the significant difference being that here is meant no ironic recognition that Massa day done. It is also significant that Jeannie, the novel's sole white female character, not only survives her liaison with the black man she fancies but remains high in the narrator's esteem. However, this doesn't trump the fact that sexual relations with a white woman (Jeannie) and an ascendant Black Power (embodied in Brenda) are what put Moses out.

If Black Power's emergence in Great Britain in the late 1960s and early '70s means that racial consciousness has been raised to an unprecedented level globally, it is unclear where Moses fits in this new dispensation. It is hard to gauge Moses, to determine for certain when he is serious versus when he is kidding. And though Selvon mocks Moses's older, colonized mindset, the character is also a foil to Galahad and Brenda, therefore revealing their blind spots in wholly embracing Black Power. Consequently, perhaps Moses should be described more in terms of narrative function than as a character with any political convictions. About *Moses*

Ascending, Curdella Forbes has argued that it is a "complexly double-visioned text, which makes it difficult to assume that Moses is generally unaware of the subversiveness of his own voice."[89] Mark Looker argues something similar: "Moses is at once knowing and naïve."[90] For example, one of the novel's many meta-narrative moments recognizes that black literature at this time is flourishing, as Galahad namechecks the West Indian writers George Lamming and Andrew Salkey and the African American writer James Baldwin. But in having the tyro writer Moses claim to be unfamiliar with Lamming and Salkey, Selvon questions the size, class, race, and nationality of their readership. The clichéd history Moses points to, of "masterpieces . . . written in garrets by candlelight, by men who shut themselves away from the distractions of the world" (50), is not limited to the European literary tradition it most obviously references. For Moses's panegyric also summarizes the approach taken in V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* in which the novel's first-person narrator, Caribbean exile Ralph Singh, writes his memoirs from his London boarding-house room, in which case Moses aligns himself with a West Indian's mimicking of European literary masters. Later in the novel, Moses kicks away copies of Lamming's *Water with Berries* even as he stumbles over the book's title, calling it "*Water For Berries*."[91] The slightly revised title, in preserving, for the most part, Lamming's citation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, still acknowledges the Barbadian writer's debt to European genius. Black writers—

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[89] Forbes, 93.

[90] Looker, 179.

[91] Edward Baugh writes: "The ultimate indignity to Lamming is that Moses gets the title wrong. It is *Water with Berries* (1971), a very earnest, *avant-garde*-ish work about West Indians in Britain plotting to stage a revolution back home. And so Selvon, much neglected by the lit. crit. industry as well as by the 'revolutionary' West Indian shapers of culture, scores a delicious point of oneupmanship as he playfully delivers a kick in the pants of some of the current in-crowd." See Edward Baugh, "Friday in Crusoe's City: The Question of Language in Two West Indian Novels of Exile," in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 137.

Lamming, and Moses as memoirist—are cast as parodic or derivative; and, again, Afro- and Indo-Caribbean solidarity is either nowhere to be found (given the friction implied here between Selvon and Lamming) or is a fiction (occurring only discursively between the invented characters Moses Aloetta and Ralph Singh).

Not only is it significant that Selvon's novel drops abruptly its Black Power plotline, as if all of the laughs have been squeezed from it, to shift attention instead to Moses's cuckolding of Bob, which ironically sees the landlord tossed out of his own nest. Equally important is the novel's "final word" in which Moses notes his objection to "some black power militants . . . [choosing] to misconstrue my Memoirs for their own purposes" (149). Structurally, throughout *Moses Ascending*, Selvon invokes Black Power only to undercut it. Indeed, it is difficult to sustain the argument that Selvon's relationship to Black Power is ambiguous when we consider that Selvon makes light of the advice that the Movement's staunchest proponent, Galahad, gives Moses: "Those who are not for us are against us" (18). Even black Britons' history of racial oppression is called into question when Moses recounts an instance in which policemen "piss on that poor African chap in Leeds, and cause him to jump in the river Aire and drown himself" (52). The qualifier that Moses then adds, "At least, so one story goes . . ." (52), hints that some stories of racist hate crimes in Britain may be apocryphal. To be sure, *Moses Ascending* is most concerned with *unambiguous* conflicts between white men and black men, like the competition for two kinds of property—white women and real estate. But Selvon's position on these conflicts is difficult to locate. According to Curdella Forbes, "Selvon's attitude could be read as critique or collusion."[92] For example, Black Power in Britain is something that Selvon's novel reduces to a comical criminal enterprise as represented by a clown (Galahad); a thief (the

[92] Forbes, 101.

absconding American, "BP"); and Brenda, the black female who blackmails Moses into giving her his room lest she turn Moses into the authorities for the "trafficking of illegal Paki immigrants" (146). Brenda's "betrayal" Moses takes as another excuse to foment his misogyny. In a sense, the novel's "final word" on Black Power is summed up under the banner of "Brenda" who, as written, is a villain: she inveigles Bob to steal the manuscript of Moses's private memoirs, outs Bob as illiterate, continues to have sex with him after he marries Jeannie, and blackmails Moses into moving back down to the basement flat. In the end, the Black Power that Brenda embodies devolves into Selvon's portrait of pitch-black psychopathy that tries desperately to be funny.

The Irreconcilability of Black Power and British Power in *Moses Migrating*

Before I conclude, a quick look at the last novel in which Moses appears affords us a crucial opportunity to journey to the Caribbean to find in Trinidad, 13 years after the failed February Revolution, a militant blackness that looks very different from previous iterations, as it is one that points back to Great Britain, not the U.S. In *Moses Migrating* (1983) Selvon revisits the title character in a plot that sees Moses return to Trinidad after a near forty-year absence.[93] Although the first line of the novel is Moses's claim, "I don't rightly recollect when it was the idea of going back home hit me" (1), readers of Selvon's trilogy might recall that Moses has been contemplating a return to Trinidad as early as *The Lonely Londoners*. But in the first novel, when every summer the weather in England approached Trinidad's average temperature, our hero put off his departure. The narrative continuity between the ending of *Moses Ascending* and

[93] Sam Selvon, *Moses Migrating* (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1983). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

the beginning of *Moses Migrating* is seamless. At the start of the third installment, Moses's Shepherd's Bush "mansion" remains for its landlord topsy-turvy. Moses has been unable to wrest back the "penthouse" flat from Bob and Jeanie, and Brenda and Galahad continue to annex his basement for Black Power party business. This persistent crisis, presumably, is what precipitates Moses, via letter, calling conservative MP Enoch Powell's bluff of subsidizing the repatriation of immigrants in Britain back to their countries of origin. Though the "beaming" immigration officer who stamps Moses "out of Brit'n with a flourish" conveys England's pleasure at seeing him leave (24), Moses does not celebrate his Trinidad homecoming. He twice characterizes his decision to trade "Brit'n" for the Caribbean as "stupid" (12, 19), which is only the first symptom of what Brenda will later diagnose as Moses's chronic Anglomania (154). Indeed, his ambivalence about Black Power in *Moses Ascending* approaches outright anti-blackness in *Moses Migrating*. In the latter novel, Moses's subscribing to the ideology of white European supremacy seems to demand that he denigrate black British and Afro-Caribbean culture. Rarely does it occur to him to adopt a creolized, all-o'-we-is-one approach. Instead, he occupies most often a black face, white mask limbo that Selvon holds up for criticism. Figuratively, Moses's Anglomania means that he never leaves England (or never truly arrives in the Caribbean); for, ironically, Moses spends much of his time in Trinidad maintaining a certain distance between himself and the island of his birth. Thus, Moses's resistance both to Britain's Black Power movement and to a full embrace of Trinidad sets him adrift. His liminal status also explains his anticipation that what awaits him upon disembarkation in the Caribbean promises to be an "alien culture" however familiar to him it once was (58).

It would dishonor his slave ancestors to claim that Moses's sea voyage westward across the Atlantic rehearses the Middle Passage; for Moses is not a slave but an ex-colonial, and his

third-class berth is not a barracoon.[94] From the beginning, the novel entreats us not to make facile comparisons between lived black experiences. Regardless, though Moses is bound for Trinidad, he refuses to turn his back on England:

> Out on deck, ere we left the English Channel, I had come to the conclusion as Brit'n faded on the horizon that I would be a credit to the country, an ambassador not only of goodwill but good manners. The idea put a different complexion on my circumstances. I now had a purpose, which was to show the outlanders in the Caribbean that Brit'n was not only still on her feet, but also still the onlyest country in the world where good breeding and culture come before ill-gotten gains or calls of the flesh. I would go forth with a stout heart and proclaim that Johnny Walker was still going strong, that the British bulldog still had teeth, that Britannia still ruled the waves. (30)

It is difficult to read no irony in the above; for from his vantage what Moses sees literally, that "Brit'n faded on the horizon," is also a metaphor for the country's decline to which he closes his eyes. To undo what has been done achieves a kind of inversion. Thus, the rehabilitation of England that Moses attempts to effect after he crosses the Atlantic appropriately calls for chiasmus—from the Greek *χιασμός* "crossing"—"A grammatical figure by which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other" (*OED*). The plot's chiasmus can be expressed as such: while the English Channel is the site of an idea that put a different complexion on Moses's circumstances, Trinidad provides the circumstances in which Moses can put a different complexion on an idea. Put differently: for a Carnival costume competition, Moses will play Britannia as she appeared on "old English coins before decimalisation" (109)—

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[94] I would agree with Susheila Nasta that here Selvon only "mock-seriously invokes the trials of The Middle Passage." See Susheila Nasta, "The Moses Trilogy," *Wasafiri* 1, no. 2 (1985), 5.

but given the fact that Moses does not pretend to be white or female for this masquerade, it would be more accurate to say that Moses will play Britannia *almost* as she appeared, but not quite. Regardless, I would argue that we should hesitate to read Moses's black and masculinized Britannia as a symbol of power Black or British, or even a successful conflation of the two. As an Afro-Trinidadian expatriate cum lonely Londoner, Moses's impersonation of the reverse side of an old English penny only showcases Britain's (and Moses's) reversal of fortune. In becoming an apologist for England, Moses rejects most everything that England is *not*, in a version of black radical politics that flouts the U.S. model. At the same time, the frame of Carnival dismisses his intervention as play. In the end, what portends that his gesture will be unprofitable for Trinidad in the long run is the fact that the coin he impersonates remains out of circulation foreign currency that, like BP's gift of one American dollar in London, was never worth much to begin with.[95]

One of the great values of the novel is the fact that Moses's obdurate enthusiasm for all things English epitomizes the challenge that a colonized mindset can present to Black Power's appeal. Taken together, the latter two Moses novels offer a travesty of Black Power, defusing it at every turn. Certainly, in *Moses Ascending* little output is to be expected from the Power-movement conducted via the small-scale operation in Moses's basement apartment in West London. In *Moses Migrating*, we are introduced to one Trinidadian Black Power supporter: Moses's adoptive mother (whose name is Tanty, which makes the trilogy's three elderly black women characters—Tanty, Ma, and another Tanty—virtually interchangeable or fungible). Though in this last novel Tanty insists, "We got no time for white people in Trinidad, Moses,

[95] Mark Looker makes the very good point that the coin is "monetarily as well as symbolically worthless." See Looker, 200.

them days is gone forever, praise the Lord. Black Power is now," she is armed with only a "sharp knife what she peel the oranges with"; and though the knife makes her "threatening enough" (67), she remains pointedly overmatched by the trident with which Moses represents Britannia for Carnival. In Moses's embarrassment of and recoil from his street-vendor godmother, Selvon shows that the grassroots nature of the Black Power movement, which makes it attractive to someone like Tanty, is the same thing that puts off upwardly mobile blacks like Moses. To be sure, Moses's choice of the Hilton for his stay in Trinidad, the architecturally inverted hotel that requires guests to travel to the top floor even to be received, betrays to Tanty a social-climber's lack of interest in racial solidarity or the reestablishment of local ties. The Hilton, Tanty contends, is "for the white tourists-them" (65), and as such is but a concrete example of Moses's many attempts to inhabit interim spaces not meant for black Trinidadians. In other words, the power that Moses perversely seeks, the power that he finds most worthy of wielding though he can never fully grasp it, is decidedly not Black Power.

Ultimately, what is confounding about Selvon's treatment of Black Power in the UK and in the Caribbean is the problematic protagonist through whom the author makes his critique. In setting Moses apart, particularly from the latter two novels' other black characters, Selvon pushes back against an Afro-Caribbean, and more narrowly an Afro-Trinidadian, essentialism. It is significant that Moses is not like other Afro-Trinidadians. Even the fact that he shares with Black Power poseur Michael X a preference for the Hilton Trinidad over other hotels marks him as aberrant.[96] If Moses wants to dress up as Britannia, perhaps it is just as well; for, per Tanty, his representation of a *Trinidadian* is unconvincing: "You don't sound Trinidadian to me no more, though. Maybe as you been away so long," she reckons (66). But if Trinidad has left

[96] See Malik, 197.

Moses's voice, it means that he cannot speak for that island. Tanty intimates that Moses has spent too much time in England. But Selvon never suggests that Moses's decades in England have turned him into an Englishman. The best Moses can do is parody—to try to talk like the English—though he doesn't quite pull that off either. For example, when Moses defends Britain's struggling economy to Lennard, a reporter for the Trinidad *Guardian*, Lennard picks up on Moses's striking use of a first-person plural pronoun: "I like the way you're saying 'we'; as if you're an Englishman" (72).[97] Moses is to Lennard at most a black Brit whose appropriation of an English identity—even subjunctively—sounds odd. Here, Selvon makes plain that, in addition to Trinidad, England is *another* island for which Moses cannot, with authority, speak.

To conclude, I will reiterate that, though it probably never was Selvon's remit, an unironic treatment of Black Power is impossible in the Moses novels in which it figures. We cannot hope to come close to a proximate depiction of Black Power from a parodic narrator who continually holds it at arms' length. In sum, Moses is, by design, a troubling vehicle for West Indian expressions of black radical politics. Instead, as a lapsed Afro-Trinidadian-cum-Englishman manqué, Moses is an ideal perspective through which to lampoon *any* identity politics. Perhaps *Moses Migrating* makes most explicit the idea that Selvon's representation of Black Power in the Caribbean diaspora via Moses's narration exhibits an ill fit between narrative form and content to comical effect. Moses as Britannia was a Plan B put into action. Initially, Moses's "propaganda to lift Brit'n's sagging economic image" was to have taken another form (100). To garner publicity for Moses's campaign for Britain's recuperation, Lennard's editors encouraged Moses to "relate it somehow with the carnival, which is topical now" (100). Against

[97] Selvon was himself "a journalist with the Trinidad *Guardian* from 1946 to 1950." Qtd. in Fabre, 65.

Moses's objection that "Carnival is a pretentious masquerade, man, and my theme is a solemn, serious, patriotic one. How can we mix the two?", Lennard proposes: "you can compose a calypso!" (100, 101). The fact that the clichéd calypso Moses produces does not fit a serious theme exposes him as the unserious and parodic calypsonian that he is. How serious Selvon is about Caribbean Black Power is another question. Selvon keeps his readers as estranged from him as he himself appears alienated from Black Power.

I began this chapter by citing Selvon's question: "What shall we do with a Black Power movement?"[98] This chapter then unpacked how Selvon answered that question, particularly in the latter two novels of his Moses Aloetta trilogy. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon measured his black male immigrant characters' erosion of power as they countered racist oppression with interracial sexual conquest. Moses's struggle for power continues in *Moses Ascending* in which the Black Power Movement, as Selvon represents it, lacks the austerity and discipline that would distinguish it from Moses's own profligacy and pursuit of property. Finally, in *Moses Migrating*, we see that the only "Black Power" that Moses can embrace is a pretense of British power with a black face. In light of Selvon's comment that "Everyone is black, you know, even the Indians and Chinese,"[99] we can read *Moses Migrating* as Selvon's attempt to universalize blackness; and in this universalization it is impossible to discover anything unique in Caribbean expressions of Black Power. To elucidate manifestations of Black Power that are particular to Caribbean culture we must turn to provincializations of the movement, and we will find them in the work of Merle Collins and Earl Lovelace as discussed in my dissertation's second half.

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[98] Qtd. in Michel Fabre, "Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations," in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 74.

[99] Ibid.

Chapter Three
Merle Collins's *Angel*: Allegory, Grenada, and Girlhood

> "Violence
> comes in gentle form sometimes"
> —Merle Collins, *Angel*

Chapter 3 begins the transition away from West Indian authors who wrote primarily for an audience outside the Caribbean. The writers in the second half of my dissertation are more interested in forging a Caribbean literary tradition through a creolization of language and form. For example, for Grenadian writer Merle Collins, of significant influence is Barbadian writer Edward Kamau Brathwaite's nation language poetry, which explains why Collins departs from Naipaul in rendering much of her 1987 novel *Angel*[100] in dialect. Indeed, the language of her novel's prose is even more creolized than Selvon's in that some of it is written in a glossary-demanding patois.

Published in its immediate aftermath, *Angel* not only fictionalizes the Grenada Revolution; it is also a Bildungsroman about a young woman, for whom the novel is named, whose education and maturity serves as a metaphor for Grenada's history from roughly 1950 to 1983. *Angel* demonstrates how the genres of the Bildungsroman and the historical novel, both of which developed out of a western European tradition, can combine with oral forms native to the Caribbean to present the story of a young woman's maturation as an allegory of Grenada's indigenous form of Black Power and social revolution.

Angel is the first of this dissertation's primary texts to center on women and, as such, calls attention to Naipaul's and Selvon's masculinist vision. The novel is also less concerned with interracial encounters like those that predominate in *Guerrillas* and *Moses Ascending*.

[100] Merle Collins, *Angel* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1988). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Instead, it builds a world that is occupied largely by black women. The primary relationships depicted in *Angel* are matrilineal and sororal ones within an Afro-Caribbean extended family that works to nurture and protect the Grenada Revolution. The novel's illustration of the women's example champions black womanhood. In this chapter I therefore examine Collins's intimation that the Grenada Revolution is to some extent an untold story of black radical feminism in the Caribbean. As such, *Angel* is a rare instance of the story of black revolutionary struggle *not* being narrated from a male perspective.

Appearing in 1988, *Angel* was nearly contemporaneous with Fredric Jameson's seminal essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) in which he argues that "All third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . *national allegories* . . . particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel."[101] But national allegory, I contend, is a literary tradition that Collins follows only to upend: she troubles it with a feminist critique. Her novel *Angel* stages the emergence of a Caribbean-inflected Black Power in Grenada as a youth movement through its story of the generational difference between those who came of age when the island was still a British colony and younger Grenadians like Angel who belong to the era when colonialism ended. It links a national revolutionary consciousness to female rebelliousness in its protagonist, Angel, whose name belies her behavior.

In this chapter, I argue that the story of Grenada's Revolution (and the plot against it) lends itself to Collins's fictionalization as a national allegory—but one with particularly feminist implications—because 1) the Revolution's undoing represents Grenada's failure of the

[101] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 5, no. 3 (1986), 69.

imagination, and 2) true equality and independence are expected of neither the island nor of a young Grenadian girl. Collins's novel therefore complicates Jameson's admittedly abstract thesis by nuancing a national allegory of Grenada with gender particularities.

My argument proceeds thusly: I begin with an anecdote that illustrates how, from the beginning, Collins works to thwart expectations about "third-world novels" and about novels written by black women. It is as though after the dashing of her own hopes about what the Revolution could accomplish, she warns us about the dangers of making assumptions. And yet for evidence that her stance is not defeatist we need only point to the fact that her work does not dwell on the Revo's failures. Hers is a recovery effort. From the collapse of the Revolution Collins salvages a foundational story upon which Grenada may begin to rebuild.

I then show how Collins redirects focus from the Revolution's great men to its women whom history has discounted and obscured. This refocusing demands a return to the Revolution's origins. Though officially the Grenadian Revolution dates from 1979 to 1983, the author traces its beginning back to restive estate workers and their agitations in the early 1950s. Via Collins's retrospection we see how the success of this earlier resistance movement augured the inevitability of revolution. Eric Gairy, the prime minister who fashioned himself as Grenada's uncle, Collins anonymizes under the figure of "Leader," the island's mimic man despot. In so doing, she warns Grenadians to be more wary about whom they admit as family. Her characterization of him reveals that what explains his rise to power was not necessarily Gairy's charisma nor competence but a people desperate for an advocate within an entrenched patriarchy. The people's uncritical allegiance to Leader, Collins suggests, licensed his excess and prophesied their later mistake of indulging the fits of pique of Gairy's successor Maurice Bishop.

I also explore how Collins demonstrates that Grenada's history of authoritarianism is a vulnerability of which the United States takes advantage. Decades before 1983, when its military stormed Grenada's beaches, the U.S. made inroads into the island by enticing Grenadian men to work as agricultural laborers in the States. The consolation for men who remained in Grenada was that the gender wage-gap guaranteed that they would be paid more than any woman. The Revolution's promise to right this imbalance won many women to the cause. Here is but one example Collins selects to highlight how Grenada's long history of oppression and exploitation is best embodied in the figure of the little black girl who must grow to womanhood under formidable circumstances.

Next I establish how Collins shows us that pedantic takes on the Revolution like V.S. Naipaul's are mis-readings of it. I translate carefully the Grenadian patois that Naipaul refuses to decipher, for it informs much of Collins's novel. Naipaul objects to what he considers to be the Grenada Revolution's carnivalization of political resistance.[102] Collins answers that objection by pointing out that carnival is itself an act of resistance. To be sure, what also lies behind the disparagement of carnival and patois is the depreciation of Afro-Caribbean culture if not outright anti-black sentiment. In depicting the Grenadian people's raised consciousness, Collins teaches us that if the ideology of Black Power taught black people self-love, then if nothing else that makes the movement valuable.

I also attend to how two men who rise to lead Grenada, first Eric Gairy then Maurice Bishop, unavoidably converge in Collins's retelling that acknowledges both men's fallibility. In recognizing their flaws Collins also implies that these men merit forgiveness. In contextualizing Gairy's and Bishop's respective tenures, the author makes it impossible to flatten either man into

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[102] V. S. Naipaul, "An Island Betrayed," *Harper's* (March 1, 1984), 72.

a scoundrel or hero. Collins then extends her generosity of feeling to all Grenadians. The surveillance and skepticism to which young women everywhere are subjected Collins analogizes to the global treatment of Grenada after Revolution. It is no wonder then that the People's Revolutionary Government, renamed "Horizon" in the novel, buckled under the strain.

I conclude the chapter by discussing how before Collins fictionalized the Revolution, the United States twice attempted to reinvent Grenada: first by rehearsing its invasion in the form of military exercises in Puerto Rico and later via an antirevolutionary psyops campaign after occupation. The effort to reimagine Grenada appears to be a legacy of the Revolution, informing recent monographs by scholars David Scott and Shalini Puri and even prompting Collins to return to her novel and revise the ending over twenty years after its initial publication.

Collins Toys with Expectations

In *Persons and Things* Barbara Johnson references the work of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou to note the literary motif that pits a little black girl against the perverse gift of a blue-eyed, white baby-doll. Johnson writes, "[T]he little black girls in the stories must learn to cherish in their dolls a white, even Aryan, ideal of femininity. . . [T]he dolls prepare them for loving white people themselves."[103] I cite Johnson to introduce how *Angel* refuses to entertain even the thought that white people could be lovable; instead it insists, in the words of one character, that "All way you meet dem is devil! Some less, some more, but same ting!" (14). It should therefore come as no surprise that in *Angel* the instructive encounter between black girl and white baby-doll plays out differently in Collins's hands. The scene plays out as follows. Sometime in the mid 1950s Grenada that Collins describes, a toddler named Angel beheads her

[103] Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 166.

white doll and asks her mother Doodsie, who is shelling peas, to fix it. Doodsie exclaims, “Well, satisfy. You finish it now” (56). She then roughly reassembles the doll, flings it from her, and shouts: “Go. Go. Give me some peace. You doll fix. Go back an break it up!” (56). The omniscient narrator refers to the doll explicitly as Angel’s “little white doll daughter” (55), and Angel’s handling of the doll is—by the novel’s logic—parental. In flinging it back into a corner the mother’s treatment of the baby-doll is just as damaging as the daughter’s, and Doodsie’s exclamatory “Go back an break it up!” metaphorically bites Angel’s head off. A significant question to ask then is: in a novel that allegorizes Grenada to a little Afro-Caribbean girl like Angel, which one of the following is the better parent: a dexterous black mother who demands that her daughter “satisfy” herself again innocuously by decapitating a lifeless thing, or is it President Ronald Reagan, described in the novel as the “great white father” who, in Grenada, in 1983 shells not peas but a populated island nation?

Though the Grenada Revolution’s aspirations met with a disproportionate level of opposition from the U.S., this was not because the United States overestimated Grenada’s defenses. The brunt of Reagan’s Operation Urgent Fury was meant not only to arrest Grenada’s growth but further to belittle it. Yet evidence that Collins had greater expectations for Grenada may be found in the relatively short shrift her novel gives to “the Revo’s” collapse. She chooses instead to foreground, via the story of a young woman’s survival, the promise of Grenada’s Revolution and not its reneging.

Angel’s abbreviation of the already truncated Revolution, which lasted only four years, belies its importance to the novel. Caribbeanist scholars David Scott and Shalini Puri have honored the Revo’s importance by recovering from it a black radical politics that had been pronounced dead, though they attempt its resurrection nevertheless. The hagiography with

which, after the Revolution, Grenada's assassinated prime minister Maurice Bishop has been memorialized does not mitigate the fact that his remains have never been recovered.[104] Consequently, Scott describes his monograph *Omens of Adversity* (2014) as potentially "reparative," an almost surgical repair that would be effected via evacuation; for one of Scott's "intention[s] . . . is to notice how *draining* Bishop's body of its surfeit of phantasmagoria and mythological longing can constitute a generational intervention of reparative mourning and remembering inasmuch as it shows one way that the catastrophic past can be remembered *without* paralyzing nostalgia and embittered divisive-ness."[105] Where Scott offers a "way that the [Grenada Revolution's] catastrophic past can be remembered," Shalini Puri's *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present* (2014) is less a remembrance of things past than a "contention that the Grenada Revolution is in many ways a *current* event, a chapter with still unfolding consequences for Caribbean history."[106] The citations above are important to my dissertation's larger argument about figurations of black radical politics, for Puri's and Scott's attention to the "chapter" that is the Grenada Revolution and also the demythologizing of a revolutionary leader's absent body evince scholarly interest in not only the content but the forms that representations of the Revolution take. However, though they discuss it in their work, neither Scott nor Puri give *Angel* the close literary analysis that my chapter provides.

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[104] Collins has said that "in his lifetime I am sure Maurice would be the last person to claim sainthood." See David Scott, "The Fragility of Memory: An Interview with Merle Collins," *Small Axe* 14, no. 1 (2010), 154.

[105] David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 117, emphases Scott's.

[106] Shalini Puri, *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present: Operation Urgent Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

I have noted that Collins's novel analogizes the small island nation of Grenada to a suffering young woman. Culpable for much of the suffering, of course, are Grenada's colonial guardians. But *Angel* does not quite suggest that Grenada fares better when left in her own charge. The nation's development has been retarded by both foreign and domestic agents. The history that the novel imparts involves colonialism and homegrown despotism. It is arguable that British imperialism groomed the native despot, Grenada's first prime minister Eric Gairy, whom Collins turns into an allegorical abstraction under the moniker "Leader." Moreover, it could be said that both the United Kingdom and Gairy set precedents for the paranoid power grabs of Gairy's successor, Maurice Bishop. Collins also refuses to distinguish Bishop as anything other than a nameless "Chief." The novel devotes more pages to fleshing out its Gairy-character so that the dictator does not disappear completely under the emblem of "Leader." Bishop's figuration as "Chief," however, remains skeletal. Beyond changes in leadership, what is bequeathed from one generation to the next in Grenada is a legacy of violence distributed unequally, and the brutality falls especially hard on the women and children. Part of what the girls and women have had to suffer is a lack of recognition. The novel, therefore, shifts deserved attention onto the women. Collins shows that Eric Gairy's ascent to power, his overthrow by the New Jewel Movement's bloodless coup, the competition between the Maurice Bishop and Bernard Coard factions within the People's Revolutionary Government, and Ronald Reagan's invasion of the island were not exclusively masculine concerns. Indeed, reducing Grenadian history to this roster of aggressive males leaves the picture half-complete and as such cannot point the way forward for Grenada.

Although the novel opens with the plantation worker rebellions of the 1950s, it may be more accurate to date its beginning in terms of what Angel's mother Doodsie calls "a bad time."

To protest their depressed wages, Grenada's estate workers have set fire to the island's plantations. This incident is illustrated after the poem that serves as epigraph to *Angel*, which warns us that "Violence / comes in gentle form sometimes." There follows the narrative's first lines:

> The yard in front of Paren Comesee's house was full of restless silence. Quick whispers, staring faces, the sound of an occasional "Sh-h-h-h!" Some people stood straining tiptoe to see better. Eyes wide open, staring. Eyes narrowed, peeping. Mouths half-open. A small figure would occasionally make a quick dart away from an enveloping skirt, only to be pulled back impatiently by a pouncing hand. Maisie heard a sudden fretful sound from the baby on her shoulder. She rocked the child gently. "Sh-h-h-h! Sh-h-h-h! Hush, baby, hush!" (1)

What is being narrated is Grenadian peasant spectatorship of the 1950-51 island-wide estate worker uprising known as Sky Red, a synecdoche born from what happens to the sky as plantations burn. The novel's opening sentences echo its epigraph's line-break. Both provide small gaps between the violence towards which Grenada's men and women turn and the reverberations of that violence as the nation's youngest generation must have felt it, albeit in gentler form, as one "small figure" is "pulled back" and "pounc[ed]" upon while a shouldered baby is "rocked" and "hush[ed]." In Collins's narrative, as such infants grow, pacifying susurrations are succeeded by remonstrations such as, "Don't interrupt when you see big people talkin!" (55); "Sh-h-h! Keep youself quiet!" (78); and "Shut you mout, boy!" (79). Perhaps shushing minors is of a piece with the responsibility of shouldering them. Because similar strictures from "big people"—that is, people in power—cuff the ears of Grenadians old and young across Collins's fictional take on the Grenada Revolution, what *Angel* suggests

allegorically is how Grenada's authority figures have at one time or another treated her citizens as if they were incorrigible children to be coddled occasionally but more often abused. For the nation's underdevelopment the novel holds responsible by turns a symbolic "mother," "uncle," "brothers," and a "father." The factors specifically to blame are: the Crown Colony rule under England, the Mother Country; Prime Minister Eric Gairy's self-styled avuncular stewardship; the Grenada Revolution's fratricidal implosion; and finally the island's invasion in 1983 by the United States, or, as the novel's namesake heroine disingenuously dubs it, "some great white father" (275). It also could be said that in refusing to be silent about Grenada's mistreatment, the novel assumes the figure of the querulous child, complaining to contest its status as a small or minor figure in world literature.

Despite the United States' occupation of Grenada after the above-mentioned ill-matched battle between the young black nation (independent only nine years Grenada) and the old white man (Ronald Reagan), what is emblematic in this novel is that the declining older generation's attempt to restrain the ascendant youth inevitably fails. We see this in *Angel* almost immediately in the following exchange: "The children were getting more fretful. One enterprising young soul escaped, climbed the steps and tried to squeeze past Paren Comesee's chair. The old man leaned across, tried to hold on to the back of the short white vest. His hand slid off a small, bare bottom" (3). This motif of old souls opposed to enterprising young ones is repeated in the contrast between the respective worshipping styles of Angel's mother and maternal grandmother, Doodsie and Ma Ettie. Come home from Aruba with infant Angel during the period of Sky Red, Doodsie makes a silent apostrophe to God about having "come back to this Grenada at a bad time" (5). In response to the same calamity, Doodsie and her mother both resort to prayer but differently. For Doodsie, prayer means appraising her situation and self-reflection. For Ma

Ettie, prayer wants windows shut and genuflection (5). But it is precisely Ettie's readiness to shut down and bow down that her son Regal, for one, can't stand. When in the face of political unrest she insists, "Allyou young people mus wait let ting work deyself out," for the world belongs to God and He will "fix it" (28), it is important to note how Ma Ettie contradicts herself when commanding young[er] people, like Regal, to wait for justice. First, she ascribes agency to *things* to insist that things will work *themselves* out. Then she revises her claim to acknowledge God's responsibility—it is His world—and names Him as fixer. Her contradiction does not restore Regal's faith, for he hears only childish echolalia in his mother's prayer: "Ah sure you sayin dat since you start to talk, Mammie. Me, I not even sure God lookin" (28-29). That Regal can imagine his old mother as a child recommends him for membership in a British parliament that treats its colonial constituents as if all were children, just as the aspirational name his mother has given him suggests that Ma Ettie is pro-monarchy.

What Sky Red's flames have illuminated are conditions of impotence: Doodsie's feeble old neighbor cannot keep steady the cup from which he sips; her husband—Angel's father, Allan—has been laid off; and even the window which frames the conflagration for Doodsie's mother needs propping up with a stick. The arson, the insecure employment, and the ensuing debate between the forbearing Christian mother Ma Ettie and her agnostic son Regal testify to the fact that the Grenadian people are rudderless. As we shall see, the Eric Gairy-like "Leader" that some think will be Grenada's savior is transparent to Doodsie as a social-climbing labor organizer with more charisma than integrity. But as a black man from Grenada, perhaps what makes Leader advisable as an authority figure is that he is not a white landowner whom black laborers are obliged to call "mister," nor is he a representative from a European country that foists itself on black colonial subjects as their "mother." Leader's rise in the novel dramatizes

how a native son like Gairy could assume political control from the mother country by refashioning himself as Grenada's "uncle." In styling himself "Uncle Gairy," Grenada's first prime minister allegorically turns the nation's circum-Independence political history into a family drama before Collins's novel does.

Collins's critique also focuses on how Grenadian women suffer under the traditional family structure that places men at the head. Even more concerning for families like Doodsie's is that patriarchy is a by-product of their Christian faith. Doodsie's practice of silent prayer to "Father God" primes her to make voiceless appeals to masculine authority, which, later in the novel, may partially account for her reticence before a pitiless male physician. Elsewhere, Collins's juxtaposition of Ma Ettie's kneejerk belief in God with Regal's initial overconfidence in Leader suggests that both mother and son misplace their respective faiths in uncertain father-figures. But it is not that the novel is anti-Christianity per se. Nor does *Angel* entirely vilify Leader. Rather, in problematizing worship—be it of God or man—the novel critiques such tractability by equating it with naivety.

In opposing Ma Ettie to her children Regal and Doodsie it would appear that the generation to which each character belongs determines his or her partisanship. For example, should it index the rise of Leader, the novel's Eric Gairy figure, the quietist claptrap that Ma Ettie espouses would religiously sanction and make inviolable Gairy's high position as Grenada's Prime Minister and dictator: "Look at the fingers on you hand. God make them all different length. We can't all be the same in this worl [*sic*]. It mus [*sic*] have high and low" (28).[107] On the other hand, for Ettie's daughter Doodsie, Leader is the type of man who deserves

[107] Carolyn Cooper points out that: "Despite the conventional disclaimer, '[t]his is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental,' *Angel* does establish correspondences between events in the narrative and the trajectory of Grenadian

to receive the middle finger that her mother's trope would give him. When Doodsie writes a letter in which she ridicules Leader's wedding to an "airess" and complains bitterly that at the ceremony guests were served "enough shampain to bathe in" (17), her phonetic spelling repays rereading. Doodsie's homophonic substitution of "heiress" with "airess" associatively and irreverently renders Leader's bride as insubstantial as air and disinherits her, if only linguistically. The similar cacography of "shampain to bathe in" anticipates both the confidence trick or sham of Leader's leadership and the pain that the despot's legacy will leave in its wake.

This is not to say that *Angel* does not understand why some Grenadians might give the likes of Leader an enthusiastic reception. The ambiguous promise of Leader is delivered in another letter that Doodsie writes to her friend Ezra in Aruba. Doodsie's impulse is to temper her bad news. "Over here," she pretends, "things not too bad" (6). But almost immediately thereafter, she decides that what her friend must be told is the truth, about which there is some doubt: "To tell you the truth, Ezra, the country need a shake up like this, even though I know the kine of person Leader is" (6). What motivates her insistence that Leader must be *seen* at work ("You should see you boy Leader in form") is the fact that everything about his activity and following the dubious Doodsie has gleaned only *aurally* ("I . . . hear about people that get kill" and "[D]own in you area . . . I hear that everybody stout stout behind Leader") (6). Ezra, Doodsie implies significantly, may form a different opinion about Leader. Regardless, if

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political history over the three-decade period it documents. The novel's two major fictional political leaders do resemble 'persons living or dead.'" See Cooper, "'Sense Make Befoh Book': Grenadian Popular Culture and the Rhetoric of Revolution in Merle Collins's *Angel* and *The Colour of Forgetting*," in *Arms Akimbo: Africana Women in Contemporary Literature*, eds. Janice Lee Liddell and Yakini Belinda Kemp (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 176-177. Though Cooper goes on to argue that *Angel*'s "Leader" and "Chief" also can be more broadly or allegorically identified as charismatic [arche]*types*, I cite Cooper to give myself permission to claim that whenever one encounters "Leader" in *Angel* (and in this dissertation chapter) one is to read "Gairy."

Doodsie knows Leader's character—the kind of person he is—then if nothing else, she knows that the country is mistaken about the man who is providing the shake-up that it nonetheless desperately needs. The ease with which Leader takes a messianic "form" ("is like people thinkin he is savior") Doodsie finds unsurprising; for if Leader and his people share the same "area," then his naïve supporters need not travel far to get "stout stout behind" him (6). But it is not only important that *Angel* stops short of endorsing Leader. The subtlety with which the novel refuses to repudiate him altogether also merits comment. Its deliberations about Leader resonate in a traditional hymn as Doodsie sings it:

> The Lord is my shepherd
> I sha-a-ll not want
> He ma-a-kes me down to lie
> In pa-a-stures green
> He lea-ea-deth me
> The qui-i-et waters by. (228)

Given the negative attributes attached to the character of "Leader," if Doodsie's reminder that "The Lord," too, is a leader does not make the inevitability of Christian salvation suspect, we should also consider that her melisma isolates and thus emphasizes the "death" in "leadeth." Moreover, in *Angel* the Lord is yet another pastor who orients his Grenadian charge towards quiet. If, on the other hand, Doodsie's hymn recuperates the figure of the leader as a shepherd, then it also suggests that Leader's paternalism, compulsions, and suppressions weren't bad absolutely.

Across its chapters Collins's historical fiction deigns to ask, If Grenada's sons and daughters were to take begrudging responsibility for Gairy would that also mean that, once Gairy

is gone, the behavior of a power-drunk Brother Maurice Bishop partially mitigates Uncle Gairy's excesses? In the event we see that the People's Revolutionary Government's fateful dissolution may be glimpsed quite early in the novel. As the plot and history ultimately bear out, Grenada's Revo will repeat the island's misguided pre-revolutionary hero-worship, violence, and murder. In the final analysis, the novel's critique of leaders earthbound and celestial warns against denying one's own agency by placing one's faith in any messiah.[108] For Grenada to pledge that kind of blind allegiance, *Angel* hints, would be childish. Indeed, this dangerous privileging of automatic deference to authority helps to explain why some Grenadians commemorate as a day of thanksgiving America's incursion immediately upon Maurice Bishop's assassination.[109]

The novel's repeated illustrations of Grenadian children being told to "keep youself quiet" and "don't interrupt when you see big people talkin" are perhaps in the service of warning that what Grenada's little ones hear too much of at home may condition them to submit to undeserving big people outside it. Unfortunately, though her letters to her friend Ezra spell subversion, the command to "keep youself quiet" "when you see big people talkin" is tacitly reinforced for Doodsie's two eldest children, Angel and Simon, when they witness their mother's silent response to an impatient physician's condescension. Doodsie suffers from stomach ulcers,

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[108] About the implosion of the Grenada Revolution, Collins avers, "those events taught me that you cannot depend on any political figure to carry out your agenda." See Scott, "Fragility," 131.

[109] In the revised version of the novel, the thanks that Grenadians give to the Americans appears to be less an act of gratitude and more a survival mechanism, as Allan explains: "at this point now we just ha to say thanks, wi!" He then asks, "How else we go get outa dis?" See Collins, *Angel* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2011), 311.

Elsewhere, Collins is on record as saying, "So when the Americans later on said they were 'welcomed,' and they were critiqued for saying that, I say, yeah. I'm not going to say it out [loud], but, *yeah*, they are correct. Because there was that sense that the RMC [Grenada's Revolutionary Military Council] really was the wicked one, so *this* was liberation. Unfortunately, if I'm honest, *that* is what happened. People had that perception, which is why, I guess, it is possible for the Mitchell government to have a 25 October holiday that people say okay about"—as quoted in Scott, "Fragility," 142.

and her children appear "malnourished" (48). That the doctor does not care to distinguish between the adult Doodsie and her children (in other words, he treats her as if she were a child) can be gleaned from the fact that he gives to all the same prescription: drink more milk. And yet, in another way, he does not connect, as his remedy does, Doodsie's ulcerated stomach to her malnourished children. Nor does the doctor guess that the "vacan[cy]" of Doodsie's stare might match that of her larder (48). Regardless, Doodsie needs no doctor to tell her that her ulcerated stomach is symptomatic of the struggle to feed her son and daughter given Grenada's impoverishment resulting from plantocratic cupidity. Indeed, she must know how her children appear; the problem is not with Doodsie's eyes. That Doodsie does not defend herself makes no difference, for the doctor, having "removed his stethoscope," suggests here that he is done with listening to her anyway (48). Instead, he misreads Doodsie's silence as incomprehension and dismisses her with his own dumb show. The doctor's recommendation, antipathetic bedside manner, and the complaint for which Doodsie must stomach him, evince why, after Grenada's independence from British rule in 1974 and "Uncle" Gairy's defenestration in 1979, the free milk distributed by the People's Revolutionary Government was so, well, revolutionary.[110]

As we can see from Doodsie's encounter with her doctor, perhaps the gravest predicament for *Angel*'s women is that they are forced to depend on unreliable male help. To be fair, Doodsie's husband Allan is sometimes a negligent dad perforce. As a migrant agricultural laborer in the United States, Allan's unpredictable pay makes virtually impossible his wife's receipt from him of any regular remittance. Allan's letters describe his work with Antiguans and

[110] Doodsie's doctor-visit dramatizes some of the rationale behind the Grenada Revolution. As Maurice Bishop, in a 13 March 1979 address to the Grenadian people, explains: "This Revolution is for work, for food, for decent housing and health services, and for a bright future for our children and grandchildren." Qtd. in Chris Searle, *Grenada: The Struggle Against Destabilization* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1983), 5.

Barbadians in Louisiana and Wisconsin; as such, even as they apologize for his fitful financial support, the letters register the greater opportunities and freedom of movement available to the West Indies' men, not women. Since she is much more permissive towards her son than her daughter, the presumption that their gender assignment will determine the degree of freedom available to her children is not lost on Doodsie. But what also signals to daughter Angel that she should not expect adulthood to bring her significant change are the domestic chores that she—and not her brother—shares with her mother, not to mention the dementia that makes her grandmother behave as if she were a child. When in her lucid moments Ma Ettie pines after her eldest son who has emigrated to Panama—"Hope" is the name of the son whose loss Ettie mourns—the novel points heavy-handedly to how much the greater latitude afforded Grenadian men costs the island's women.

The novel depicts the human toil of the devastating conditions in Grenada following the world prices of cocoa falling during the late 1950s. As an agricultural laborer whom the Grenada economy keeps in penury, Doodsie's husband, Allan, answers a call to work in the U.S., whence he sends home a letter that describes his low-paid work alongside other Caribbean migrants. America offers Allan only exploitative labor for fluctuating pay, indeed not much more than he may have earned at home. In harvesting alongside Antiguans and Barbadians English potatoes and Louisiana sugarcane Allan finds that both the Caribbean and England have followed him to the United States.

It is significant that in one of his letters home, Allan inquires first about his son Simon, privileging him over Angel, the eldest child. A line can be drawn from the patriarch's male bias to the exclusion of women in Grenadian politics. Yes, Allan does "hope" that his daughter is thriving, but how Angel was to have thrived in his absence remains unstated (50). Indeed, this

letter explains further why his malnourished children presented to the doctor's surgery; for it is the first to come "from Allan with something in besides just the notepaper" (49).[111] For much of his time in the United States, Angel and Simon's father has neglected them as much as England, metaphorically their Mother Country, has forsaken them and every Grenadian peasant. Since it will help feed her children, the small funds Allan sends and his eventual return to Grenada will release the shameful "grip [on] her throat" that is but another complication of Doodsie's ulcerated stomach (48). But Doodsie, in keeping with the novel's dispersal of violence, will only displace this silencing shame onto her daughter, even as she follows Allan's instructions that their son become a cricket star. For example, when Angel protests being stuck in the kitchen while outside her brother Simon bats limes as ersatz cricket balls, Doodsie commands her daughter, "Hush you mout and peel de bluggoe, girl" (102). Her censure will keep the household traditionally gendered, with the male outside and the females inside. Also remaining traditionally gendered is the household's division of labor wherein the son is permitted to play with his food while the daughter must learn how to prepare it to be sold or eaten. Whereas "Simon shout[s]," Angel is told to hush her mouth. Simon receives from his mother praise and encouragement ("Good. Bravo! Do it again"); Angel remonstrance. In either instance Doodsie directs her children to "perfect . . . the skill" that she believes will best serve each one (102). But everything I have written in this paragraph Doodsie already has perhaps better digested for her daughter thusly: "Simon is man. You is little girl" (97).

The scene above is but one illustration of *Angel*'s critique of how before the Revolution, gender inequality combined with the labor-repressive agriculture practiced on the island meant

[111] In her 2008 interview with David Scott, Merle Collins explains that before migrant farmworkers like Allan could send home remittances, they "of course first . . . had to pay back their passage"—as quoted in Scott, "Fragility," 89.

that labor was further devalued when done by women. When Doodsie and her brother Regal argue this point as she cleans the kitchen around her sedentary sibling, the novel subtly recognizes, as Regal does not, the hardworking Grenadian woman that Doodsie exemplifies. With its promise of parity between men and women, it is no wonder then that Doodsie and Angel would welcome, and work to maintain, Grenada's socialist Revolution. Given its concern with generational strife, it should be expected that *Angel* would suggest that the sins of the father and mother are visited upon Grenada's sons and daughters. The fact that the little boy Simon is considered already a man paradoxically means that it will be a long time before Angel reaches parity (if ever) with her little brother. The future of gender equality in Grenada does not bode well here. This sexist division of labor between Angel and Simon only repeats to the next generation the sibling rivalry that pits Doodsie against her own brother Regal in their roles as differently gendered estate workers. When Doodsie asks about her brother's salary, his answer reckons that Grenadian brothers might never expect to work as hard as their under-compensated sisters. Regal explains:

> "Well, me, as a driver I gettin a few pence more but what all the ordinary labourers gettin is two shilling an sixpence a day for man and two an two for women. I gettin two and ten."
>
> "An go an see," Doodsie emptied the pan of dirty water in the drain at the back of the kitchen, looked at her brother sitting there on the kitchen bench near the door. "Go an see, those women doin more damn work than allyou self."
>
> Regal sucked his teeth. "Dat is not de point." (12-13)

What Collins skillfully delineates here is that before the People's Revolutionary Government's labor reforms, equal pay for equal work in Grenada was never a point. Indeed, compensating

women for their *extra*-“ordinary” labor was also not a point. Yet as the brother sits while his sister cleans, this kitchen drama between siblings rehearses *Doodsie’s* point that women do more work than Regal and his ilk. These rigged man-versus-woman contests suggest that what attracted Grenadian women like Doodsie (and later Angel) to socialism was the possibility of freedom from their oppression under not only racial but gendered hierarchies.

Grenada’s and Angel’s Burgeoning Independence

At the time of the New Jewel Movement’s 1979 coup that eventuates in revolution, the fledgling independence Grenada had won in 1974 was mostly nominal under the tyranny of the new nation’s first prime minister, Eric Gairy. Thus, what can be said about the former colony immediately preceding the Revolution applies also to a vulnerable and devalued Afro-Caribbean girl like Angel—that is, with so much stacked against them, their survival was uncertain, contingent upon vigilance and resistance.

One aspect that makes her story a synecdoche for Grenada’s is the protagonist’s Catholic school education, for it epitomizes the parochial tuition imposed upon Grenada under colonial rule that then continued into Gairy’s tenure. That the convent teaches Angel a series of rituals behind which the significance has been lost is suggested when Doodsie, though she cannot explain why, compels her daughter to cross herself like other schoolgirls. It is hoped that adopting such shibboleths will mitigate the fact that as a girl growing into young womanhood Angel shares with newly independent Grenada an ignominious status. The assumption that with too much freedom both will come to ruin dismisses them as but potential sources of schadenfreude if not altogether beneath notice.

Therefore, the story of Angel's success offers clues as to how Grenada can disappoint her naysayers too. For example, Angel's strict education in the persecutions that befall Grenadian women extends beyond the mute plantain peeling we have seen her tasked with in the kitchen. On the day that begins her secondary schooling, Angel and her mother encounter "the pink walls of the Convent High School . . . [and a] statue of the Virgin Mary . . . just inside of the gate" which, when read together, doubly threaten to immure young girls (106). When Doodsie notices good Catholic girls crossing themselves before entering the church, she instructs Angel to do the same. But when Angel asks her mother to explain the gesture, she is met with another censure: "Jus do it, ka dammit" (106). Paradoxically, yet traditionally, Angel is instructed to follow authority automatically, even as the sacred and profane meet in her mother's expletive, spat "in front of the church." The demand that Angel conform without question is reiterated implicitly in the several small statues of the Virgin Mary, and also explicitly when "Angel look[s] at Doodsie and the nun talking about the good opportunities for young girls at the establishment, about books, ties, uniforms, regulations" (106). It would appear that the only things the Convent High School reproduces are more Virgin Marys in miniature who cannot move nor speak. These regressive Marys are here conceived immaculately via reading, being bound around the neck, uniformity, and regularity.

Unfortunately, girls like Angel may meet curbs to their freedom even outside convent walls. Collins's novel illustrates how prior to the Revolution, Grenada's men underestimated girls and women. As Doodsie informs her daughter: "Nobody does expec good out of little girl an all those you tink is you frien just waitin to see you fall for them to laugh. They not interested in you. Any time you see man smilin for you, is because they want to drag you down with them. So study you head" (101). One of the ways in which Angel could follow her mother's injunction

to study is by translating Doodsie's creole into Standard English. Per Doodsie, the only good that "nobody does expec[t] . . . out of little girl[s]," is a bit of slapstick, a "fall for them to laugh." Accordingly, Doodsie's double negative of "don['t] grin grin [with] nobody" positively reduces such jokers to the nobodies that they are. What Angel is of an age to learn is that her father was once probably a "smiling" "nobody" to whom Doodsie returned a "grin," the consequence of which is Doodsie's fall into a thankless drudgery that helps provide for someone else's children ("You big enough now to know that you father have other children, other people to mind, that he never have enough for us, that the more I work inside is the more he have to give outside") (101). Poor Doodsie: if, as we have seen, daily plantain peeling in the kitchen is, as Doodsie also has taught her daughter, work that little girls do, then adult Doodsie is a little girl still. As such, she exemplifies the infantilization that nearly all Grenadians have been made to suffer by a succession of their leaders.

One example of someone who doesn't "expec[t] good" from Grenada is V. S. Naipaul who, in "An Island Betrayed," his essay on the Grenada Revolution, cynically tests attempts like Collins's to recuperate Grenada and the Revolution. In the essay, Naipaul argues that "The revolution depended on language." He then adds: "At one level it used big, blurring words; at another, it misused the language of the people. Here the very idea of study—a good idea, associated in the minds of most Grenadians with self-improvement—had been used to keep simple men simple and obedient."[112] Certainly, Doodsie's admonishment of Angel illustrates the connection Naipaul draws between study, self-improvement, and obedience. But the historical point that Collins's revolutionary deployment of patois allows me to make here is that per

[112] V. S. Naipaul, "An Island Betrayed," *Harper's* (March 1, 1984), 72.

Naipaul the PRG's attempt to edulcorate the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin for an under-educated Grenada was a mistake:

> People's speech, phonetic spelling—the party used them to make the more difficult parts of its doctrine and practice acceptable: to make the many rallies and "solidarity" marches appear more folksy; and to make all the imported apparatus of socialist rule and patronage—the organizing committee of the party, the political bureau, the central committee, the many "mass" organizations, the army, and the militia—to make all of this appear carnival-like and Grenadian and black, "de revo."[113]

Naipaul suggests that the biggest problem that the Grenada Revolution posed was one of translation, and the translators, in his estimate, had not been up to the task. On the one hand, as we have seen, Naipaul argues that the Revolution "misused the language of the people." On the other, Naipaul chastises the Grenadian people for their misuse of the language of revolution, their *diminishment* of it: "de revo." Such a poor—in every sense of the word—translation of high political theory into "people's speech, phonetic spelling" dooms Grenada to failure for it makes impossible following (European) socialist doctrine to the letter.

Naipaul contends that Grenada's experiment with socialism is not a creolization so much as a corruption of European ideals. Specifically, he insists that these ideals resist translation into patois and, when rendered phonetically, suffer from the elisions. But Naipaul's argument is overdetermined by the repugnance with which he treats the creolized rhetoric of the Revolution. He finds the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin unrecognizable in their Grenadian application simply because, for him, the translation into patois makes them unreadable. It is not that Naipaul can't read patois; he just doesn't want to. When it comes to learning Grenada's lexicon,

[113] Ibid., 63.

strangely the writer prefers to remain illiterate. But anyone with recourse to a glossary of Grenadian *patwa*, like the one Collins provides at the back of *Angel*, will find that Naipaul's is no excuse. Arguably, the whole point of *Angel*'s creole is that some of its readers will experience something akin to the infantilization of Grenada given that the novel's deployment of *patwa* puts those, like Naipaul, unfamiliar with it into the position of an uninitiated child. Indeed, young Angel intercedes on behalf of all non-*patwa* readers when she complains to her mother, "Ah don't even know Patwa. Allyou does only talk Patwa for us not to understand." To which Doodsie retorts, "What you have to study is you book, not stupidness. Go an do you homework!" (91). What belie Doodsie's asseveration that such stupidness is unworthy of study are the translations of *patwa* into Standard English that the novel's glossary provides. Ironically, for readers to understand the book's *patwa*, we must defy Doodsie by following her instructions to the letter: "What you have to study is you book," or at least we must thumb through to the back of it for definitions and translations. In so doing, our indulgence in such stupidness should make us wiser. But like Doodsie, at least in this instance, Naipaul insists that ideas worthy of study are irreconcilable with the language particular to the Grenadian people.

What Naipaul appears not to take into account is that the Revolution's dependence on *patwa*, like *Angel*'s, affirms that accurate representation of West Indian culture requires the hybridization of European and Caribbean forms of expression. Also prerequisite is acknowledgement of the *importance* of the oral discourse specific to the island. For those unfamiliar with it, Collins's use of *patwa* accomplishes at least two things. Translated for a broader audience, it retells the story of rebellion against oppression intrinsic to colonial history. Untranslated, the *patwa* functions as a way to resist retelling the history of [neo-]colonial oppression *in the oppressor's terms*. For this reason, we see that the novel's endorsement of

Grenadian *patwa* is the opposite of the villain Leader's fashioning himself after a white plantation owner. When Leader's exact mimicry results in his exile, it warns that Grenada chooses unwisely anytime it favors European forms. Consequently, one mark of Angel's heroism is her insistence upon being initiated into the community of *patwa* speakers. And one mark of Collins's generosity is the glossary that grants readers greater access to the *patwa*-speaking community. By extension, when we take the preceding into account, we see that within the portrait of the ingénue Angel is the celebration of Grenadian ingenuity.

But if Naipaul were to insist that the translation of a foreign political theory into Grenadian language does not work, a counterargument is that *Angel*'s creolized English peppered with *patwa* encourages more sympathetic readers to follow the people's speech and phonetic spelling to the back of the book's glossary to effect a *reverse* translation in search of an indigenous political theory. Such political lessons come early in the novel. For example, if we don't know what she means when Doodsie says, "Is the same story all over. Is vyé nèg on the groun an bakra béké on top" (11), we can turn to the glossary to find that "vyé nèg" means "old nigger (from 'vyé,' old, and 'nèg,' black)" (294), and "bakra béké" means "white boss" (292). Having learned this, readers with knowledge of the history of the Grenada Revolution specifically, and Caribbean history generally, may recognize this maxim for the spoiler alert that it is and read no further. But should we continue reading, we will find that Doodsie's political theory holds even when the bakra béké is not exactly a white man but merely a black one *dressed* in white like Leader (after Gairy, the historical figure upon which Leader is based). To demonstrate sartorially that Leader is but an Afro-Caribbean translation of European power, the novel lets us listen in on the comments two characters make about Leader in "[h]is spotless white suit [that] glistened in the sunshine" (24). One character avers that Leader resembles a wealthy

plantation owner: "He look like Mr De Lisle, eh! . . . Is just so Mr De Lisle does dress neat when he playin tennis!" But her companion finds the simile inadequate: "De only ting is he prettier dan Mr De Lisle!" (24). Of course, it is a bad omen that Leader models himself on Mr. De Lisle at leisure, and in so doing outshines him. But once the black man dressed in white becomes despotic, what better way to vanquish him than to turn him black again? Leader's vulnerability is made especially visible during J'ouvert, the official start of Carnival, when previously-banned carnival bands "covered themselves completely in black grease and paint, [and] clattered through the streets with cans, pans, horns, celebrating like their African ancestors had celebrated emancipation, parading the blackness that gave so much fear and making sure it left its mark on anything white" (212). This "anything white," of course, applies to Leader too when he dons his white suit. In making sure that their blackness leaves its mark, the Grenadian people metaphorically turn black pride into literally a smear campaign.

In ways like the above, *Angel* illustrates how the recuperation of exclusively *Afro*-Caribbean culture like *patwa* is but one demonstration of black pride by which Grenadian youth sometimes embarrassed their more conservative elders. Doodsie, at least initially, believes that Angel steps in the wrong direction when she expresses an interest in learning *patwa* and later joins the Black Power Movement. But one should expect nothing less from a parent whose synonym for *patwa* is "stupidness." It should be clear here that the novel does not endorse Naipaul's view of *patwa*. If we understand that Doodsie's mind awaits decolonization, then we cannot excuse her failure to appreciate her own culture without also forgiving Leader his perverse mimicry of a white man. Ironically, Collins's revaluation of Grenada and the Revolution also reclassifies the offenses of Gairy, the man upon whom *Angel*'s terrible Leader is based, as pardonable.

Via the character of "Chief," the Maurice Bishop figure, the novel also tacitly asks that Eric Gairy's *rule* be reconsidered as well. Because the respective designations that Collins gives them—"Chief" and "Leader"—are synonymous, the insinuation is that Bishop is not Gairy's diametric opposite. Indeed, the two men are comparable if only because both were prime ministers whom Grenadians at one time or another considered saviors.[114] Collins suggests that because Angel's generation has no memory of Leader being anything but loathsome, they are unprepared when his successor, their beloved Chief, disappoints them. In making each character a foil for the other, the novel argues against apprehending any man as a messiah.[115] *Angel* does not sacrifice Eric Gairy's character for the sake of assigning blame, nor is the novel a work of martyrology dedicated to the memory of Maurice Bishop, because to do otherwise would repeat the mistake of assigning outsized roles in the nation's traumas to independent Grenada's first two prime ministers. Their status as minor characters to whom the novel refers obliquely serves as more than Collins's implicit comment upon them. One of the novel's aims is to remind Grenada that since she can no longer look up to her "Leader" and "Chief," given their fallen status, she now must turn inward. But in a short yet pivotal scene, Collins also warns that action must follow introspection. One of Angel's moments of self-reflection is undercut when she tries to adjust an automobile's rearview mirror that, as she stares into it, falls from its perch. When in this feminist national allegory Angel restores the mirror to its proper place, it is easy to see the moral lesson taught here is that Grenada must prop up her own fallen self-image.

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[114] On the similarities between Eric Gairy and Maurice Bishop, see Omowale David Franklyn, *Bridging the Two Grenadas* (St. George's: Talented House, 1999).

[115] Collins's *Angel* may be compared to V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* in that both may be described as what John Thieme calls "studies of the false redeemer." See John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction*, (London: Hansib, 1987), 171.

What perspective to take towards the polarizing figure that Eric Gairy presents is a problem that the novel has Angel act out once she reaches young adulthood and begins, like other Grenadians, to rebel against Leader and the status quo. Angel's opposition to Leader is noticeable even in her apparel and hairstyle, much to the chagrin of her mother who protests, "Every time ah look at you, eh, it hurt me heart. Look at you! Look at that big, baggy, shapeless dress. Look at you head! Like it don't see a comb in years. What is that? Black Power? Black dirtiness!" (174). Here, again unexpectedly, we find another point of agreement between Doodsie and V. S. Naipaul. Black Power is for Doodsie, as it is for Naipaul, little more than a series of poor and unhygienic aesthetic decisions. Her physiological response to Black Power—a shameful pain in her heart—together with the conflation of "Black" with "dirt" is the opposite of pride. And like that of Sam Selvon's Moses Aloetta, Doodsie's aversion to Black Power testifies to the fact that when it emerged globally in the 1960s and 70s, not every black person, particularly those of older generations, delighted in Black Power. It was largely a youth movement.

The youth movement's tendency to be reactive, as opposed to deliberative, makes the prior generation's history of resistance appear much more proactive. Or at least such is illustrated after Angel willfully breaks a framed portrait of Leader that her father prizes, and her uncle Regal joins Doodsie in thinking that, given their truculent stance against Leader, Angel and other young people require an attitude adjustment. Accordingly, Regal recommends that the youth be reminded that Leader "really did start off as though he wanted to do something for poor people and that is what Angel and her friends' generation have to realise" (193). Per Regal, the tantrum that she throws and the disdain Angel shows for the framed photo of Leader only makes *her* look bad to Leader's proponents. But it is not that Regal apologizes for Leader. Instead,

what Regal wants is for Angel and her generation to see the bigger picture: "De man [Leader] bad, is true, but you have to put the ting in some kine o . . . framework. If you just keep saying de damn asses supportin him, then they go just keep supportin him because of what they remember an because you jus lookin down you nose at what you not even tryin to understand" (193). Regal avers that one must first reconstruct the support for Leader's fetishization, put it into a kind of framework, before attempting to dismantle that support. Therefore, Regal's figurative, chiastic objection to Angel literally breaking the frame around Leader's iconography is that she skipped a step, thus causing mere superficial, not irreparable, damage—only a bit of broken glass—and therefore creating a mess that endangers herself and her family but not Leader. Thus, Angel cannot stop her father from stubbornly repairing the damage to Leader's image.

Fittingly, it is through Angel's Uncle Regal that the novel's ambivalence about Leader sheds light on the effects of Gairy's appropriation of the role of Grenada's symbolic "uncle" and suggests that even when his fellow Grenadians despise him, they cannot wholly disown him. Indeed, what must be considered is how it is not only Leader's avuncular charisma but his entire history in the West Indies that motivates a character named Maisie to respond to his deposition thusly: "Dis ting not good at all, non! How dey could do de man dat? Is true ting wasn always for de bes, but he did try!" (231). Maisie's puzzlement, and the credit for his effort that she gives him, is further evidence that the novel does not find Leader's legacy, and by extension Eric Gairy's, entirely indefensible.

What the novel refuses to do is to scapegoat its Eric Gairy character. The moral that Collins's heroine meets at every turn is that the more mature response to the specter that haunts Grenada is self-examination, as can be seen when as an adult Angel drives past the corner that

once terrified her younger self. With Angel in the driver's seat, her car becomes the vehicle in which metaphors for Angel's vulnerability are figured in the obstacles that she must surmount by turns: the residue of a childhood fear of a haunted corner, a steep terrain, a noxious odor, darkness, existential crisis, all culminating in a precarious self-image, as symbolized in a broken rearview mirror: "The mirror held, at a different angle" once Angel is able to "settle it back into the groove" (257). That even the letters of her name are vulnerable to transposition can be seen in the car's resettled mirror that holds not "Angel" but something slightly "different," an "angle." And from this new angle that affords her a rear view we can see that Angel, if not yet Grenada, is almost all grown up.

For even though Angel has managed to navigate the potentially treacherous road from childhood to adulthood safely, after the Revolution it is then all of Grenada's lot to feel like a little girl whom others want to see fail and derided. Where locally, as Doodsie swears, one expects from a little girl nothing good, on the global stage the Revo's ousting of Leader meets with her similar skepticism—as Doodsie explains, "Things lookin up so well [here in Grenada] an America jus waiting for us to fall for dem to laugh!" (257). Consequently, the advice Doodsie gave to Angel to study her head Doodsie modifies to apply it to Angel's work for the People's Revolutionary Government, whom the novel renames Horizon. Between counting stitches as she crochets to an old Bobbette's tune, Doodsie goes off on a tangent: "All you just keep allyou head! Dis is something powerful. Allyou don let it go, non. . . . Secondary school free. Education in swing! Where you ever hear dat in dis Grenada here? Huh! Chile, ah don believe allyou even know how much good allyou doin" (243-244). Despite her penchant for tautology ("if is so dis ting is . . . is so it is"), Doodsie reminds her daughter of all the good the Revo has wrought and risks losing even as her exhortation and whatever garment she is crocheting forecast

Horizon's eventual unraveling (244). The act of "keep[ing] allyou head" depends on cooperative thinking, the bringing together of "all" and "you." However, that yoking is undercut by the pop love-song Collins invokes here, The Bobbettes' "Mr. Lee," for in its sequel the lyrics are revised to count "One, two, three / [I *shot*] Mr. Lee" (244, emphasis added).[116] The implication is that Grenada's unprecedented free education has come too late, for there remains "much good" that "allyou" apparently still "don['t] . . . even know," a lacuna that Doodsie's neighbor, Melda, fills as she chastises party leaders for keeping internecine secrets: "Dey not suppose to hide ting from us. Dey on top but is we dat make Revolution" (258). Nonetheless, for dissatisfactions such as Melda's, Horizon can counter with the following facts: "We gettin free education now, houses getting fixed, free milk for children"; and should such gains fail to placate, there is the Water Commissioner's metaphor that modern Grenada, in its infancy, must suffer "teething pains" (250).

"Horizon" functions not only as Collins's pseudonym for the People's Revolutionary Government. Each successful outcome of the new government's burgeoning socialism increases the odds that the small island nation will become a target for capitalist American aggression.[117] Consequently, the name "Horizon" denotes the limit of Grenada's progress before the U.S. may be expected to intervene. Collins also demonstrates that it is not only the United States who was ambivalent about Grenada's new direction. Doodsie and her friend Melda contend that the sequestered party leaders, dizzy with thinking themselves to be the Revolution's centrifugal

[116] Taken together, The Bobbettes's two songs "Mr. Lee" and "I Shot Mr. Lee" recount a period of infatuation succeeded by violence; as such, they provide an allegorical microcosm of the Grenada Revolution.

[117] Even in the revised version of *Angel* that Collins published in 2011, Horizon appears doomed from the start; for no sooner does the Revo begin before Angel starts dreaming of its demise.

force, must be confused about the people's much more substantial role in effecting radical change. Likewise, Grenada's aunts and mothers grow especially concerned that Horizon's army has turned their nephews and sons into depersonalized soldiers pitted against civilians. And when by shutting citizens out of decision making it repeats Leader's mistake of treating Grenadians as if all were children, Horizon's ironic myopia is brought to light.

In the end, the Grenada Revolution in its infancy does not survive long enough to acquire its adult teeth. In other words, what the Revo needed before it was cut down was a chance to grow—an idea that the novel emphasizes in the allegorical implications of the term "Horizon" with its suggestion of open-endedness, a pointing to a potential future, the unknowability of what lies ahead. Collins just briefly sketches the PRG's fatal schism for, as David Scott surmises, "the details of the internal dispute do not interest her fictively."[118] Collins's forbearance on the subject is understandable given the fact that a fictive interest in the PRG's undoing had already been exploited by the U.S. to disastrous effect. Audre Lorde observes that in 1983 the invasion of Grenada actualized a plot that the United States had contrived and staged two years previously: "[I]n 1981, the United States rehearsed the invasion of Grenada openly. It practiced the war game *Ocean Venture* in which it bombed the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, calling it 'Amber of the Amberines' (Grenada of the Grenadines). In this grisly make-believe, a situation is supposed to occur where Americans are held hostage. As we know, this was the first excuse used to justify the invasion of Grenada."[119] This *fictional* "first excuse" of which Lorde speaks

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[118] Scott, *Omens*, 84-85. I'll note here as well that in the revision, Collins devotes more pages to describing the brief resistance to Operation Urgent Fury than she gives to a portrayal of the years of the Revolution. Nevertheless, as Collins herself has said, the Revo "was so much more than invasion"—as quoted in Scott, "Fragility," 144.

[119] Audre Lorde, "Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report," *The Black Scholar* 15, no. 1 (January-February, 1984): 24-25.

is the purported rescue of 750 American medical students by "Operation Urgent Fury." I cite Lorde verbatim to demonstrate how Grenada lends itself to fictionalization in Collins's national allegory with feminist implications because the country already had been thought about in allegorical terms ("Amber of the Amberines") before it was subordinated as if it were a little girl. Lorde enumerates the excuses to remind us that the United States had more than one. A spurious speech that Ronald Reagan makes functions as another pre-text, in both senses of the term, for America's raid on Grenada, as Jenny Sharpe elaborates: "In March 1983, as [Grenada's] new airport neared completion, [Ronald] Reagan announced to the American people that Grenada was a threat to national security. Grenadians, in turn, perceived a U.S. invasion to be imminent. [Prime Minister Maurice] Bishop's execution in October provided the occasion for the so-called 'rescue mission.'"[120] For her part, in fictionalizing the invasion of Grenada (as we have seen, a fiction of a fiction made real, another hyper-fictionalization in codex form), Collins likens the U.S. to a chicken-hawk on the hunt circling above vulnerable fowls running higgledy-piggledy until one of them is taken—like Angel who, as part of Grenada's impracticable resistance to U.S. forces, loses an eye. Of course, what happens to Angel and Grenada in the face of Ronald Reagan's "Fury" also again suggests, to paraphrase Doodsie, that the U.S. is man, Grenada is little girl. More importantly, Angel's injury gives us an opportunity to note that in both V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* and Collins's *Angel*, violence to women's bodies is likened to the violence that several Caribbean nations have sustained. The demand that a woman be obedient, and what happens to that woman should she fail to obey, makes her too alluring a figure for Naipaul and Collins not to borrow for their allegories of Caribbean resistance. Between the two texts, one

[120] Jenny Sharpe, "The Original Paradise: Grenada ten years after the U.S. Invasion," *Transition* 62 (1993), 51.

critic singles out *Angel* for praise because, as he argues, "[i]f it had been written as an ironic treatment of emancipatory processes, Collins's text might read like Naipaul's trivialization of revolution." What the critic adds next reminds us, as I have argued, that Collins writes against dominant tropes even as she follows tradition: "Collins's novel suggests that it is possible to wage war on the terror of totality without at the same time wallowing in a discourse of fragmentation and nothingness."[121] If *Angel* has avoided the "trivialization of revolution" and the "rendering of social transformation as a tragic impossibility," it indeed is to be commended, especially since, to cite Doodsie again, "nobody does expec good out of little girl."

If anything deserves a reparative reimagining it would be not only the Grenada Revolution but also Grenada's post-revolutionary relationship to time. David Scott argues that since the Revolution's demise, "Time . . . has become less yielding, less promising than we have grown to expect it should be." He then adds, "what we are left with are *aftermaths* in which the present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin; a certain experience of temporal *afterness* prevails in which the trace of futures past hangs like the remnant of a voile curtain over what feels uncannily like an endlessly extending present."[122] "The trace of futures past" makes of Grenada a new demand: that she look both forward and backward. The Grenada Revolution's implosion gives the lie to two of its most popular slogans: "Forward march" and "Forward ever, backward never." Now, perhaps, after the Revolution's ultimate collapse, "an endlessly extending present" is asked to militate against the repetition of *failures* past.

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[121] Patrick Taylor, "Deconstruction and Revolution: Merle Collins's *Angel*," *The CLR James Journal* 2, no. 1 (1991), 14-15.

[122] Scott, *Omens*, 6 (emphases in original).

Perhaps it was unreasonable to expect an ever forward march in a region perennially subject to the cyclonic rotations of hurricanes, from which nonetheless, according to Shalini Puri, have emerged positive effects. For example, as Puri argues, "Hurricane Ivan, which devastated Grenada in 2004, transformed both the natural landscape and the political-discursive landscape about the Grenada Revolution. . . . Ivan did not only destroy archives but also activated and redirected memory."[123] According to Puri's argument, Ivan offers itself as a mnemonic to replace the archival record that it destroys. What else Hurricane Ivan offers Puri is "an alternative image through which we might glimpse differently patterned movements of history." And, as a metaphor, the hurricane figures for Puri a new mode of interpretation and critique, what she calls a "hurricane historiography [that] is more attuned to repetition, disorder, and unpredictability."[124] Furthermore, the hurricane's figurative force is not limited to the writing of history. Indeed, Puri tracks it in Merle Collins's poetics as it is practiced in Collins's *re*writing of the Grenada Revolution.[125]

And yet the hurricane-like circularity of Collins's revolutionary poetics makes even more sense when we think of "revolution" as a circular or elliptical orbit. Indeed, the close of *Angel* rebounds to its beginning in that it returns us to Doodsie in a reverie as she remembers travelling from Aruba to Grenada to suggest that after the revolution there remains a pristine country which has always been present: "Her mind did a somersault in time to come up again years back, [when she found herself] standing on the deck as the ship came in from Aruba. . . . Doodsie had stood

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[123] Puri, *Grenada*, 28. It should go without saying that the revolution's slogan "Forward Ever, Backward Never" forgets that revolutions are also by definition cyclical or elliptical.

[124] Ibid., 212.

[125] Ibid., 222.

transfixed, seeing this view of the land for the first time and suddenly understanding what the white people she worked for meant when they said to her that her island was 'extraordinarily beautiful, with the most fantastic harbor'" (290). Doodsie's vision of her nation was not blinkered prior to the revolution. As the above anecdote brings home, her white employers' recollection of Grenada as a place of refuge and protection is for Doodsie initially "fantastic," that is, not real but only a white person's projection. Instead, what the novel calls Doodsie's "only real memory" of Grenada was of the island's exhausted resources—for example, its nutmeg and the backs of its people—and additional sites of painful exploitation, "white people's kitchens" (290). However, Grenada's socialist revolution—an event that is figured in Doodsie's mental and temporal acrobatics, her mind's somersault in time—has afforded Doodsie the luxury to appreciate *again* both the island's instrumental *and* its aesthetic (what Marxism would call its surplus) value.

Angel Redux

Angel's loss of an eye in resisting U.S. armed forces at the novel's end suggests that Grenada's vision, because of American influence, has been compromised. Implied here is that *Angel*'s perspective on what David Scott has identified as the aftermaths of the Revolution must remain only partial, incomplete. This implication points to the limits of allegory in this Caribbean novel and partially explains why Collins, reportedly "dissatisfied" with its conclusion, returned to *Angel* and published a substantially revised version in 2011.[126]

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[126] The present chapter focuses on the first version of the novel because, for this section of the dissertation, I am interested in the development of the Caribbean novel nearest the point when Jameson defines "third-world literature." For detailed discussions of Collins's revisions to *Angel* for the 2011 version, see Puri, *Grenada*, 266-268; Asha Tall, "The Erotic Schemes of Angels: Love on the Line in Merle Collins's Novel Revisioning," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 27,

I want to conclude this chapter by demonstrating briefly how the new edition departs from the original. In so doing, I will explicate what the added material contributes to Collins's story of the Grenada Revolution. The revision subtly but certainly changes her narrative's form. For example, starting on page 300, Collins gives a fuller account of the massacre of Maurice Bishop and others at Fort Rupert. In their specificity, these details make *Angel*'s second edition a more historical, less allegorical, novel. Collins also adds other incidents that are particular to this time in Grenadian history. The extended version draws out how the Revolution wasn't always propulsive. The narrator hints at the inertia, audit culture, and administrative bloat to which the Revo was prone, describing it as such: "It was exciting. It was enervating. It was frustrating. Angel started to feel that life was one long meeting."[127] The repetitive characterization of the Revolution, interrupted several times by full stops, imitates the starts and stops of progress. It suggests that what proliferated most were meetings. The implication is that too much of the work of the Revolution was anticipatory, that radical transformation was debated more than it was actualized.

From my understanding, the new material starts on page 261, although older material is dispersed throughout the remainder of the revision. In interleaving new sections with old, Collins adds more layers to her tale and thereby deepens the impression she takes of the Revo. But the author does not augment her book for the sake of completion. Through Doodsie's instruction to her daughter, the novel recommends that if one wants to complete the story of Grenada, then oral, first-hand accounts in addition to a written record must be consulted: "You

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no. 1 (2019): 50-69; and April Shemak, "Re/writing Reconciliation in Merle Collins's *Angel*," *Caribbean Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2014): 42-60.

[127] Merle Collins, *Angel* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2011), 270. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

an you people, Angel, allyou know what you see on the surface. Allyou know ting allyou read in book, but come an ask people like us, so—me and you father and you aunt—come an ask people like us that know life in the trenches" (280). Doodsie's appeal to Angel and her comrades uncovers the divides that persist between two generations of Grenadians and between the educated and the unlettered. On one side are the elders and the illiterate whose experience, nonetheless, is of great depth ("life in the trenches"). It is significant that Doodsie's metaphor positions her and her peers at the Revolution's front line of defense. On the other side are the beneficiaries of education, mostly younger people whose knowledge remains narrowly limited to the textual and comparatively superficial.[128]

In the new version, Horizon is still portrayed ambivalently—as Doodsie puts it, "people starting to say it look as if we get rid of one set o devil to put another set inside there" (284). In her comment is not only a glimpse of Milton's Pandemonium but also the awareness that both Horizon and Leader are subject to dubious gossip. Nonetheless, Doodsie insists on distinguishing Horizon's administration from Leader's rule; for lest we think that she couches as hearsay her own misgivings about the post-Leader era, she adds, "Me? I don't believe that we really take out one devil to put in the same kine because dat one [Leader], he was special all on his own" (285). Doodsie's judgment of Leader entreats readers of the expanded version of *Angel* not to think of the Gairy character as representative of all despots. Such a petition would suggest that at least some of Gairy's deviltry was unique to him.

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[128] David Scott notes that "one of the tensions that runs through this novel . . . is a tension between book learning and what one might call folk wisdom or popular learning, things that are passed down from generation to generation, the knowledges that have come through living and sorting out what is life." See Scott, "Fragility," 148.

Not only is Collins's insistence on holding Gairy accountable for his actions more pronounced in the revision. The second edition also makes it more difficult for Grenadians to exculpate themselves for their post-Revo predicament by villainizing the United States. The complaint that Doodsie's youngest son Carl makes about Americans, that "They don like us. They don like no black people that tryin to do something. They like to see us grin teeth" (311), racializes U.S. opposition to the Grenadian Revolution, painting all Americans as white (or at least not-black) and racist. For Carl, black people's refusal to be passive and pleasing is apprehended by others as aggression. But the complicity of his fellow West Indians complicates his argument. In the material that Collins adds, one of the characters notes that the American forces "have Caribbean troops with them" (314). The narrator then explains that "The neighboring Caribbean countries, appalled at the murder of Chief, other ministers, government officials, and members of the public, had apparently agreed to be part of the US invasion" (314). This transnational incursion on Grenada makes the answer to the question "Who was the enemy?" elusive (314). Collins makes clear that it should be more difficult for Grenadians like Carl to distinguish between "they" and "us." The novel muses on the idea that given Grenadian emigration to America, some of the island's invaders under Reagan's command might have been Grenadian-Americans: "the American army was everybody's army. Were there Grenadians bombing too? America was everybody's country. Everybody had Auntie somebody and Cousin somebody and brother and mother and father and—somebody—there" (326). If some Americans are also Grenadian, if "America was everybody's country," then "everybody" is also responsible for Grenada's takeover by the U.S.[129]

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[129] In her interview with David Scott, Collins admits, "we're *all* implicated in it [the Revolution's failures]. And the *we* is not only a party *we*, it is an *everybody* we. Because it is really about ways in which we form relationships with those in authority, ways in which we are,

This is not to say that the U.S. escapes critique in the second edition of *Angel*. In revising her novel about the Grenada Revolution, Collins also calls attention to the attempted revision of Grenadian history by the United States after it occupied the island. The superpower's program of Psychological Operations tried to eradicate from Grenada traces of the Revo. The maxims of the Revolution were painted over to make space for American-approved messages.[130] In the novel's final pages, Doodsie's memory turns the painted-over, agitprop slogans into pentimenti:

> When Doodsie went down to the market, she kept looking around wondering what was different. Something wasn't the same. Then somebody on the bus said, "They paint over that one, too!" All heads turned to watch and somebody said, "That good. Let the nonsense go. They too wicked!" Then Doodsie realized. She had become used to seeing "Education is Production Too!" written in green on the board near the roundabout. She became aware that all boards were painted over, so that the signs had disappeared. NSDP (National School Day Programme), CPE (Centre for Popular Education)

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ways in which we allow ourselves to be, ways in which we engage with others, ways in which we, as a people, allow others to take our lives. Yes? So that is in there as well. So it is like everybody bears responsibility"—as quoted in Scott, "Fragility," 161.

[130] Jenny Sharpe writes that "after the U.S. soldiers returned home, a psychological operations team (PSYOPS) remained behind to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Grenadian people. A U.S. station called Spice Island Radio took over the frequency of Radio Free Grenada and began to broadcast a combined programming of American rock music and propaganda. Thousands of posters depicting Coard and Austin bound, blindfolded, and stripped down to their underwear, were circulated. A text was provided to ensure a proper reading of the picture: 'The Grenadian people will never again allow such characters to assume power. Support democracy in Grenada.'" See Sharpe, "The Original Paradise," 55-56.

About such psychological operations more broadly, John Berger has written, "In the past a common tactic employed by those defending their homeland against invaders was to change the road signs so that the one indicating ZARAGOZA pointed in the opposite direction, towards BURGOS. Today it is not defenders but foreign invaders who switch signs to confuse local populations, confuse them about who is governing who, the nature of happiness, the extent of grief, or where eternity is to be found. And the aim of all these misdirections is to persuade people that being a client is the ultimate salvation." See John Berger, *Landscapes: John Berger on Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 223.

> CELEBRATING FOUR YEARS OF REVOLUTION, all the signs were gone. Not quite five years after the March 13th excitement of Revolution, Grenada was saying nothing now, just waiting for America to speak. (337)

It is no accident that during the Revolution a sign proclaiming that "Education is Production Too" is located on a road that leads to the market. The sign's message and location make explicit post-revolutionary Grenada's connection of education to commodities. Consequently, America's suppression of this sign suggests that the U.S. fears Grenadian competition in the marketplace of ideas.

In this chapter I have argued that Collins's attention to the New Jewel Movement's more inclusive environment for black women makes the story of the Grenada Revolution ideal for her feminist take on the genre of national allegory. Moreover, Collins disrupts the toxic masculinity and fixation on interracial sex that preoccupy Naipaul and Selvon. In its celebration of Grenadian people and their unique oral culture, her work recuperates from the Revolution a more gender-equitable, self-affirmative vision; and with sympathetic intelligence Collins argues for a compassionate reassessment of the Revolution. Nevertheless, given their content, the revisions that she makes to her novel hint that she found the genre of national allegory too constraining. In my dissertation's closing chapter, we will see how Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace also recognizes the limits of the Caribbean novel-as-national allegory and explodes them.

Chapter Four

Earl Lovelace's *Is Just a Movie*: A Metanarrative of Black Power in the Caribbean

> We have to re-examine the history and present as well a vision of the past that impels to our future. We cannot have a past in which we are going to get stuck; it's like writing, you have to start from where you could go forward. . . . We are not living in a borrowed culture, but one that we are creating, against a background of a lot of struggles an important one of which is to disengage from the bacchanal characterization that began in colonialism and create a self confident culture of our own.
> —Earl Lovelace[131]

In Earl Lovelace we find a West Indian author who across his oeuvre has written unfavorable depictions of Caribbean Black Power like Naipaul's, calypso-novels like Selvon's, and national allegories like Collins's. In his 1979 novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* Lovelace initially aligns himself with Naipaul when he metaphorizes Black Power in the form of a U. S.-branded police vehicle that literally runs out of gas in Trinidad.[132] We can also note that the Carnival setting of Selvon's final Moses novel prefigures the juxtaposition of Trinidadian literature, orality, and performance in Lovelace's most recent fiction *Is Just a Movie* (2011). However, in *Is Just a Movie*, Lovelace returns to Trinidad's 1970 February Revolution and reverses course by redefining Black Power's emergence on the island as autochthonous self-expression, wherein lies its considerable and unique value. Additionally, the author extends his

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[131] Earl Lovelace, "Calypso and the Bacchanal Connection," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005), 8.

[132] About Lovelace initially sharing Naipaul's opinion of Trinidad's Black Power Revolution, Gordon Rohlehr explains that "Lovelace, in 1967 and later in 1979, saw Trinidad society as Naipaul had seen the fictional island of Isabella in *The Mimic Men* (1967) . . . . That is, he was reading Trinidad through the metaphor of Carnival, in which all human activity is viewed as theatrical performance, parody, caricature or pappyshow." Later Rohlehr writes, "If . . . *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1981) is any indication, Lovelace viewed the 1970 Black Power insurrection as derivative, exhibitionist, brainless and directionless; a mas' played for the approval of some external validating agency rather than an autonomous affirmation of something rooted." See Gordon Rohlehr, *Perfected Fables Now: A Bookman Signs off on Seven Decades* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2019), 113, 117-118.

critique of black masculinity to join Collins in remedying the male chauvinism that plagued Naipaul's and Selvon's texts as well as his earlier novel, *Dragon Can't Dance*.

In his latest work Lovelace also plays out a disputation with his former self, which leads me to contend that what most aids this novel's recuperative project is its self-conscious, experimental form that combines heteroglossia, calypso, and allegory into a meta-narrative of the history of the Trinidad Revolution and its aftermath. In this chapter I argue that what Lovelace produces in *Is Just a Movie* is a work of historical metafiction that refines its calypso elements and defies generic conventions to exemplify how the West Indian novel has developed to the point at which Black Power in the Caribbean diaspora can be represented in a way that does not reduce it to mere mimicry, parody, or allegory. Lovelace's reimagining of the movement in Trinidad benefits from his having arrived at a narrative form that Funso Aiyejina calls "novelypso," which creates "a technique that . . . is versatile enough to articulate the complexities of the Caribbean psyche."[133] As such, Lovelace's latest work marks the much-needed intervention into the way Caribbean Black Power is recorded and remembered in literature.

My argument requires starting with a brief overview of Lovelace's 1979 novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, an important precursor to which I return when it informs my discussion of *Is Just a Movie* throughout this chapter. Because the title of *Is Just a Movie* invites us to apprehend the text as a film, my aim in reading the two novels together is to demonstrate how Lovelace takes character types familiar from *The Dragon Can't Dance* and recasts them, so to speak, in his later work to achieve more nuanced portrayals. I also illustrate how Lovelace's

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[133] Funso Aiyejina, "Novelypso: Earl Lovelace and the Bacchanal Tradition" in *A Place in the World: Essays and Tributes in Honor of Earl Lovelace @ 70*, ed. Funso Aiyejina (Caroni: Lexicon Trinidad Limited, 2008), 118.

metaphorization of Black Power in *Dragon*—from the stolen and spent jeep to the feckless badjohn—is refurbished in *Is Just a Movie* when the usefulness of the Movement is suggested via Lovelace's comparisons of Black Power to, for example, a lit torch and a pair of binoculars.

In my close reading of *Is Just a Movie*, I note how Lovelace takes up the critique of America's corrosive influence on the Caribbean, particularly as it pertains to the hegemony enjoyed by the United States as it shapes popular culture globally. Lovelace underscores the seriousness of the American film industry's trivialization of people of color and of indigenous history. The author ironizes his title by protesting in his novel against filmic exploitation of West Indians, pitching the struggle for Trinidadian self-representation as a battle of life and death. Lovelace invokes movies to reconsider the relationship between performance and authorship—arguing for the inextricability of one from the other. Indeed, taking his example from the world of filmmaking, he demonstrates that whether they adhere to a script or depart from it, performers enter into collaboration with authors. This collaboration is described in the novel as "choreography" and suggests how Caribbean Black Power can counter doubts about the movement's originality. Consequently, I turn to a discussion of choreography, particularly the etymology of the term, and liken it to Lovelace's experiments with narrative perspective that make explicit the conflation of performance with authorship. In so doing, I add to the number of readers who, since the publication of his 1996 novel *Salt*, are compelled to describe Lovelace's formal innovations figuratively.

I also address figuration's importance to Lovelace. For example, I show how in the author's illustration of the reformation of a misshapen steelpan, we can identify his reparative approach to the legacy of Black Power in Trinidad, his effort to make it instrumental again. In my analysis we see how Lovelace's metafictional reparation of Black Power's reputation extends

to the figure of the badjohn. The causeless rebel from *The Dragon Can't Dance* is rehabilitated into a legitimate revolutionary in *Is Just a Movie*.

Thereafter, I examine how the reconciliation between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians that proved unimaginable in *The Dragon Can't Dance* finally materializes in *Is Just a Movie* though only metaphorically. Lovelace's use of allegory to dramatize the antagonism between the nation's blacks and Indians underlines the conflict as a moral problem. With the aid of the distancing effect afforded by allegory, the author brings into relief the fact that Trinidad's calypsos and calypso-novels, as products of creolization, confirm the attainability of harmonious multicultural convergence on the island.

Of course, Lovelace's allegories invite comparisons to Merle Collins's *Angel*, and I elucidate how Lovelace joins Collins in dismantling the trope of the woman-as-nation in the Caribbean novel. Like Collins, Lovelace critiques the violence that has been done to this figure in the service of national representation. I demonstrate that he attenuates this violence in *Is Just a Movie* by virtue of the fact that several of his women characters variously share and shirk the duty of being a symbol of Trinidad.

Finally, I attend to Lovelace's formal innovations in this novel at the sentence level. I contend that Lovelace takes the structural problem that Black Power posed to the status quo and analogizes it to creolization's effect on English grammar in Trinidad. I parse the author's sentences to argue that, in *Is Just a Movie*, Lovelace invents a new, gender inclusive grammar of Caribbean Black Power.

Rewriting the Dragon

I must preface my discussion of *Is Just a Movie* with a brief reading of *The Dragon Can't Dance*.[134] In the Longman's 1981 paperback edition of this novel, the prologue ends with the narrator's imperative to "Dance!" on page 14, the book's verso side. But on page 15—the recto side—is the book's prohibitive title "The Dragon *Can't* Dance." The two contiguous statements, bound together on pages that face each other, anticipate the tense opposition between action and inertia in the novel's plot. *The Dragon Can't Dance* is set in a Trinidadian barrack yard atop Calvary Hill that is shared by its supercilious residents. There, as the third-person narrator tells us, the inhabitants perch precariously "on the eyebrow of the enemy."[135] This vantage is their only amenity. Offering no indoor plumbing nor privacy, the yard gathers an assortment of rented rooms around a communal standpipe. The book's initial chapters introduce each resident in turn. Rapidly eclipsing the yard doyenne Miss Cleothilde is seventeen-year-old Sylvia whose maidenhood preoccupies the men around her as well as the omniscient narrator. Though he is nicknamed "Fisheye," the surname of the novel's badjohn or miscreant figure, "Belasco John," means that the emblematic ruffian is literally a bad John. Comprising the sole Indo-Trinidadians in the yard are the ingratiating entrepreneur Pariag and his wife Dolly. But perhaps of most significance is the unemployed Aldrick whose bespoke dragon costume in which he dances every Carnival makes him the novel's titular character. However, even if no one else dances the dragon, there are suggestions that every character parades every day of the year in imitative and cumbersome costumes. The chapter titles, "Queen of the Road," "The Princess," "The Dragon," "The Bad John," identify the characters' disguises only to unmask them.

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[134] Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1981 [1979]), 10.

[135] Ibid., 10.

When over the course of the story some of the characters drop one role for another, their transformations point out the folly of limiting oneself to playing any one mask. We follow as Sylvia the princess dethrones the queen of the road Miss Cleothilde, and Pariag graduates from spectator to shopkeeper. This daily masquerade takes up much of the narrative until the novel's climax in which Aldrick, Fisheye, and seven similarly disaffected youths kidnap two policemen, commandeer the officers' jeep, and drive round Port of Spain shouting hungrily for "Power to the people" on empty stomachs until both the jeep and the hijackers run out of fuel. Thereafter the fugitives are arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned. Most of the action takes place in the mid-1960s with a coda set in 1971, but the novel does not mention the February 1970 Trinidad Revolution, which would have found Aldrick and Fisheye serving their jail time. If the novel alludes to the Revolution at all, it is dismissed as a joyride.

However, in *Is Just a Movie*[136] Lovelace rectifies his neglect of the Revolution, returning to the same setting and time period to rewrite many of the themes and character-types from *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Indeed, when placing the novels side by side we find that the ending of one and the beginning of the other fit together. Where *Dragon* ends with a chapter titled "The Calypsonian," concerning a character named Philo, *Is Just a Movie* begins by introducing its calypsonian narrator, Kangkala, also known as Donny. The calypso audiences in both novels help us to distinguish one singer from the other. It is only Philo who changes his repertoire when people tire of hearing protest songs. But even as he revolts in the calypso tent, Donny likens the 1970 Trinidad Revolution to a "show" that "was over" (6). Trinidad's Revolution is glossed over quickly by Donny with no talk of action, only consequence: "the state of emergency was

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[136] Earl Lovelace, *Is Just a Movie* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

declared. The heroes made their triumphant surrender. Then they disappeared" (6). Donny's abridgement of the movement bespeaks its brevity in Trinidad. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will show that in its entirety *Is Just a Movie* can be read as Lovelace's attempt to dilate Black Power's effects.

The calypsonian narrator of *Is Just a Movie* answers to many names: Donny, Kangkala, and King Kala. The first is his birth name. The second is the name under which he performs. The third, importantly, is a corruption of his alias that technically results from American influence, as Donny explains: "I was born again by a slip of the tongue when one night in the kaiso tent . . . for the benefit of foreigners in the audience, the Master of Ceremonies introducing me, proceeded to make his announcement with an American twang. He said, 'Ladies and gentlemen . . . this is your singer, King Kala'" (5). Here Donny acknowledges that the MC's attempt to sound American is an unwitting mistake, "a slip of the tongue."

The American-aping MC's mispronunciation of Donny's stage name is the first example of a significant pattern in this novel: in *Is Just a Movie* whenever America directs a West Indian's actions the result is some form of speech impediment—either a loss of control of one's tongue or the inability to speak or express oneself altogether. For an even more noteworthy example, when Donny and a fellow Black Power revolutionary named Sonnyboy audition for roles in an American film production on the island (the movie of the novel's title), they are given only non-speaking parts. Central casting has identified the Trinidadian actors as talented, decorative, and disposable. Donny complains that "The role they give me, the same one they give the locals, is a role to die. Local talent. Our role is to die. The rest of the people, they bring from America. They is the stars, the ones that have lines to speak, lives to live, in the movie of course" (25). Donny's preface to his description of the film for which he has been

hired as an extra, "So, I get this job to die," suggests that the following racialized stereotypes can be fatal: "Is a kind of jungle picture, with a river in it and a trail and a rope bridge and a love story and natives with headdresses of colored feathers, their splendid bodies bare except for grass skirts, carrying bwana packs over the mountains. And they have donkeys. I mean, we have donkeys. Some of us tote the loads on we head. Around us is the enemy, another warring tribe" (25). The lack of proper names for the jungle, river, and mountains that Donny mentions figuratively transforms the film's location into a flat scenic backdrop. The anonymization of the setting and of Donny and the other similarly burdened extras makes the distance that he wants to maintain between him and them immediately collapse: "they have donkeys. I mean, we have donkeys." Donny's hesitation to identify as a native is understandable considering that another word for "native" in this scenario is "enemy."

That all of the Trinidadian actors are given roles to die, full-stop, and not roles to die for is an underestimation of the local talent. Indeed, once filming commences, Sonnyboy, another talented fellar picked to die, performs his death so strikingly that Donny describes him as "the *author* of . . . magnificent dying" (28, emphasis added). Donny is then inspired to take a page from him for his own performance: "I fling out my arms too in the beautiful movements of the dance of my childhood and begin the exquisite *choreography* of my dying" (29, emphasis added).

As we have seen, Donny and Sonnyboy embellish the scripted roles assigned to them; and, notably, the novel makes plain that it is the amplification of their roles that the American director objects to. When what is demanded of them is an unremarkable death, Donny must defend his and Sonnyboy's decision to go off script. But Max, the film's director (and diametric opposite of Donny's minimal position), "swing his head and toss his mane," citing "Budget.

Shooting schedule. Time constraints" (29-30). The reported speech of Max's parataxis, "the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination) between them" (*OED*), reflects the constraints inherent in what Donny characterizes as "Whitepeople time" (29). "Whitepeople time," we gather, is too precious even to dispense complete sentences. The American, moreover, is not bound by the rules he wants Trinidadians to follow: despite the Whiteperson's parataxis, what is expected from Blackpeople is conjunction (coordinated, minor "roles" of little distinction) and subordination (acceptance of a rank lower than that of the lionized American director, who "toss[es] his mane," and also of the film's distinctive "stars"); for, as Max sees it, even if he only laconically articulates it, the local talent already have been sufficiently sentenced: they have been sentenced to death. This slippage between "sentences," understood as sets of words, and "sentences," as determinations of, say, capital punishment, Donny exploits with what sounds like a paraphrase of Freud's death drive: "No matter what your *plot*, we are human who would each like to leave our individual mark, our human signature, on our efforts and it is as human *we must die*" (30, emphases added). Here is no mere quibble between actor and director over the former's motivation. Donny's and Sonnyboy's death-defying performances are expressions of their humanity. Like Lovelace's novelistic recuperation of the quelled Trinidad Revolution, Donny and Sonnyboy attempt to transform a death scene into a scene of writing.

Given that the American script has already divided the Trinidadian actors into warring tribes, it is to be expected that Donny's protest meets with resistance from a fellow performer:

> "It is just a movie," Errol say. And as if to point us away from the pathos, the pain in the statement, he say it again, this time with half a laugh to give us the direction we should take: *"It is just a movie."* And you had to listen past the chuckle in his laughter to the

subtle agony bubbling in his voice, the sadness, the grief, the truth, the tears of a capped-down rage. (31)

Errol's dismissal of the significance of the representation of black humanity makes him complicit in securing black compliance and misery. But if we follow Sam Selvon's suggestion in *The Lonely Londoners* to look "under the kiff-kiff laughter," we find the hint of "subtle agony bubbling in [Errol's] voice" which tells us that he does not really mean the line that he repeats.[137] Yet in faithfully playing his part, Errol ironically reiterates what Sonnyboy, "the author of . . . magnificent dying," already has made plain, that the conflict staged here is over *authorship*; paradoxically Donny's and Sonnyboy's macabre poetics are, on the one hand, attempts to sign or co-sign and, on the other, *refusals* to sub-scribe to, Max's "plot."

The importance of seizing the authorial signature and choreographing one's life and death is the crux of *Is Just a Movie*. As I will demonstrate, Lovelace's characters practice what could be called "choreography" in its etymological sense, that is, a *chorus-writing* in which certain of the novel's dramatis personae share authorial control of what is nominally a first-person narrative. Additionally, in *Is Just a Movie*, we see how choreography recommends itself as a literary motif that can free Caribbean expressions of Black Power from accusations of mimicry when we remember that Black Power was a *movement*. Lovelace's use of choreography as a motif shows us how West Indians take ownership of Black Power in embodying the movement despite following steps or performing actions first arranged by someone else.

In comparing *Is Just a Movie* to choreography, I join several scholars in resorting to metaphor to describe Lovelace's unique narrative technique. With the help of Gordon Rohlehr's

[137] See Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (White Plains: Longman Publishing Group, 1985), 141.

work on the history of stickfighting in Trinidad, Funso Aiyejina appropriately situates Lovelace's narrators within the indigenous tradition of the chantwell, the champion singer of the stickfighting ring or gayelle. Aiyejina argues that "while Lovelace may experiment with first-, second-, and third-person (limited or omniscient) narrators, the narrative tradition that conditions his main narrators and their narrative options is, more often than not, the tradition of the chantwell/calypsonian with its multi-modal/nodal vision."[138] However, the figure of the chantwell doesn't by itself explain the abrupt but brief shifts in first-person perspective that create meta-narratives in Lovelace's *Is Just a Movie* and his 1996 novel *Salt*.[139] To account for these perspectival shifts, Trinidadian author Merle Hodge borrows the language of proprietorship: "The specific strategy of participatory narration [that was] introduced in *Salt* is a culmination of trends that have been developing in Lovelace's work over the years, advancing the writer's undertaking to make the subjects of fiction the collective owners of the story, joint *comptrollers* of the word."[140]

Especially useful to my conception of *Is Just a Movie* as a choreography is Bill Schwarz's categorization of Lovelace's work: "In Lovelace . . . the attempt to reconstruct in the novels and in the stories the rhythms of popular speech and the forms of calypso . . . produc[es]

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[138] Funso Aiyejina, "Novelypso," 108. Elsewhere Aiyejina describes Lovelace's fiction as "singing novels." See Funso Aiyejina, "Narrating the Narrator: An Occasion for Celebration" in *A Place in the World: Essays and Tributes in Honor of Earl Lovelace @ 70*, ed. Funso Aiyejina (Caroni: Lexicon Trinidad Limited, 2008), 5.

[139] Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996).

[140] Merle Hodge, "The Language of Earl Lovelace," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2006), 5 (emphasis added).

in the later fiction especially a hybrid genre of performative epic."[141] Following Schwarz's understanding of Lovelace's narrative technique as being informed by both Trinidadian calypso and performative epic, I suggest that we may consider that Donny the calypsonian narrator in *Is Just a Movie* functions as a modern coryphaeus, the chorus leader (but still firmly part of the chorus) in Ancient Greek drama.

Lovelace's modernization of the coryphaeus figure means that the dichotomous, call-and-response, "chantwell/chorus paradigm"[142] that Aiyejina proposes does not quite convey the complexity of Donny's indivisible connection to the chorus of other characters who sometimes expropriate the narrative perspective briefly before returning it to Donny. The expropriations occur without warning courtesy of shifting first-person pronouns that, again, don't always belong to Donny in this novel. In fact, Donny as narrator is sometimes supplanted even within a single sentence. In other words, other voices comment on Donny's commentary, and this heteroglossia creates a metanarrative. Given the fact that his perspective is susceptible to intermittent seizure by other characters, Donny might be regarded as an example of what Aiyejina calls "a sublimated first-person narrator who is regularly possessed and deployed by other characters to reiterate their version and consciousness of their stories. This narrative technique approximates the behavior of the medium in Orisa and other Africa-inspired rituals, who loses his or her voice and personality and is inhabited by, and sublimated to, the voice and distinctive personality traits

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[141] Bill Schwarz, "Introduction: 'Where is Myself?'," in *Caribbean Literature After Independence: The Case of Earl Lovelace*, ed. Bill Schwarz (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2008), (xii).

[142] Aiyejina, "Novelypso," 109.

of the possessing deity."[143] Though I find Aiyejina's theory of a spiritually possessed narrator well contextualized and provocative, it doesn't hold when we bear in mind that the characters who might be said to "possess" Donny are neither dead nor deities. Moreover, strictly speaking, it is not Donny who is variously "possessed" but the narrative.

Indeed, in *Is Just a Movie*, the multiple characters' negotiation of a first-person perspective illustrates how Trinidadians can and at any time take *ownership* of the telling of their *stories*. Via a loosely connected series of parabolic scenes in lieu of a tightly knit plot, *Is Just a Movie* recounts a fantastical version of Trinidad's history after the 1970 revolution unraveled. To challenge anti-black significations, the novel also emphasizes the importance of African-derived elements in Trinidadian culture. Additionally, I want to underscore here that one of Lovelace's feats of metafiction in this novel is that although his characters sometimes function as archetypes in a parable, they also occasionally insist on speaking only for themselves.

Women in *Is Just a Movie* are much more front and center than the female characters in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. In the earlier novel, Miss Cleothilde, Sylvia, and Dolly were mostly peripheral and reactive figures awaiting a male character's provocation. Theirs was a world in which male steelpan players stroked the pan "more gently than they will ever caress a woman."[144] The character of Lance in *Is Just Movie* certainly treats his pan better than he does his wife Lystra. But he also plays a relatively minor part in Lystra's life story. Indeed, Lystra's narrative arc, which has her immigrating to the United States, leaving her two sons and their

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[143] Funso Aiyejina, "Novelypso," 117. This quote appears under the heading "Narrative Possession," but what Aiyejina explicitly describes is not narrative possession but possession of the narrator.

[144] Lovelace, *Dragon Can't Dance*, 12.

father behind her, might be described as the story of one woman's refusal to be limited by her relationship to men. Her failure even to visit Trinidad again hints at the difficulty in returning to a former way of life. On the other hand, her oblique reappearance in the novel, in the form of a letter that she writes to her son, illustrates how exiles may return to the island discursively to make their voices heard in Trinidad.[145] Moreover, the female characters' interpolations into the novel, their refusal to let Donny speak for them, solve a problem that Lovelace himself has sometimes had when rendering women in his work. The aphasia that temporarily strikes Donny near the novel's end suggests that one way to avoid misrepresenting others is to be quiet.[146] This is not to say that Lovelace calls for calypsonians to keep their mouths shut. Here is only the recognition that whenever we give our attention to one voice, other voices go unheard.

In wrestling over the narration, the characters in *Is Just a Movie* might be said to compete with each other for audibility. In this respect they enact Black Power's attempt to acquire a signal when antiracist concerns were so often dismissed as noise. Against the perception of Trinidadian Black Power as dissonance, Lovelace's solution is to treat its history like an instrument that needs retuning. Such would explain why in two novels the author dramatizes a

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[145] It must be admitted that the idea that there is an audience for Trinidadian discourse is comically undercut in the novel in the figure of "John de John the novelist from Matura with thirty-five unpublished novels" (193). Later, it is recorded that John de John has only "twenty-four unpublished novels" (310). Regardless, de John typifies all West Indian artists who are productive but given no platform, particularly a local one, for their work. In this respect, the fact that Lystra writes from America may explain why her discourse, and not John de John's, reaches an addressee.

[146] Donny's aphasia might also be read as a metaphor for what happens to the calypsonian during Lent, as Lovelace explains: "Once Carnival was done, Lent came in . . . . We were not allowed to sing calypsos in Lent, so imagine the frustration. You dying to tell someone about a calypso you had heard or a band you had seen in Carnival, and you couldn't speak." See Earl Lovelace, "Calypso and the Bacchanal Connection," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005), 7.

musician's pursuit of an elusive unsounded note that, in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, saxophonist Norman "Tex" Williams aspires to but never can hit. But after considerable trial and error, pan-player Lance eventually succeeds in striking the right note in *Is Just a Movie*. In reading the two texts together, the theme of impossibility in *The Dragon Can't Dance* that explains Tex's failure also makes any attainability of success significant in the later novel.

In *Is Just a Movie* the suggestion that Black Power may be analogized to an instrument that needs retuning to sound out its potential is explicitly illustrated in the quarrel between Lance and Lystra over a smashed steelpan. Lystra asks Lance why he would want to repair a pan that despite his solicitous attention will never again sound as it had in the past, "And is then, before he could answer, it *hit* her: somewhere in pounding to find the lost note, Lance had begun to hear a note that as yet hadn't made a sound. . . . [This was] a note unsounded and sacred and surprising and potential" (42-43, emphasis added). Though Lance pounds only his pan, Lystra also is "hit," and the answer that treats Lystra like a steelpan prefigures the psychic drubbing Lystra takes from all around her:

> [Lystra's] mother and those neighbors, who know the trouble she seeing, looking from Lance and his patient tenderness with the pan to her to see what she doing with this man, and she could hear them thinking, *if he had with you the patience he have with that pan, if he had with his children, with work the patience he have with that pan* . . . She tried her best to be supportive. She wanted to assist. But, they were right. She couldn't help but observe his patient tenderness with the pan, and she find the same words leaving her head and finding her voice: "If you had with me the patience you have with that pan . . . If you had with work, with your children, the resolve you have with that pan . . . If you had . . . if you . . . if you . . . if if if . . . if . . ." (43)

Like Lance, Lystra hears what is yet unsounded—her mother's and neighbors' telepathic shaming of her man—over which she obsesses until she makes audible what only "she could hear": "if you had with me the patience you have with that pan . . . if you had with work, with your children, the resolve you have with that pan . . . ." Such wishful thinking is parsed as the optative, the verbal mood that expresses a wish or desire even as the ellipsis in the above example guarantees that Lystra's and her neighbors' wish never shall be fulfilled. Indeed, their wish is impossible to grant given that it conjures a counterfactual *past* for Lystra and Lance (the past tense of the verb *to have* and the ellipsis combine to suggest that a *future* in which Lance extends his patience beyond his pan cannot be even *imagined*). Of the optative Andrew H. Miller writes that "[i]t understands one's past through an acknowledgement of what one has not done, what one has not been."[147] Likewise, the chorus of voices that Lystra hears and harmonizes with feels no nostalgia for a Lance that *was* but declaims instead only what he has not done for, and has not been to, his wife, his children, and his work.

Similarly, if we take the hint, in *Is Just a Movie*, that retrieving the recent Trinidadian past is neither possible nor in many instances desirable, then the novel's recourse to the optative is practical. Like Lance's refurbished steelpan, the lost energy that was instrumental to Black Power is, as with any history, material that cannot be recovered intact but which, nonetheless, Lovelace reshapes for its "potential," even as his fiction admits what Black Power has *not* been or done in the region. Though *Is Just a Movie* likens black radical politics to Lance's unsounded note, this "note unsounded and sacred and surprising and potential," once Lovelace and Lance

[147] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 193.

are able "to get that note to sound," there is evidence that it has, paradoxically, been heard before, ringing in a hymn that Lance and Lystra's adult son, Sonnyboy, recognizes:

> [T]he melody of the hymn for years had been in the ears of the hill from the church of Mother Olga and Mr. Trim:
>
> > *I am a warrior out in the fields,*
> >
> > *and I can sing. And I can shout . . .*
> >
> > [. . .]
> >
> > *And I can tell it tell it tell it* (50)

This hymn's old promise of black resistance Sonnyboy makes new. For black power *in potentia* sounds a lot like black torpor when we note the discrepancy between what the *hymn* "tells" and what *Sonnyboy* later tells when he recounts the story of his father's steelpan: "Sonnyboy found himself telling of the first time his father went on the road with the steelpan he had [re]tuned and was attacked by the police, of his own astonishment and outrage as he watched the people unable or unwilling or afraid to retaliate, establishing this episode as the basis of his own resolve, *I not fucking taking that*, a declaration that even the fellars recognized as his way of sharpening his determination to stand against humiliation from any agency, be it individual or state" (56). The earlier, optative criticism of Lance redounds upon his neighbors in Sonnyboy's apostrophe to police brutality, for behind what Sonnyboy tells is a wish that people had behaved differently. What further answers the blackpeople's refusal to help his father is Sonnyboy's own neglect of the helping verb *am* in his "I not fucking taking that," a foreshortened syntax that makes ontological what Sonnyboy is not fucking taking; or, put less crudely, Sonnyboy's "determination" is *to be* everything for which Black Power raises a fist.

Later, Lovelace uses Sonnyboy's vernacular translation and interpretation of Black Power to relocate the center of the movement to the Caribbean: "in political detention, as he [Sonnyboy] listened to the Black Power leaders exchange stories of themselves and present insights from Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Walter Rodney of the violence rooted in the colonial situation, he realized that his *I not fucking taking that* was no different to fellars shouting for Black Power" (75). Here three of the four men that the narrator references are from the Caribbean—Fanon (from Martinique), Carmichael (from Trinidad), and Rodney (from Guyana)—suggesting that the Black Power movement has stronger Caribbean origins than elsewhere. In this respect, Fanon's and Carmichael's and Rodney's articulations of *I not fucking taking that* herald the shouts for Black Power around the globe. They are leaders from the Caribbean who linked U.S. oppression to colonialism and demonstrate not only what is unique about Caribbean Black Power but also its substantial contributions to American Black Power.

The eloquence of Fanon, Carmichael, and Rodney lays bare the pedantry that one must eschew to appreciate the import of Sonnyboy's ungrammatical *I not fucking taking that*. It is therefore significant that the coarseness of his extempore speech, which delimits its reach, is circumvented when Sonnyboy "gained an even wider audience for his work" after the aphorisms he adopts to express himself are published under the title "Sonnyboy Speaks":

> *The voice of the people is the voice of God.*
>
> *Righteousness shall prevail.*
>
> *We shall overcome.*
>
> *Who don't want to hear will feel.*
>
> *I will not let you go until you bless me.* (147)

The list above certainly makes Sonnyboy vulnerable to accusations of plagiarism. Indeed, "I will not let you go until you bless me" is an unattributed verbatim quotation of Donny's Aunt Magenta. Nevertheless, Donny's insistence that "These were not ideas [Sonnyboy] had copied, but positions he had arrived at on his own" argues that what the unlettered Black Power revolutionary lacks is not originality but a syntax and vocabulary (147). Black Power gives the badjohn a language he can enter into to express experience that is nonetheless unique to him.

Indeed, Lovelace shows us that in the absence of Black Power, Sonnyboy would have been just another Fisheye, his precursor in *The Dragon Can't Dance,* and his "being a badjohn [would] not quite qualify him as a revolutionary" (76). To be sure, we receive from Fisheye a first draft of Sonnyboy's rallying cry, "*I not fucking taking that*": speaking of himself and his fellow limers to any policeman who dares attempt to oust them, Fisheye promised that "Nobody ain't moving on."[148] But, as we have seen in *Is Just a Movie*, Black Power provides the lens through which Lovelace re-views the figure of the badjohn. The idea that Black Power offers a framework for reassessment is illustrated in the gift that Black Power leaders bestow on Sonnyboy: "a pair of binoculars for him to bring faraway objects near" (74). The Movement equips Sonnyboy with telescopic vision, the ability to magnify what he can't well see and to shorten the distance between himself and what would otherwise be out of his reach. It is as if Black Power points to the horizon while quoting to Sonnyboy a line from Derek Walcott's "The Sea is History": "strop on these goggles, I'll guide you there myself." Thereafter, Sonnyboy observes that "[r]evolution . . . was the turning over of things," a reminder that Lovelace enacts his own revolution by revisiting and revising his previous motifs (145). To drive this point home

[148] Lovelace, *Dragon*, 172.

Lovelace also presents the reappraisal of the badjohn in the following dialogue between Sonnyboy and his partner, Sweetie-Mary:

> "Badjohn? That is how you see me? A badjohn?"
>
> "So, you not a badjohn?"
>
> "What you think?"
>
> "I don't know." (119)

Where Sweetie-Mary is doubtful, Donny, as if speaking for Lovelace himself, is certain, admitting about the questionable badjohn, "I had totally misread the man" (35).

Is Just a Movie entreats us to understand that what partially explains why some badjohns are vulnerable to being misread is that such men may not have the words to express themselves well. This point is affirmed eloquently when Lovelace writes about Sonnyboy that "he was searching for his real voice" (108). An example beyond Sonnyboy is his badjohn uncle Egbert, a frustrated poet (calypsonian) whose misfortune in being inarticulate manifests as violence (66). Via the characterizations of Egbert and Sonnyboy, Lovelace demonstrates in *Is Just a Movie* how the figure of the badjohn deserves a much more astute and compassionate interpretation than it had enjoyed previously.

Lovelace's reassessment of the badjohn is pegged to the author's reappraisal of Black Power, which is likened to the flambeaux that Sonnyboy holds aloft during a National Party meeting.[149] Consisting of bottles of kerosene, with strips of clothing serving as wicks, the

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[149] The "National Party" in Lovelace's novels functions as what John Thieme describes as "a thinly-veiled surrogate for the PNM (People's National Movement)." See John Thieme, "Earl Lovelace: The Poetics and Politics of His Fiction," in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, eds. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 61. https://search.proquest.com/docview/2137958781?accountid=14512. Bill Schwarz adds that Lovelace's "fictional 'National Party' and its fictional 'leader' . . . represent closely the historical

flambeaux, we are told, "gave good light; and the only manipulation needed to keep them from going out was that the bottles had to be tilted every now and then to keep the wicks moistened and the flame alive" (98). Lovelace, following the torchbearers' example of cobbling together old material for new uses, unsettles his previous characterization of black populist resistance to argue that, like the flambeaux, Black Power needs only to be upended to be illuminating and incendiary.

A New Black Power

In *The Dragon Can't Dance* jealousy explained the antipathy between blacks and Indians in Trinidad. About Afro-Trinidadians, Aldrick contends that "the little they have they frighten the Indian come and give them competition."[150] In *Is Just a Movie* Lovelace details how this competition extended to the demand for civil rights. The failure to reconcile Trinidad's blacks and Indians is emblematized in this novel in the form of a black flag carried during a Black Power demonstration. As the flag is waived it sends a semaphore signal that widens a wedge between blacks and Indians; this signal is decoded as: "the black flag is for the land, for the place, for the people who we fighting with and for" (163). The flag marks the exclusion of Indo-Trinidadians in the fight for racial justice—as Donny confesses: "Romesh and Soogrim had been excluded from the march by those of us who wanted to see it only as an African thing" (166). (Even the red flags that have been circulated at Black Power demonstrations signify the blood shed for the cause by black people only. That an Indian should carry either flag is verboten.) On

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PNM [People's National Movement] and the historical Eric Williams." See Bill Schwarz, "Introduction: 'Where is Myself?'," in *Caribbean Literature After Independence: The Case of Earl Lovelace*, ed. Bill Schwarz (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2008), xvi.

[150] Lovelace, *Dragon Can't Dance*, 111.

the cricket field, blacks and Indians play together on the same team. Therefore, the ostracizing of Romesh and Soogrim by their black teammates indicates that Africa could loom too large in Caribbean expressions of Black Power. Suggested here is that even as the "black" in "Black Power" recuperated African identity, it also limited the movement by imbuing it as essentially African. Evidenced by the March 12, 1970 Black Power demonstration in which over 6,000 Afro-Trinidadians marched from Port of Spain to the Indian sugar workers in Caroni, which was instrumental in winning support from East Indians (as discussed in chapter one), Black Power's success in Trinidad depended on a more capacious understanding of who may be considered "black" on the island.

Focalized through Donny is the novel's suggestion that the Black Power movement in Trinidad stumbles when it essentializes "black" as strictly of African descent. Donny reflects that "it was strange that now when at last we had the opportunity to claim Africa we would want to do so at the expense of all we had created here in the Caribbean" (183). According to Donny, it is the turn to Africa that obscures what originated in the West Indies. If Black Power in the Caribbean accomplishes only a return to Africa, it will mean that Afro-Trinidadians will have "gone forward to right back where [they] had begun" (185).

In *Is Just a Movie*, this retrogressive vision of Black Power is epitomized in the character of Clayton Blondell who, in some respects, resembles Michael Abdul Malik (see chapter one). Like Malik, Blondell is known as a "leader of a commune" (180). As Donny describes him, Blondell's solipsism, unoriginality, and attention-seeking also recall Malik: "as he [Blondell] spoke, batting aside interruptions, I detected no new message, but if his objective was to become the center of focus, he achieved it" (181). Lovelace's Malik-like figure, however, significantly differs from Naipaul's in that Blondell's influence is comparatively benign. Though he

humiliates a woman, he has none killed. And his effect on Sonnyboy, to Donny's chagrin, is largely sartorial, responsible for the "expensive African clothes" that Sonnyboy takes to wearing (184). Donny's displeasure at Sonnyboy's atavism evinces how the Black Power movement, when taken to extremes, could alienate people of Indian *and* African descent.

In *The Dragon Can't Dance* Indian alienation from Afro-Caribbean communities was emblematized in Pariag's estrangement from the life of the yard and his denial of entry into the homosocial and monoracial arena of the street corner. Furthermore, his success as a shopkeeper at the end of the novel insinuated that Indians were rising in rank in Trinidad. By contrast, in the interracial marriage between Claude and his wife Arlene in *Is Just a Movie*, Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians appear to be firmly paired. About himself and his wife, Claude initially insists, "We are the new world" (239). But soon Claude revises this cosmology as only prospective, asking himself, "What of the new world of which they had dreamed? He began to see that to arrive at it they had to struggle with each other" (261). In allegorizing Claude and Arlene's marital woes to inter-ethnic tensions in Trinidad, Lovelace implies that a marriage or some other sacred union of blacks and Indians on the island is insufficient to the task of harmonizing them. Instead of unproductive exchanges—as symbolized in Claude and Arlene's childless status—Trinidad's new world demands a fruitful, dialectical relationship between the two ethnic groups. But the fact that Arlene's Hindu family disowns her for marrying a black man warns that Trinidad will not achieve inter-ethnic solidarity without great personal sacrifice.

In *Is Just a Movie* the reconciliation of the Indian and the African in Trinidad is given incarnate form via the character of V. S. Rooplal, through whom Lovelace also affectionately

trolls Selvon and Naipaul.[151] As "a dougla fella" (57)—that is, "of mixed blood, African and Indian" (59)—Rooplal embodies a more capacious understanding of "black" that would include Indo-Trinidadians. Obviously Rooplal shares first and middle initials with Vidia Surajprasad Naipaul, and he and Selvon have in common immigration to Canada where they both worked briefly as janitors.[152] More important, however, is the significant role that Rooplal plays in dislodging the cloud of sadness that hovers over Trinidad at the end of the novel. This literal cloud also symbolizes the violence that has overshadowed the island. In a subtle dig at Naipaul, Selvon, and even Lovelace himself, the cloud of sadness that Rooplal disperses is a metaphor for the dangers that lurk in the reification of harmful tropes; or, as one character describes the dangerous slippage from fiction to fact: "What was performance in Carnival is now the reality of life. The devil is no longer in the make-believe of Carnival, he is right here on our streets. The Midnight Robber is not a character in our fiction, he is in possession of real guns" (229). To banish the cloud, Rooplal's solution is "for the people to put aside ethnic loyalties and come together for Carnival and dance" (337).[153] Funso Aiyejina notes that Lovelace "celebrates dance

[151] In all fairness, in *Is Just a Movie* Lovelace also trolls himself in the figure of "John de John the novelist from Matura" who is prolific but given no platform for his "twenty-four" to "thirty-five unpublished novels" (310, 193).

[152] See Ken McGoogan, "Samuel Selvon: Janitor to Writer-in-Residence." *Calgary Herald Magazine* 27 October 1985: 7.

[153] Invoking the troubled history of Trinidad's relationship with Canada, an oneiric solution to disperse the cloud of sadness, proposed by "Professor Matthew Wrinkler of Nova Scotia," implicates Canada in the killing of Trinidadian aspiration: "His [Professor Wrinkler's] recommendation was simple. The state and private enterprise needed to join together to rid the people of unrealistic and stifling dreams" (317).

as one of the artistic ways in which the enslaved New World African affirmed and celebrated his/her power/control of his/her body."[154]

But it must be noted that in *Is Just a Movie* Lovelace expresses the worry that Trinidadian dance along with the nation's other powerful art forms have been subdued by cooptation into the tourist industry. Outsiders visiting the island find themselves "[d]elighted that the cultural forms, which had been used by delinquents and rebels to challenge and disturb the peace and welfare of the law-abiding citizens, have now been fashioned to provide . . . such marvelous entertainment" (326). Therefore, the challenge now is to make dancing, Carnival, and calypso formidably rebellious again without literalizing the devil and the midnight robber. Lovelace makes an exception, however, for the moko-jumbies or stilt-walkers, "towering above everybody, seeing far ahead and seeing far behind," demonstrating a comprehensive vision that merits year-round actualization (348).

The marriage between Claude and Arlene and the mixed-race figure of V. S. Rooplal are not the only allegories of interracial relations in *Is Just a Movie*. In the narrative's description of the coming of electricity to Cascadu (the fictional name of a village outside Port of Spain), modern Trinidad's catholic collection of religions and ethnicities is associated with commerce, power, light, and mobility; for following "the caravan toting electricity poles and equipment for road works" are "merchants . . . and behind them the religious people . . . Pentecostal preachers

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[154] Funso Aiyejina, "Novelypso: Earl Lovelace and the Bacchanal Tradition" in *A Place in the World: Essays and Tributes in Honor of Earl Lovelace @ 70*, ed. Funso Aiyejina (Caroni: Lexicon Trinidad Limited, 2008), 104. On Lovelace's suggestion of the liberatory possibilities of dance, Bill Schwarz cautions that "The metaphorical properties of this mode of thought are clear, and it would be wrong to take them too literally: nowhere does Lovelace suggest that the material realities of exploitation can be resolved 'in the dance'." See Bill Schwarz, "Being in the World," in *Caribbean Literature After Independence: The Case of Earl Lovelace*, ed. Bill Schwarz (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2008), 13.

. . . Adventists, Hindu pundits, Muslim imams . . . Hare Krishna . . . Shouter Baptist mothers . . . Shango leaders . . . all the elements that were to take the town into modernity" (176-177). This suggestion that Trinidad's infrastructure depends on multiculturalism opposes the stance taken by the novel's prime minister character, known only as "PM," who offers a competing notion of what it means to consider that in Trinidad, as is said, all o' we is one. The novel's correlation of public utility and cultural diversity makes the PM's position that "modern civilization" would have "no ethnic association" appear unenlightened (300).

The prime minister in *Is Just a Movie* evokes Eric Williams who served Trinidad and Tobago in that role from 1962 to 1981.[155] However, in Lovelace's novel, the PM of T & T reigns for 40+ years. This tenure, belied by history, counterfactually heightens the character's figurative function. Nevertheless, both Williams and Lovelace's caricature of him inherit the same problem after Trinidad wins independence, which is "the challenge of blending the discipline derived from the order imposed by the plantation, the creativity that came out of resistance and the anarchy of individual rebellion, and at the end still come up with one nation" (265). For Lovelace's PM, meeting this challenge requires the suspension of disbelief: "He had to accept the fiction that every ethnic and religious group had started off with equal opportunity" (269). Significantly, what prompts the PM to resign is his failure as a storyteller: "All the work

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[155] Eric Williams's repeated but oblique appearances in Lovelace's work may be explained by the novelist's comment about the former Prime Minister that "It was hard to imagine anyone more suited for caricature. He had a distinctive height, look. He was masked with dark shades. Nobody in public saw his real face. He was equipped with a hearing aid. In the early days he had a cigarette dangling from his lips. His speaking voice was unique, his vocabulary and rhythms a kind of baroque Trinidadian, his cadences echoing the Midnight Robber, his repartee as swift and sharp as an extempore calypsonian's, his attitude that of the badjohn. In addition he was griot, historian, *obeah* man, the third brightest man in the world. This was The Man." See Earl Lovelace, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan," *The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (1998), 57.

he had done to produce a narrative that included everybody as equal victims of a system unraveled" (266). The unraveling of the PM's narrative followed by his preoccupation with writing an aborted resignation letter means that the character represents not only Eric Williams but the trope of the charismatic prime minister as author of the nation.

The novel's prime minister figure gives Lovelace an opportunity to hold disingenuous nation-building narratives up to critique. For example, embedded within the PM's indictment of Black Power is another apology for his lack of success, an attempt to "lay blame that had been heaped on him at the door of colonial history, its injustice, prejudice and waste that left Blackpeople so impatient for an equal place, that less than six years after he take power (power?) he would find the army in mutiny, the youth, unemployed and trade unions demonstrating in the streets, productivity down, business people packing up to leave, and a set of Black Power drums vibrating in his head" (265). As we have seen, in the PM's letter is not only a defense of Caribbean ingenuity, the recognition of "the creativity that came out of resistance" (265). The letter also explains why that resistance falls short of creating one unified nation. The essence of the PM's resignation letter, perhaps muted by the beat of the Black Power tattoo, is the suggestion that power in newly independent Trinidad remained parenthetical—that is, qualified and questionable: "power (power?)." One of the things that qualifies the PM's power is the fact that the unwavering faith in him by "supporters still waiting for salvation" can be explained only by an enraptured people's faith in a messiah (267). For example, every time Donny's Aunt Magenta is asked to defend the PM, she can respond only by resorting to bibliomancy (97).

The PM's provocative insinuation likening Black Power to a drumbeat that punctuates the nation's problems provides a counterpoint in the novel to Donny's definition of the movement in Trinidad. Donny's recollection of the 1970 Revolution is that "For just a moment,

we in Black Power had parted the silence that curtained the biggest issues in this land—the dignity of Blackpeople, opportunity, equality, what was to be done, how to go on" (22). Nothing could be more inimical to a calypsonian than the absence of sound. It is therefore only natural that Donny should define Black Power in terms of the aural. This definition resonates with Donny's remarks about Maurice Bishop, revolutionary Grenada's prime minister after Eric Gairy was unseated, in which we will note Donny's tacit identification of the Grenada Revolution as a Black Power movement: "I had gone to hear . . . Maurice Bishop speak when he came to Trinidad, and had been impressed by his charisma, hopeful that here at last in the Caribbean was a group of persons prepared *to tackle the silence* that had continued from emancipation" (219, emphasis added). For Donny, the oppressive reticence concerning racial inequality in both Grenada and Trinidad warrants the same piercing clamor: "Black Power!" In Donny's conflation of "Maurice Bishop" and "a group of persons," one man embodies the Grenada Revolution. Consequently, other important revolutionaries are anonymized and absorbed into one voice. This stands in stark contrast to the anonymization of the prime minister figures in Merle Collins's *Angel*.

What further distinguishes *Is Just a Movie* from *Angel* is the former's reimagining of the Grenada Revolution's demise. When Donny discusses the death of the Revo, it is as if he enters into a shared consciousness that results in the loss of his voice:

> [W]hen I open my mouth, is like the weight of all the years just fall on me and strike me dumb. No sound came out and I was back in Grenada and all I could hear was the roar of planes, grenades exploding and gun mouths flashing murder. . . . And I was seeing me everywhere. That is me, there and over there and over there . . . I am the military commander with the pips on my shoulder and the gun in my hand. I am the dedicated

comrade, the revolutionary worker standing under the avocado tree with a smile from his teeth one moment before a gunshot ripped through his thigh and before he could shout another slammed through his windpipe. . . . And all the time I trying to sing . . .

But my voice is not my own. (292-293)

Donny's alliteration makes "grenades" repeat "Grenada" but with a difference, just as Donny is repeated but also transformed as he begins to see himself first as "the military commander" and then "the revolutionary worker," both of whom, depending on a shift in point of view, are but synonymic repetitions of a "dedicated comrade." Again, the pronoun shifts, wherein "I" equals "that" equals "he," place the gun in Donny's hand *and* the "gunshot . . . through his windpipe" to redetermine as a suicide the fratricidal death of the Grenada Revolution. Donny's subsequent aphasia is the psychosomatic response to the psychic "gunshot . . . through his windpipe," which prevents Donny from voicing his memory of hearing the phrase with which Grenadians freed themselves from Eric Gairy's tyranny: *"This is the revolution, resistance is futile*," a claim that is rendered dubious after the events of 1983 (293); for it is as if what must remain unstated is any suggestion that the Revo's failures prove the futility of revolutionary resistance.

But there is one significant point of agreement between Merle Collins and Earl Lovelace. As Collins has done in *Angel*, Lovelace in his novel puts pressure on the figure of the woman-as-nation in the literature of decolonization. In *Is Just a Movie* the author devises a gendered allegory of Trinidad via the character of Dorlene Cruickshank. In disdaining most local men, and as a prize over whom such men compete, Dorlene calls to mind Miss Cleothilde and Sylvia from *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Lovelace makes Dorlene's narrative arc parallel Trinidad's by staging a violent culture clash between a European and a West Indian in the Cruickshank family yard. When the immigrant Englishwoman Phyllis Dorset hires the Trinidadian truckdriver

Alliman Brown to transport her piano, the rope securing the piano to Brown's truck breaks. The piano then slides from the truck and crashes into the Cruickshanks' veranda, causing Mr. Brown to complain, "These people come from England and bring everything with them, why they don't look for things we make here" (189). Mr. Brown's position that the English don't look for things made in the Caribbean because they bring everything with them explains why indigenous products of the West Indies may go unrecognized by the English.

Moreover, it is arguable that Phyllis Dorset's piano also stands in for other instruments of art—like books and movies—with which people of European descent damage, in one way or another, property belonging to West Indians. On the one hand, when Mr. Brown's rope breaks, it is hinted that the load that the English engage the West Indian to carry is too heavy. On the other hand, when Dorlene learns to play the piano that Phyllis Dorset never reclaims, she shows how West Indians can take up a European's discarded instrument and master it. Unfortunately, the piano creates discord between Dorlene and other Trinidadians—as Donny explains, "It was the prestige of this possession that her parents would take to heart and set themselves apart from the town and encourage Dorlene to think she was better than other people" (191). Learning to play the piano is the first step of Dorlene's educational journey away from her hometown of Cascadu. When Dorlene subsequently wins a placement at a secondary school in Port of Spain, Donny's Aunt Magenta laments, "Poor thing. . . . She will not know the bush teas and the songs and the dances. She will live on the edge of the world that is her world" (191). Magenta's prophesy comes true; Dorlene's pursuit of a Catholic education, which privileges European culture, consigns her to the margins of her Caribbean milieu.

The figure of Dorlene is pressed into the service of so many of Lovelace's ideas that it is no wonder that the character dies of exhaustion only to be resurrected and troped again. It

almost goes without saying that Dorlene's illusory death attests to how the allegory of the woman-as-nation is moribund. As the virtuous object of Donny's unrequited love, Dorlene combines the queen and the princess from *The Dragon Can't Dance*. When lesser men take her for granted, she again becomes a stand-in for Trinidad. Indeed, in consorting with men unworthy of her, she embodies the island's misplaced affections—a metaphor most obviously for the nation's courting of ultimately bad investments. Dorlene's running herself to death in her effort to organize a steelpan orchestra also dramatizes what Lovelace, in an essay published in 1998, has called the "Almost Loss of Pan," in which he laments that "With the Emancipation-Jouvay figures emptied of their force and threat, and steelband tamed and almost put to bed, it is time for us to look elsewhere for the challenge that has always been integral to the Emancipation-Jouvay tradition."[156] Optimistically, because it is a child who alerts everyone to the fact that Dorlene in her coffin is not dead, there is the intimation that younger generations will be responsible for recognizing Trinidad's vitality if not resuscitating the nation altogether. However, the prime minister's subsequent exploitation of the "miracle" of Dorlene's resurrection, another unsubtle anti-tourism metaphor, suggests how difficult it will be to change the status quo.[157] And, finally, it must be said that as an allegory of Trinidad, Dorlene shares her duties with 1) Arlene, who, as I have mentioned, embodies Indo-Trinidad, and 2) with Donny's Aunt Magenta whose

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[156] Earl Lovelace, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan," *The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (1998), 60.

[157] In capitalizing on the death-defying Dorlene's international media attention and the potential tourism it might generate, Parliament appears to sample a line from Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi": "They paved paradise. Put up a parking lot." Donny complains that "They take what used to be Shannon cricket ground, where Learie Constantine, C. L. R. James and Pascal used to play, and make a car park" (313).

abandonment by her England-bound lover may be read as an indictment of every Trinidadian expatriate.

A New Black Power in Trinidad Requires a New Grammar

In *Is Just a Movie*, Lovelace doesn't just put to bed overworked tropes, as he literally does with the figure of Dorlene; he also emends the grammar of Black Power in Trinidad to remarkable effect. For example, the linguistic structure of Sonnyboy's manifesto tacitly reappears in the performance of Donny's cousin, Franklyn, during a game of cricket. Only the "that" that Franklyn is "not fucking taking" is what Franklyn at bat deems an untimely bowl—as Donny recalls: "He had a lot of no's, that is, when he actually play the ball for no runs, 'Noo!' He had a lot of no's. As if he knows that it have time in the world. And all that is batting and he ain't even start to score yet" (90-91). Franklyn's "no's" translate homophonically into what he "knows" in his *via negativa* approach to batting. But Franklyn, like Sonnyboy, does not promise to just say no. Significantly, in Donny's cricket color commentary, another echo of Sonnyboy is heard: "I not even talking yet about Franklyn going down on one knee and sweeping to square leg or climbing back on his back foot and slapping it back past the bowler" (91). The same stresses and number of syllables in Sonnyboy's "I not fucking taking that" we scan in Donny's "I not even talking yet," which signals that Sonnyboy's poetics of resistance may be parodied to describe any competition.

Moreover, the novel hints that an echo of Sonnyboy also appears to be the unsounded note behind Franklyn as he defends his wicket, where a) his genuflections before striking are, like Sonnyboy's declaration, violent subversions of something found in church, and b)

Franklyn's batting, too, redefines what it means to be "a warrior out in the fields." But my reading has interrupted Donny, when he was about to tell us more about Franklyn:

> I ain't talking yet of Franklyn up on tiptoes . . . his bat come down sweet and long . . . slap, between the keeper and slips, *How you going to stop we? How you go keep we down?* And all round the wicket . . . would be the music of bat on ball, punctuated by the chorus of our applause; though, it wasn't Franklyn alone we were applauding. When Franklyn batting we were the ones batting, and in the . . . contest with the world. He was holding the bat but the strokes was our strokes and the bowler was England or Australia or Pakistan. (91)

Donny's narration erases the distance between spectator and player in a perspectival shift from first person singular to first person plural as the interrogating slap of bat on ball demands "*How you going to stop we? How you go keep we down?*" If in Trinidad the bowler figures for a larger opponent like "England or Australia or Pakistan," it is because cricket is one of very few ways in which a small island nation can turn an international contest into a *winnable* game.[158] And if the admission of self-applause sounds shameless, it is because Trinidadian self-congratulation is warranted when, as we saw in Naipaul's work, such recognition otherwise is not forthcoming. "The music of bat on ball, punctuated by *the chorus of our applause*" are but *multiple* re-percussions of Sonnyboy's singular "I not fucking taking that," a refrain that, Sonnyboy realized, "was no different to fellars shouting for Black Power" (75).

It is significant that Donny's, albeit brief, pluralization of the narrative perspective from "I" to "we" raises by several decibels a radical shout comparable to one Sonnyboy makes alone.

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[158] For more on the political significance of cricket to Trinidad, see C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* [1963], (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

It further amplifies the fact that collectively, of course, resistant voices have a greater chance of being heard, even if they are "saying the same thing [Sonnyboy] had been saying for years . . . . [T]hey didn't have to tiptoe around the issues. They spoke out bold. . . . These fellars had better words and more history, but the sentiment was the same" (73). Likewise, though "*How you go keep we down?*" and "I not fucking taking that" share a "sentiment," the polyphony of the spectators' chorus points to the comparative poverty of Sonnyboy's solo performance and reminds us that Black Power depends on not an "I" but a "we."

The valorization of the expressive power of first-person, vernacular speech in *Is Just a Movie* aligns Lovelace's novel with Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* but marks a significant departure from *The Dragon Can't Dance*.[159] In Lovelace's earlier text the characters struggle to be intelligible and need the omniscient narrator to articulate their ideas. But in *Is Just a Movie* we see how in dispersing his novel's narration among characters who speak in both high and low registers Lovelace puts more faith than he had before into demotic expressions of Black Power. Of course, possession of authorial control concerns not only questions of voice but of perspective. When Lovelace's women characters annex the narrative perspective in *Is Just a Movie* they suggest that there are things that only they, not men, can see. This suggestion speaks to the blind spots in a masculinist vision of Black Power. Consequently, Lovelace's latest work can be read as a declination to let a singular, gendered viewpoint frame the universal implications of Black Power.

[159] In *Is Just a Movie* downright contempt for Standard English is subtly expressed when Donny recounts Sonnyboy's decision to quit working as a political organizer for an opposition party. Donny explains that once the "Hard Wuck Party had become hard work," Sonnyboy's "Hard Wuck Party experience had reached its end" (174). In other words, Sonnyboy grows disillusioned with the party once it becomes de-creolized.

Perhaps the novel's most radical example of a gendered contest over authorship occurs in Donny's account of the resurrection of his aunt Magenta's moribund love life that, according to Donny, begins appropriately "One day before . . . Easter":

> One day before that Easter, **she** [Magenta] in her yard, near the front steps, throwing corn to see if **she** could get the chickens to come close so **she** could catch one, see this man, whose name **she** don't yet know is Clephus Winchester, going by with his springy tiptoeing walk . . . his pants stick up in his crotch, its seat tight across his bottom . . . and when he nearly finish pass in front **her**, he stop and look at **her**, his face stretched in his broad Castara Bay smile, his teeth, white like the surf, suddenly filling up his whole mouth, and his eyes on **me** [Magenta] not as if he was looking at a Mother in the Church, but like he measuring **me** to see how much cloth it will take to make a dress to fit **my** body, and look at **me** again in a kind of worshipful confusion and **I** fighting to keep **my** face serious, like how a Mother in the church supposed to keep her face, asking in what **I** hope was **my** stern Mother Magenta voice, "Mister Gentleman, is me you watching?"
>
> And **she** [Magenta] watched the most delighted smile bathe his face . . . (95-96)

In the above's dizzying deictic play of first- and third-person personal pronouns (which I've emboldened for the sake of argument) Magenta momentarily usurps Donny's "I" and eye. Or we might say that Magenta temporarily perforates Donny's perspective; she makes for herself an aperture in Donny's frame narrative. Given both Donny's and Clephus's objectifying perspectives—for Clephus measures Magenta much the same way that Donny measures Clephus—Magenta struggles to maintain her subject position, even if it means that we must "look at" her through a "worshipful confusion" of pronouns. Here Magenta enacts grammatically what Donny and Sonnyboy earlier performed—highly subjective, improvised

rewrites of another's objectifying script. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even after Magenta's initial interloping "me," she and Donny continue to haggle over ownership of the above anecdote's pronouns. Indeed, the distinctions between Donny and Magenta blur together, for the oscillations between their individual perspectives are as rapid as the turning blades of a fan at high speed. In this way, the flouting of conventional pronoun usage means that when Magenta asks, "Mister Gentleman, is me you watching?," she could be addressing either Clephus *or* Donny.

These pronoun shifts also explain Donny's brief bout of acute aphonia in the novel—it is not enough that Donny, as King Kala, should "become the recorder of the people's story, singer of their praises, restorer of their faith, keeper of their vexation, embalmer of their rage" (6). If Black Power is to be repaired, renewed, and sustained, *Is Just a Movie* suggests, it requires multiple, *sui generis* perspectives inclusive of all genders.

Conclusion: Caribbean Black Power Resistance Reconsidered

As I have argued, in *Is Just a Movie* Lovelace updates—and comments indirectly on—his prior work. The character of Donny, for one example, answers the question: What would have happened to Philo in *The Dragon Can't Dance* had he refused to capitulate to calypso audiences grown weary with protest fatigue? But part of what makes *Is Just a Movie* a calypso and not a travesty is its author's practice of self-citation, which places it in opposition to forms of representation we have seen in *Guerrillas* and *Moses Ascending*. The privileging of original authorship in the art of calypso is stressed in the novel when Donny classifies himself as "a real calypsonian, not just a fella who sing other people songs" (23). Put otherwise, a real calypsonian is no mimic man but a creator of his own songs. Indeed, in Donny's paranoia not to be perceived

as inauthentic is a subtle defense of the Afro-Caribbean performance of Black Power. Although Black Power gestures in Trinidad might appear to be merely imitative, they could also be understood as exponentially iterative. And each iteration is unique.

Epilogue

> [F]or years, hardly any among us realized that in celebrating Jouvay, we were commemorating the celebration of Emancipation.
>
> We knew that from 1838, 1 August was the official day of the Emancipation celebration. What we did not know was that sometime in the mid-1840s the colonial administration had moved the celebration from that day and tacked it onto Carnival. From midnight Carnival Sunday the Emancipation celebrations began. In effect, Jouvay became Emancipation. Somewhere along the way the name Emancipation was withdrawn; but the celebration continued with, poetically, a more appropriate name, one confirming not only the dawn of Carnival Monday morning, but asserting the dawning of a New Day for those previously enslaved in the island. Jour ouvert, J'ouvert, Jouvay!
> —Earl Lovelace, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan" [160]

The "almost" in the title of Earl Lovelace's 1998 essay, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan," prevents his treatise on Trinidadian steelpan from sliding into a dirge. In the epigraph above, the author acknowledges his late recognition of the link between Emancipation and the Carnival celebration of Jouvay, whose hidden history may be explained by the fact that shortly after Emancipation Day appeared on Trinidad's calendar, colonial authorities decided, unsurprisingly, to reschedule it.[161] As Lovelace illustrates, Jouvay names the displacement of Emancipation Day after it has been "tacked . . . onto Carnival" as an appendage. If metaphor is the language of poetry, then the French Creole word for "new day" is, "poetically, a more appropriate name" because it has been metaphorized to signify emancipation for a creole-speaking people. But put less charitably, "Jouvay" reduces the attainment of freedom to a mere figure of speech, and yearly this retreat into figuration reenacts the historical event of 1838 that Lovelace disparages a few pages later as the emancipation of "people to nothing" (59). Nevertheless, the metaphor of a new day provides the vehicle in which at least

[160] Earl Lovelace, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan," *The Drama Review* 42, no. 3 (1998): 54-60. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[161] In *Angel*, Merle Collins notes the link between J'ouvert and Emancipation as well. See Collins, *Angel* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1988), 212.

the *idea* of emancipation can "penetrate the official Carnival and transform it into a stage for the affirmation of freedom" (54). As their ancestors have done, the Trinidadian people continue to express this "affirmation" at Carnival in a dynamic visual- and gestural-language unfolding in time and set to the music of Jouvay.

The spelling of the word "Jouvay" marks the gradual subordination of written language to speech. As Lovelace traces "Jouvay's" etymology, we see the erosion of the graphic until it gives way to the phonetic: "Jour ouvert, J'ouvert, Jouvay!" Grouping together its various spellings in this way brings into relief that what also makes "Jouvay" a poetically more appropriate signifier is that, over time, the metaphor has become as contracted as the freedom it signifies.

There remains another, literal sense in which Emancipation was given a new day. The date that was designated to celebrate freedom, instead memorializes the onset of colonialism in the West Indies. Lovelace elucidates how Columbus Day came to replace Emancipation Day after it had been displaced from August 1st: "By the time we get to the 1950s there is no official celebration of Emancipation. August 1 has been given over to Discovery Day or, as some called it, Columbus Day, commemorated in a Carnival-style celebration, its central point Columbus Square just off Nelson Street" (54). Whether the day celebrates him or his "discovery," Columbus remains legible on a city grid stamped like the streets in Antigua named after "maritime criminals," as described by Jamaica Kincaid in *A Small Place*.[162]

It thus may be tempting to think that hints of Columbus survive in the names of popular Jouvay characters that seemingly describe his career, such as "*Dirty Sailor*, *Bad Behavior Sailor*" and "*Midnight Robber*"; but to do so would be to credit Columbus with too much

[162] Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 24.

influence. Instead, Lovelace argues that "[i]t is in Emancipation . . . that we find the genesis of the Jouvay Carnival characters. Along with parody, ridicule, and *pappyshow*, what characterizes these presentations is a sense of threat and violence, ritualized in masquerades" (55). Lovelace avers that the ritual contains the threat as the violence is abstracted into art. Yet this art remains subversive when Carnival in Trinidad is apprehended as the secularization of the banned African religions, as he has written in another essay.[163]

Against the sublimated violence of Jouvay revelers, Lovelace opposes the steelband, which "presented a violence that was naked, that could not be ignored" (55). Nevertheless, as Lovelace tells it, the steelband met a perfect foil in Prime Minister Eric Williams, the impressive orator who replaces the metaphor of a new day with more threatening figurative speech: "*Massa Day Done*." After writing of the prime minister that "[i]t was hard to imagine anyone more suited for caricature" (57), the author supports this claim with an ekphrasis of the picture of Williams that accompanies the essay. The description places on Williams his customary dark shades and inserts into his ear the requisite hearing aid. Lovelace then dispatches his sketch by combining elements of the Midnight Robber, calypsonian, and badjohn into one figure. The Jouvay character that emerges from the caricature is summed up as "The Man" whose political rise precipitates the depoliticization of steelpan (57). Since "Jouvay . . . was itself created and supported by the lower classes of Africans" (54), the pacifying effect of Williams's tenure on what Lovelace calls the "Emancipation-Jouvay constituency" might be analogized to the dampening of steelpan's African rhythms (57-58). The Emancipation-Jouvay movement may at one time have been the engine of radical political power, but when Lovelace speaks of the

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[163] Earl Lovelace, "Calypso and the Bacchanal Connection," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005).

mobilization of steelbands in late twentieth century Trinidad, he means only that they "now ride on trucks" through Port of Spain (58).

Near the end of his essay, Lovelace argues that "Steelband cannot remain indifferent to its role in keeping the spirit of this movement alive" (59). This sentence is, I think, what lies behind Lovelace's metaphor for the recuperation of Black Power's potential in *Is Just a Movie*, the finding of the unsounded note; for it reminds us that what was perhaps most unique about Trinidadian expressions of Black Power was how they manifested in *sound*: the calypsos, Shouter Baptist hymns, and steelpan music. The essay accents the significance of sound to Black Power, especially as it offers a way to circumvent the racial coding that is tied to the visual. It also speaks to the value of all of the African-Caribbean cultural elements that imbue Lovelace's definition of blackness as a way of contesting pathologized and racist significations. What resonates about Lovelace's work is that, like a shout of "Jouvay," it turns into a political metaphor a sound in which can be heard the African-derived traditions and epistemologies that have subverted conditions of unfreedom for centuries.

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