

Spring 2012

1960s travel fiction and Englishness during the postimperial turn

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1960S TRAVEL FICTION AND ENGLISHNESS
DURING THE POSTIMPERIAL TURN

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

May, 2012

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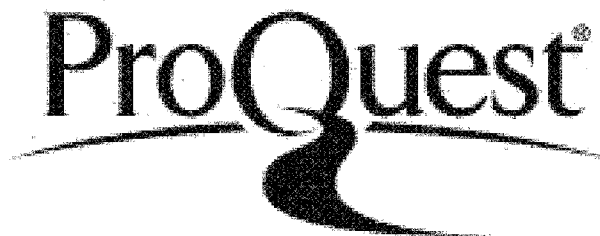


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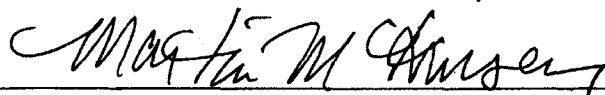
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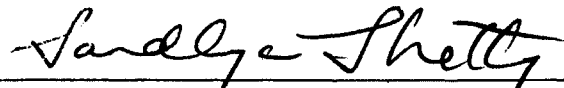
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Robin Hackett, for all of her help and support, and all of the members of my committee – Nicoletta Gullace, Martin McKinsey, Petar Ramadanovic, and Sandhya Shetty – for their willingness to guide me along this long and difficult journey. I also want to thank everyone who helped me to maintain my sanity and my priorities throughout this process: my family, my friends, and my love, Julie. And thanks, Charlie, for just being you when I needed you the most.

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ABSTRACT

1960S TRAVEL FICTION AND ENGLISHNESS DURING THE POSTIMPERIAL TURN

by

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University of New Hampshire, May, 2012

British travel writing has for centuries helped to construct English identity in relation to its others. The traditional function of travel narratives to define Englishness, however, faced a fundamental crisis of meaning when the British Empire starting falling apart after WWII. This crisis emerged as an explicit literary subject in several key 1960s novels: John Fowles's *The Magus* (1965), V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In these three novels, Fowles, Naipaul and Rhys critique British imperialism by engaging and reinventing the travel narrative form. Although many British writers publishing during the 60s were using travel tropes and the generic conventions of travel narratives in their fiction, they were rarely doing so to question how the connotations of travel had changed with the end of empire or to investigate in self-critical fashion the role of travel in endorsing imperial versions of English national identity. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys, on the other hand, argue against nostalgic travel narratives of the 60s by demonstrating the generic limitations of those narratives in representing Englishness after empire and by interrogating the very notion of travel itself. They illustrate how typical elements of the genre such as the gentleman traveler, the freedom and agency of travel, the containment of the other, the trope of travel as a journey of self-discovery, and the use of literary realism inadequately address the emerging postimperial order. In rethinking the role of travel narratives after empire,

these three novels help constitute the crisis in meaning for British travel fiction during the postimperial turn of the 1960s.

CHAPTER ONE

TRAVEL AND ENGLISHNESS DURING THE POSTIMPERIAL TURN

British travel writing has for centuries helped to construct English identity in relation to its others. A long and complex tradition of travel writing extends back to the earliest narratives of exploration, continues in a myriad number of traveler's tales and literary genres, including Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and then explodes with the increase in Britain's imperial activity. Travel writing during the height of the British Empire includes such infamous texts as Sir Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888), as well as novels such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In *Heart of Darkness*, for example, Marlow describes himself in contrast to the African natives he encounters:

[S]uddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling [...]. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. (1,916)

At this moment, Marlow describes the natives as fragmented, irrational, undifferentiated, and primitive. In contrast, Marlow, one of the “sane men,” suggests that he is whole, rational, self-possessed, and modern – that is, an Englishman and not an African. Conrad raises the specter here of an Englishness defined against its colonial others – however, he deeply problematizes that narrative by illustrating its breakdown and its reliance on

imperial discourses of difference. *Heart of Darkness* thus serves as a crucial pivot point in literary depictions of Englishness; it represents a critical intervention in British travel narratives by challenging the genre's traditional function of clearly demarcating English identity.

Heart of Darkness helped to initiate a larger crisis in the meaning of British travel writing which intensified when the British Empire starting falling apart after WWII. This crisis, as I argue in the pages that follow, emerged as an explicit literary subject in several key 1960s novels: John Fowles's *The Magus* (1965), V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In these three novels, Fowles, Naipaul and Rhys critique British imperialism by engaging and reinventing the travel narrative form. Although many British writers publishing during the 60s were using travel tropes and the generic conventions of travel narratives in their fiction, they were rarely doing so to question how the connotations of travel had changed with the end of empire or to investigate in self-critical fashion the role of travel in endorsing imperial versions of English national identity. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys, on the other hand, argue against nostalgic travel narratives of the 60s by demonstrating the generic limitations of those narratives in representing Englishness after empire and by interrogating the very notion of travel itself. They illustrate how typical elements of the genre such as the gentleman traveler, the freedom and agency of travel, the containment of the other, the trope of travel as a journey of self-discovery, and the use of literary realism inadequately address the emerging postimperial order. In rethinking the role of travel narratives after empire, these three novels help constitute the crisis in meaning for British travel fiction during the postimperial turn of the 1960s.

Furthermore, I have chosen these three authors because each of them wrote explicitly about Englishness in other genres as well as in their fiction and were particularly interested in and reflective about what it meant to be English – ideologically, culturally, racially, anthropologically – during the break-up of the empire. The reasons for their interest differed dramatically: Fowles wanted to revive an archaic Englishness that predated empire, Naipaul hoped to assert his personal claim on English identity as a non-white colonial subject, and Rhys intended to expose the xenophobia and misogyny of an England where she felt she never belonged. In trying to assert their visions of Englishness in a uniquely self-reflective manner, all three locate their fiction within a particular literary tradition of travel writing: Fowles responds to the modernist narratives of Mediterranean travel by writers like D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster; Naipaul invokes the travelogues of the Victorian period and the novels of Conrad; and Rhys reimagines Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its representation of travel. In each of these cases, the writers I focus on were particularly intent on responding to the British literary tradition of travel writing by challenging the cornerstone features of that genre, features that primarily hinge on the privileges made possible by a history of imperial power. In the process, they produced new ways of conceiving travel during the 60s by illustrating the corrosive effects of imperial nostalgia and its roots in universalist and ahistorical myths of British hegemony and national purity.

Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys share common textual strategies and thematic concerns in their revisions of travel writing, despite their many differences. In *The Magus*, the narrator journeys to Greece to replenish his essential Englishness but instead discovers an inescapable otherness that ultimately undermines his journey's purpose. In *The Mimic*

Men, Naipaul relies on highly nostalgic Victorian travel narratives to reveal the limits of travel as a metaphor for postcolonial identity. By doing so he subverts his East Indian protagonist's romantic vision of travel and reveals the assumptions about race and class inherent in that vision. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys challenges the foundational myths of the traveling Englishman by showing how colonial travel of the 19th century was akin to and linked with the forced migration experienced by slaves and migrant workers. She further demonstrates the gendering of travel and how travel narratives have the potential to undo the privileges traditionally associated with male imperial travel. They each undermine nostalgic versions of Englishness specifically by interrogating the imperial rhetoric of many British travel narratives, rhetoric that conflates English national identity, white racial purity, and the geographic borders of the island nation.

In employing travel narratives, Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys chose to work within a genre that is exceptionally well suited to addressing imperial nostalgia. Travel narratives – whether non-fiction travelogues or the travelling plots of fiction – have served for many British writers after empire's dissolution as an especially potent form for expressing various forms of nostalgia: for a lost, pre-civilized past; for romanticized adventures only possible before the rise of the tourist industry; or for a time when Britain still had an empire. This nostalgia centers on an idealized vision of travel in which white, middle-upper class Englishmen (and, sometimes, women) journeyed wherever they pleased throughout the empire and the globe. The purpose of these journeys varied – to seek out exotic pleasures, to gain scientific knowledge, to engage in commerce, to become immersed in another culture, to convert natives, to civilize and acculturate colonials – but motivating most of this travel was the certainty that the English had a special prerogative

to travel outwards and export their Englishness. At root, these journeys created and reinforced the national identities of those who traveled.

Despite the fact that postcolonial critics, as well as those who write about globalization and cosmopolitanism, have analyzed in great depth the relationship between travel and national identity, this perspective has not been applied to British travel writing of the 1960s, a transitional period for definitions of Englishness and travel. British travel writing – indeed, most travel writing, as Edward Said argued persuasively in his groundbreaking work, *Orientalism* and other scholars have argued since – defines the national identity of the traveler. This process of national definition occurs by either allowing the traveler to discover his own home country, as in, for example, George Orwell's journey around England in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), or allowing the traveler to contrast his or her Englishness with the national identity of the country traveled to, as is the case, for instance, with India in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), with South America in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), and with Germany in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). Postcolonial theory has transformed our understanding of how Englishness and empire are intertwined in such travel texts, starting with the work of Said, and expanding into the analyses of seminal studies like Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), both of which focus on the colonial period.¹ Applying the

¹ See also Steve Clark's *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (1999), Patrick Holland Graham Huggan's *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1999), Barbara Korte's *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (2000), and Hsu-Ming Teo's contribution to *British Culture and the End of Empire* (2001) to name a few of

insights of these scholars to the 60s travel fictions of Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys illuminates their use of the generic elements of travel narratives to reassess English national identity as the empire contracted.

By situating *The Magus*, *The Mimic Men*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* within the tumult of the 60s, I bring to the forefront the conditions of imperial decline and cultural confusion that Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys respond to in questioning the ability of travel narratives to maintain imperial notions of Englishness. The 1960s marks a period of great change in England, and much of that change revolves around the end of the British Empire. Two major factors contributed to that end: WWII severely crippled England and its economy, and colonial independence movements increased in number and power. In 1947, England partitioned India into two separate states – India and Pakistan – and granted both independence (both also joined the Commonwealth of Nations along with England). In the succeeding years, an increasing number of countries gained their autonomy from the empire, a process that accelerated dramatically during the 1960s.² Despite the commonplace view which sees the 60s in England as a moment of historical rupture, however, this period represents neither a total break from the past nor a radical difference from the decades that followed. It is, rather, a period of transition, a fulcrum point between the age of formal empire and the age of what has been termed global or

the titles that treat this subject. For more on the interrelationship between the novel and travel writing, see Percy G. Adams's *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (1983).

² In addition to the fact that India (and, by extension, Pakistan), Ceylon, Burma, Ghana, and the Malay states had all gained their independence before 1960, the decade of the 60s was a watershed time for the end of the British Empire. The following colonies became independent between 1960 and the close of the decade: British Somaliland, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, British Cameroons, Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago, Uganda, Western Samoa, Kenya, Zanzibar, Malawi, Malta, Southern Rhodesia, Botswana, Lesotho, Gambia, Aden, Mauritius, and Swaziland. L. J. Butler's *Britain and Empire; Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (2002), Roy Douglas's *Liquidation of Empire: The Decline of the British Empire* (2002), and Niall Ferguson's *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (2003) have been especially helpful in my understanding of the end of the formal British Empire.

transnational culture, and so the 60s represents a time when expressions of English identity are particularly contradictory and confused. In their fiction Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys respond to this set of cultural and historical forces, including the end of empire, the changing role of England on the global stage, the rise of tourism, the increase in immigration to England from the former colonies, the preponderance of imperial nostalgia and the related naïve rejection of the past as embodied in the idea of “Swinging London.” The writers I focus on – though each one has been written about extensively – have not had their 1960s publications adequately contextualized in these terms.

1. Contextualizing 1960s Travel Writing

My project participates in a number of critical conversations about how Englishness has been represented in 20th century literary texts, how the dissolution of the British Empire influenced those representations, and how 1960s literature is understood within the context of the century’s history of British travel writing. Naipaul and Rhys write from a postcolonial perspective, but by recontextualizing their work within the 1960s and comparing it to Fowles’s, I shift the focus on their work to emphasize how their use of travel narratives responds to 1960s anxieties about English identity. By discussing Fowles alongside these two postcolonial writers I highlight how his work, which is primarily viewed by critics as unrelated to empire, actually engages in complicated ways with the end of the British Empire. Framing their travel fictions within the postimperial turn and English cultural trends of the 60s brings to light the pivotal role these three writers played in rethinking travel narratives and travel tropes for a new, postimperial age. My project illuminates how British travel fictions shifted from modernist, imperial notions of travel, to the postmodern and postcolonial challenge to the

universality of travel narratives and exploration of their imbrication in forms of power and neo-imperialism. And it examines in historical and cultural specificity the role that 1960s anxieties about the fading British Empire played in shaping literary explorations of Englishness and travel. We cannot understand the history of 20th century British travel fiction without understanding how key writers of the 60s reimagined that genre in terms of its imperial implications.

Much exciting work has been done recently about Englishness, but not enough is understood about how it transformed in the 1960s specifically, nor, and more to the point, how literary texts navigated and remapped the imaginary landscape of postimperial England during that time.³ Because it falls after the period of modernism and what has been termed late modernism by Tyrus Miller, but before the full bloom of the postcolonial/postmodern efflorescence, the 1960s is a period difficult to frame within a clear literary context and thus difficult to comprehend.⁴ Further, the postwar years and the early years of the 60s are typically viewed as ones of depression, contraction, and austerity in England; the realist literature being written at this time, exemplified by John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1957),⁵ is seen as a product of this mood and not as

³ Wendy Webster, for instance, claims that most of the scholarship on the relationship between empire and Englishness has dealt with the period of time extending from the 18th century to the early 20th century but that scant attention has been paid to the post-WWII period and beyond. Likewise, Raphaël Ingelbien in "Imagined Communities/Imagined Solitudes: Versions of Englishness in Postwar Literature" (2004) calls for scholars to perform the "intricate task" of "[e]xploring the varieties of Englishness" (171) in postimperial literature, a task which he argues has only just begun.

⁴ My project dovetails with Kristen Bluemel's persuasive argument that "the fascinating, compelling, and grossly neglected writing of the years of Depression and World War II" should be framed in terms of what she terms "intermodernism" (1). See her edited collection, *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain* (2009) for a full discussion of this growing field of study.

⁵ Osborne's realist drama typifies in many ways the attitude of the so-called Angry Young Men: a sweeping disdain for middle and upper class pretensions, a hard-edged misogyny, an embittered sense that old

interesting or artful as that of the modernists or the postmodernists. At some point during the 60s, postwar austerity started to give way to the exuberance of “Swinging London” and hippie culture, but this process was both uneven and incomplete and so the tension between these two poles – austerity and plenty – add to the confusion historians and literary critics have in making sense of this period.

Finally, because 1960s writing lacks the aesthetic experimentation of the modernists, writers of the 50s and 60s are often treated by critics as naively ignoring or dismissing modernism’s massive legacy to the detriment of their own work. As Dominic Head observes, this commonplace view was established by several critics who first attempted to assess the postwar decades. For instance, Head cites historian Arthur Marwick’s view that “the novel in the immediate post-war period is ‘fading,’ characterized by ‘a national, even parochial quality’” (6). “More pessimistic,” Head continues, “was Bernard Bergonzi’s assessment of 1970 that ‘English literature in the fifties and sixties has been both backward- and inward-looking’” (6).⁶ The Bergonzi viewpoint, Head argues, “set the tone for critical discussion” going forward and can be witnessed in the dearth of criticism on this period as compared to the volumes of material written about both

institutions and traditions have failed, a general malaise and misplaced aggression. The play rages, with a sardonic smile, against all that postwar British culture has come to represent.

⁶ Although Bergonzi does discuss what he sees as the “situation of the [English] novel” as having some positives, in general he tends to see it as being “no longer novel,” having “abandoned freedom” (20) for the “predictable pleasures” of a more “moderately conservative” (26) mode. The remainder of the quote that Head cites elaborates on this viewpoint: the English novel has “rather little to say that can be instantly translated into universal statements about the human condition” (56). And the literature reflects the times: “[I]n literary terms, as in political ones, Britain is not a very important part of the world today” (57). His viewpoint is remarkably reactionary and conservative, as revealed by his incredible claim that “the accidents of history have provided the English with fewer opportunities than other people for inflicting large-scale atrocities on themselves or others” (61).

modernist and contemporary writers.⁷ Contrary to this pervasive view, my project demonstrates the forward- and outward-looking drive of key 1960s travel fictions.

Analyzing the vital role of 60s travel fictions by Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys in rethinking literary travel writing as a genre involves recontextualizing their work within a larger 20th century context. Travel prior to WWII and the dissolution of the British Empire often retained for writers its past ideological function within their texts as a means of escape, a whetting stone to sharpen national identity, and a corrective to the ills of Englishness. For instance, travel writing of the 1920s and 30s, what Paul Fussell terms in his study of interwar travel writing the “last great age of travel,” romanticized travel and implicitly – sometimes explicitly – viewed it as an extension of the imperial project even as that project was on the cusp of unraveling.⁸ Even modernist writers like Christopher Isherwood, who offered some sort of freedom from the restraints of British culture, and George Orwell, who used travel as a means to critique the British Empire, still managed to rely on travel’s traditional associations. Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), for example, treats travel as a means to escape a repressive social order in England; his ability to do so draws on a legacy of viewing travel as a form of escape. Although Berlin only offers temporary reprieve, his journey there does allow him the

⁷ This reality is made evident by a simple MLA Bibliography search for “English Identity” in 20th century texts. The vast majority of sources listed from this search are either modernist (articles on Ford, Eliot, Orwell, and Woolf) or contemporary (Seamus Heaney, Graham Swift, Rushdie, Andrea Levy). Very few focus on publications of the 60s.

⁸ Non-fiction travel writing that celebrates English travel includes the many travel books by Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and D. H. Lawrence. See Fussell’s *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980) for more on this group of writers and their expeditions into travel writing. A typical sentiment of this group is voiced by Waugh in his introduction to *When the Going Was Good* (1947): “At that time [our travel] seemed an ordeal, an initiation into manhood. [...] I never aspired to being a great traveler. I was simply a young man, typical of my age; we travelled as a matter of course. I rejoice that I went when the going was good” (10-11).

chance to seek an alternative to Britain's oppressive homophobia. In another register, Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* (1934) is essentially about what it means to be a British civil servant representing the British Empire abroad. The novel charts out in great detail the nuanced political and social tensions attendant to life in colonial India. It is also a critique of colonialism, a depiction of the debilitating effects of the colonial context on colonizer and colonized, and a harbinger of the end of empire. Orwell's use of travel as a critique of empire and the homeland, however, is possible because of travel's traditional associations with cultural critique and the power of travel to function as a paradigm of objectivity and clear vision for the privileged traveler.⁹

On the other hand, the 60s, especially the middle years, are often seen as the moment when the postmodern and postcolonial literary and cultural turn began.¹⁰ Into the 70s and 80s, fictional treatments of travel increasingly investigated – and celebrated – travel as a form of redemptive play whereby the traveler, through performance and the openness of the travel experience, could expressly remake him or herself beyond the confines of national identification, as for instance in the postmodern journeying of Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972). Accompanying these new attitudes towards travel were changes in the material realities of travel. Most significantly, travel by air became commonplace and increasingly democratized, travel by sea less frequent and reformulated as the province of the elite through the expansion of the luxury cruise line industry. Borders were also opening up, increasing the ability of

⁹ For another example of interwar travel fiction, see also Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927). The novel depicts an ultimately successful redemptive travel narrative whereby an Englishman is transformed by his journey to a South Pacific island.

¹⁰ As, for instance, Marianne DeKovan argues in *The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (2004). Her thesis is that "certain aspects of sixties radical politics and countercultures [...] embodied simultaneously the full, final flowering of the modern and the emergence of the postmodern" (3).

travelers to move with ease across the globe, and tourist destinations were further marketing themselves in an increasingly cluttered marketplace of possible vacation spots vying for potential travelers' attention. Travel had become liberated from imperial routes and, as Arjun Appadurai puts it, by the 80s was defined by the increasingly unfettered global flow of peoples, images, and ideas. By the time Salman Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, the material, economic, and political realities of travel had markedly transformed. Rushdie's novel represents the culmination of this shift, and employs travel to unsettle all binaries embedded in colonial discourse.¹¹ In it, Rushdie claims for travel a special status as a potentially radical form of movement which can utterly transform the traveler and the place traveled to.

Contrasting the travel fictions of the 60s with the decades that surround it is an essential component of defining the counter-winds of melancholic nostalgia and youthful hope that define the period. To that end, my project builds on the work of a handful of critics – John Brannigan, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alan Sinfield, Patricia Waugh, and Wendy Webster – who have examined the 1960s as a unique literary period, situated at a crossroads moment for British culture and the history of empire. In *Literature, Culture and Society in Postwar England 1945-1965* (2002), for instance, Brannigan counters the common assessment that the period is characterized by “conformity, conservatism and dull congeniality,” a sentiment repeated widely (5). Rather, Brannigan calls for “a more expansive notion of literature in England between 1945 and 1965” (14). The editors of *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (2007) similarly argue

¹¹ Caryl Phillips's *The European Tribe* (1987), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) also exemplify this approach to writing about travel after empire in contemporary texts.

against the entrenched notion that “[a]s their island shrank, mid-century writers [of the late 1930s through the 1960s] become more domestic and domesticated” (1). “Too often characterized as a conservative literature of retreat” they continue, “mid-century fiction has a complex and under-thought relation to its own history” (2). Attending to this period allows us to assess the particular tensions and ambiguities built around the attraction to and rejection of imperial nostalgia which defined the travel fictions of Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys. Their fictions represent a fundamental transformation of British travel writing, and so the 60s are a pivotal moment – and not ancillary – to the development of travel writing in the 20th century.

In highlighting the continuing influence of imperial ideology in 1960s culture, I am indebted to Simon Gikandi and Ian Baucom, both of whom have analyzed English identity in 19th and 20th century literature, since they recognize the ways in which Englishness has been defined in large part through an imperial matrix, even after empire’s dissolution. As historian Antoinette Burton writes, imperialism was always never merely “out there” safely beyond the nation but was interwoven with British culture and society; thus she sees “the nation as an imperialized space” (4). Gikandi and Baucom in their respective studies similarly draw on a postcolonial perspective to recognize the ways in which current manifestations of Englishness are caught up in gestures of disavowal and prejudice set against a backdrop of imperial memory and the constriction of empire. Gikandi, for instance, emphasizes that “the crisis of Englishness in the present period is symptomatic of the incomplete project of colonialism” (9), and Baucom writes that the British Empire is “less a place where England exerts control than the place where England loses command of its narrative of identity. It is the place onto

which the island kingdom arrogantly displaces itself and from which a puzzled England returns as a stranger to itself” (3). Whereas both Gikandi and Baucom emphasize Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* as their primary example of how contemporary fiction represents Englishness in terms of place, I expand the scope of their analysis to better understand the pivotal nature of travel writing during the transitional decade of the 1960s.¹² England’s future seemed especially uncertain during the 60s as the nation was discovering its new role on the world stage and grappling with its new relationships with former colonies. As Gikandi, Baucom, and Burton argue, the formal British Empire may have been ending, but its ideologies, relationships, structures, and cultural impact lived on, sometimes in surprising and unexpected guises.

Equally significant for my analysis is the work of Jed Esty and Peter J. Kalliny because they explain how literary representations of Englishness published in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s emphasized the particularities of English places rather than the role of travel in shaping Englishness. Their work thus demonstrates the inward-turning literary trend that Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys are in part reacting against.¹³ As Esty argues

¹² Other notable examples of how Rushdie predominates analyses of literary Englishness after 1945 include Dominic Head’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction 1950-2000* (2002) and Bruce King’s “The New Internationalism” in *The British and Irish Novel Since 1960* (1991). Tellingly, King describes how Rushdie represents a group of like-minded writers including Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Shiva Naipaul, brother of V. S. Naipaul, all of whom criticize an England which for far too long has been, in King’s words, “enamoured of its own navel” (194).

¹³ In the case of postwar writing, for example, the unabashed hostility of the imprisoned working class narrator in Alan Sillitoe’s “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner” (1959) and the deep-seated cynicism and misdirected anger of Jimmy in John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1957) highlight the role of localized class conflicts in postwar England. Indeed, the very phenomenon of 1950s “Movement” and “Angry Young Men” – labels assigned to writers like Sillitoe and Osborne by the press – was driven by a nativist surge of English pride. The labels assigned to these writers suggest that the public needed a voice for their frustrations while they also wanted to believe that the moribund British literary culture of the more immediate postwar years was once again reclaiming its former glory as a synecdoche of the nation’s special standing in the world. “In an age of increasing American and European influence,” Dominic Sandbrook

persuasively in *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2004), English literature of the 30s and 40s produced by modernist writers such as Woolf, Forster, and T. S. Eliot involved an “anthropological turn” which sought to identify and celebrate a uniquely English and localized national identity distinct from the Britishness of global empire. This emphasis on a particular English identity occurred in response to the beginnings of empire’s contraction and focused on archaic notions of Englishness that supposedly existed prior to the period of colonial expansion.¹⁴ Kalliney extends Esty’s claims by asserting in *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (2007) that during the immediate postwar years of the late 40s and early 50s a number of writers, including John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, and Doris Lessing, extended the anthropological turn of the modernists in response to the contraction of the empire. As he writes, “[t]he threat, and later the reality, of imperial decline forced the English to turn inward, to perform a thorough inventory of Englishness in the absence of an expansive imperial imaginary” (6). Unlike this inward-turning literary phenomenon of the interwar and postwar years, Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys employed outward-looking travel narratives in order to reconceive Englishness and the relationship between English identity, location, and movement in the emerging postimperial order. My project thus looks at the other side of the same coin that Esty and Kalliney detail in their work by emphasizing the role dislocation played in reassessing the meanings of Englishness.

writes, “the Movement can easily be seen as an aggressive, patriotic backlash” which champions “Britishness” (161).

¹⁴ See James Buzard’s “Culture for Export: Tourism and Autoethnography in Postwar Britain” (1998) for an account of how that anthropological turn took another, commercial twist in postwar travel writing undertaken by agents of the British Travel Association, who “wrote not of their impressions of foreign scenes but of their progress in the effort to attract foreigners to the scenes of Britain” (106).

Caught between nostalgia for a lost imperial past and hope for a postimperial future, the novels which are the subject of my study are situated at a unique moment for the meaning of travel and Englishness. Indeed, the dissolution of empire and imperial nostalgia are central concerns for any understanding of post-WWII expressions of Englishness; these are the forces which help to make this period unique in the history of British travel writing, for never before did the genre have to face the implications of empire's end and the powerful forms of nostalgia for empire that appeared in empire's wake. "Nostalgia," notes Dominic Sandbrook, "was one of the most powerful forces in post-war British culture, which was hardly surprising, given the collapse of the empire and all the talk about national political and economic decline" (*White Heat* 420). As I detail in the following sections, during the postwar years, particularly during the late 50s and throughout the 60s, a new crisis in Englishness began to bubble to the surface of English society because of the disintegration of empire. Although this anxiety about the sun setting on the British Empire was nothing new,¹⁵ for the first time since England's rise to global power, fears about English decline were matched by the reality. English culture of the 1960s must be framed by that decline and by the myriad, sometimes contradictory, ways the English responded to the postimperial turn.

2. The 1960s: England Swinging

A number of events and phenomena, when considered for their cumulative impact, worked to alter British culture and society in profound and irreversible ways during the 60s. These changes, in turn, shaped emerging notions of what it meant to be English after empire as well as literary explorations of that identity. In this section, I detail those

¹⁵ One can see it expressed by any number of 19th and early 20th century writers: Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, George Orwell.

changes and the forms of nostalgia they produced in order to demonstrate the larger cultural ambiguity about Englishness which Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys were responding to in their fictions. In speaking of “the 60s” I accept the general frame laid out by Dominic Sandbrook in his excellent two-volume social history of the period: 1956 (the year of the Suez Crisis) – 1970.¹⁶ This period covers the larger cultural, social, political, and historical moment experienced by Britain which roughly coincides with that decade and which in many ways was perceived as a transformational time in the history of the nation and its literature.

English culture during this time was caught between tradition and modernization, between the world view of a generation who experienced the full impact of WWII and the next generation of baby boomers who were less interested in the past and more open to foreign and American influence. The image of England, especially London, at that time was best captured (and created) by the cover article of the April 15, 1966 edition of *Time*. The cover featured an image of a dazzlingly alive city with the caption “London: The Swinging City,” and the article went on to announce:

In this century, every decade has had its city. [...] Today, it is London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence, graced by daffodils and anemones, so green with parks and squares that, as the saying goes, you can walk across it on the grass. In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene. (30)

The *Time* article helped to crystallize the image of London in the mid-60s as a city in full swing. As Jenny Diski explains in *The Sixties* (2009), the generation who came of age in

¹⁶ 1956 also coincides with what Sandbrook sees as the emergence of the “affluent society” in Britain. 1970, meanwhile, is the year that the Conservatives, lead by Edward Heath, replaced Harold Wilson and his Labour government. See Peter Leese’s *Britain Since 1945: Aspects of Identity* (2006) and Mark Donnelly’s *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (2005) for more on British culture during the 1960s. Donnelly is especially cogent on the question of the “The Sixties” as “a totem, something that people are either ‘for’ or ‘against’” because they are “the historical equivalent of a brand identity, representing a set of meanings, values and attitudes” that “left a legacy that refuses to go away” (3).

the 60s in England experienced that time as “a rare island of perceived well-being and a belief in the future as progress, after a long, dark hiatus” (14). Even though the commonplace image of England at this time conforms to the notion of a London-centered rebirth – a suddenly youthful nation experiencing “breakneck, irreversible and unprecedented change” (Sandbrook xv) in a spirit of “hedonism, liberation and excitement” (Sandbrook xiii) – such a view oversimplifies the much more complicated social change England was experiencing.¹⁷

Rather, this time can more fruitfully be understood as striking a balance between change and stability, between, to take Sandbrook’s example, the innovative music of The Beatles on the one hand and the continued popularity of gardening on the other.¹⁸ Expressions of national panic – as in the “What’s Wrong with Britain?” publishing mini-boom of the early 60s¹⁹ – and of glee – best exemplified by the image of “Swinging London” – were both commonplace. The 60s are for Sandbrook defined by this simultaneous desire to look backwards to a glorious imperial past and forward to a dazzlingly hip, swinging, and modern future that could leave England’s past behind. Both nostalgia for the past and hope for the future were often combined at the same

¹⁷ Philip Larkin memorably lampooned such hopeful optimism in “Annus Mirabilis”: “So life was never better than / In nineteen sixty-three / (Though just too late for me)” (167).

¹⁸ Sandbrook writes,

Of course, it would be absurd to deny that the 1960s was an era of social and cultural change. Yet it is important to realize that the changes were often halting, fragmentary and bitterly contested. What is more, the effects of change were often manifested in ways that seem disappointingly mundane to writers who like to sneer at ‘Middle England.’ Instead of tearing down established conventions and habits, the rollicking consumer growth, technological innovation and social mobility of the sixties often ultimately reinforced them. (*White Heat* 191).

Patricia Waugh makes a similar claim about the literary history of the period in her book, *Harvest of the Sixties* (1995).

¹⁹ The titles of two of the books published at this time capture the general spirit of the inquiry: *The Stagnant Society* and *Suicide of a Nation*.

moment, as the editors of *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (1999) argue regarding the emergence of the “new modernity” during this period. Many cultural expressions meant to celebrate the modern were really “a hybrid affair, assembled out of tales about the past as well as narratives of the future” (3); they point to the Queen’s coronation in 1953 as emblematic of the period’s “amalgamation of the traditional and the self-consciously modern”(1).²⁰ England – and how the English viewed themselves – was changing, even if change also inevitably meant resistance to that change. Amidst the optimism of the mid-60s and the phenomenon of Swinging London, resistance to that mood remained: “anxieties about national decline, the performance of the economy and the impact of affluence were always there” beneath the image of London swinging (Sandbrook, *White Heat* 572).

One of the most significant transitions of the period involved the irreversible process of decolonization as England moved from being the epicenter of empire and one of the world’s great powers to a greatly diminished nation. The loss of empire had far-reaching consequences around the globe and at home, including the mood of decline and fatigue which seemed to cling to Britain at the start of the 60s. Sandbrook – mistakenly, I believe – claims that “the reaction of the general public to the end of empire was one of almost total indifference. [...] In Britain there was no great national trauma or soul-searching [unlike Portugal or France]; indeed, it appears that [...] most people simply could not care less” (*Never Had It So Good* 284).²¹ Such an account takes too easily at face value the meaning of this seeming “indifference.”

²⁰ The Coronation was, they describe, “the last great imperial display” which at the same time involved “a reinvented and explicitly modern idea of the Commonwealth” (2).

To the contrary, I argue that much of the history of England – and its literature – in the 60s can be understood specifically in terms of imperial decline. This is true even when, perhaps especially when, that monumental loss was not acknowledged.²² One of the ironies of Sandbrook’s history of the period is that much of what he discusses could be seen as compensatory responses to the end of empire: the collective desire to imagine a bright, utopian future for England; the upbeat and experimental mood of the Swinging Sixties; the willed amnesia regarding empire. I agree with Patricia Waugh when she counters the “myth” of 1960 as some kind of watershed moment when “Britain is supposed to have stepped out into a liberated and upbeat mood of optimistic abandon. In fact, from 1960 until 1963 a pervasive obsession with the decline of Britain occupied both the literary intelligentsia and the popular media” (3). For example, John Fowles’s *The Magus* is in no obvious way a novel about the end of empire, and yet what motivates its writing and the quest of its protagonist is the desire to redefine Englishness precisely in the face of its felt decline. In other words, the contraction of the British Empire helped to exacerbate deeply felt anxieties about the nation’s global importance and self-definition rippling through postwar England. Even the celebratory *Time* article that announced the new hipness of England seems to make cautious reference to the end of empire as in one caption, “An empire lost, a heart recovered.” And yet what motivates

²¹ Sandbrook explains this indifference as the result of a long history of ignorance about empire on the part of those who had no direct role in empire maintenance. Raphael Samuel, in his multi-volume study of English national identity, *Patriotism* (1989) makes a similar claim: “the eclipse of British power could hardly be said to have registered itself on the public mind before the 1970s” (“Introduction: Exciting to Be English” xvii). Stuart Ward criticizes such a view as Sandbrook’s and Samuel’s in his introduction to *British Culture and the End of Empire* (2001): “the demise of the British Empire is [wrongly] assumed to have left barely a trace on the broad fabric of British civic culture. [...] [I]t is as though the end of empire has signaled the end of the subject” (2).

²² See Andrzej Gąsiorek’s *Post-War British Fiction* (1995) for an alternate explanation of the sense of literary decline in the 50s and 60s, which he elucidates in terms of the intertwined relationship between “liberalism and realism in Anglo-American theories of the novel” (6).

the entire article is the notion that, as the author addresses at one point, “Britain has lost an empire and lightened a pound. In the process, it has also recovered a lightness of heart lost during the weighty centuries of world leadership” (30). Such acknowledgements, brief and airy, allude to a history that contextualizes the entire mood of exuberance trumpeted in the declarations of England’s supposed rebirth. They also represent the desire many felt to unburden themselves from empire, as if that history could merely be unshouldered, as if the legacy of that history did not live on in the present.

As Bill Schwarz argues in “Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment” (1999), even though empire seemed to be fading into the past it was still “deeply imbricated in the nation and in its ethnic longings” (192). Schwarz observes how empire during this time was memorialized in sites of cultural memory such as museums and libraries, referenced repeatedly in print and television advertisements, and embedded in commonplace assumptions about identity and race. And Sandbrook does acknowledge that “romanticized, nostalgic patriotism remained a powerful force in British life for decades” after WWII (*Never Had It So Good* 44). The Suez Crisis of 1956 in this regard is a crucial moment in the history of the nation for it was the disastrous result of Britain’s inability to intervene in the foreign affairs of its former colony, Egypt, which woke many people to the notion that England was no longer a superpower and that there would be no going back to that time. The initial intervention reflected the continued assumption of British “exceptionalism”: the nation’s action in Suez was motivated by the belief that Britain remained one of the planet’s superpowers with the authority and obligation to intervene in the affairs of other nations. Nonetheless, for many, the Suez Crisis revealed the depth of British imperial decline which had in reality been on the wane for decades.

The cascade of effects produced by England's changing global standing included major demographic shifts in the mother country, especially in the cities, in a way that would forever alter the correlation between Englishness and whiteness in the public imagination. One of the most obvious consequences of decolonization was the flood of postcolonial immigrants coming to London for economic opportunity during the postwar years (especially the late 40s and early 50s). The most famous symbolic moment which signaled this new wave of immigration was the docking of the *Empire Windrush*, the first of many such boats, and its 492 Jamaican passengers, on June 22, 1948.²³ Even though historically all subjects of the British Empire had been considered British citizens (going back as far as the 17th century) – duly protected by the Union Jack – this new wave of black and Asian immigrants, in changing the face of London and other English cities, manifestly challenged the long-held equation between Englishness and whiteness²⁴. And even though subjects considered racial others had been living in England for centuries – Jewish, Irish, African, Asian, West Indian²⁵ – racial diversity became that much more visible, especially in cities, in the decades following WWII. As Raphael Samuel notes, “[i]mmigration and settlement have brought Third World communities into the heart of the major cities, making it impossible to maintain, even as a fiction, the notion of the

²³ In the ten years after the end of the war, about 125,000 West Indians immigrated to England. In addition, by 1958, about 55,000 Indians and Pakistanis were living in England as well (Fryer 373). The combined West Indian and South Asian populations in England rose to around 500,000 in 1961 and tripled by 1971 to 1,500,000 (Leese 48, 89).

²⁴ See Chapter 11 in Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* for more on this first wave of West Indian and Asian immigration.

²⁵ See David Goldberg's *The Racial State* (2002) pgs. 18-24.

British as a common race” bound by their shared whiteness (“Introduction: Exciting to Be English” xxx).²⁶

Indeed, the very presence of these “newcomers” not only threatened to redefine what it meant to be English but exacerbated precisely the kind of thinking which too tidily linked Englishness with racial purity. One of the most notorious moments representing this widely felt anxiety is Enoch Powell’s infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech, delivered on April 20, 1968, in which he warned in dire rhetoric of the dangers posed to England by unchecked immigration from the former colonies.²⁷ As Schwarz asserts, speaking of the debates about immigration held during this time, “[t]hat ‘the fact of whiteness’ had to be asserted at such volume, and so insistently, indicated the depth of the transformations underway” (191). These assertions, he claims, were a symptom of the growing belief that “the frontier – between the white English and their black others – had truly come home, the primal colonial encounter now relocated onto the domestic domain itself” (191). Events like the so-called Notting Hill Race Riots of 1958 only exacerbated such fears. As Sandbrook writes, “[c]asual racism was present at all levels of British society in the sixties” (*White Heat* 626). This pervasive racism “was based on old ideas of British

²⁶ A notable increase in cultural production – from fiction to poetry to music to the visual arts to radio programming – generated by these new immigrants further increased their presence and imbrication in English society.

²⁷ Another indicator was the formation in 1967 of the National Front, a racist, white supremacist organization which was staunchly opposed to immigration. As historian Kathleen Paul writes, the correlation between whiteness and Englishness was also forged by official governmental policy, “the creation of a policy-making elite that manipulated notions of identity and definitions of citizenship and massaged public opinion in order to preserve a constructed national identity, a useful labor supply, and a demographically and politically strong empire/commonwealth” (xiii).

imperial predominance, and by the late sixties it had become interwoven with broader anxieties about cultural change and national decline” (*White Heat* 627).²⁸

England was also feeling pressure from across the Atlantic to the West and across the English Channel to the East. On the one hand, a sort of youth-centered “American invasion” was at hand which fed the image of Swinging London: of music, television, movies, fashion, sexual mores, language and lingo, consumer goods, of, in total, a whole modern, consumerist, materialist way of life. Enthusiasm for and fears about the supposed “Americanization” of England rippled throughout the nation, especially during the late 50s and early 60s. On the other hand, greater and greater pressure was being felt by Britain to try and join the European Common Market. In both cases wounded British pride and patriotism were being further undercut: in the first case, by the great cultural and geo-political influence of America and, in the second, by the possibility of England losing its “special” status in becoming just another European country. Britain’s waffling desire to become part of the Common Market reflected the nation’s oscillation between wanting to assert its independence and its staunch self-reliance on the one hand, and, on the other, needing to acknowledge the harsh realities of the Cold War political order in which they played a much diminished global role. Observable in all these phenomena is a majority population still yearning for the good old days of empire but no longer capable of exercising that power and influence. In summation, this was an England which was turning increasingly outward in new ways to the world beyond its borders – often in spite

²⁸ The British Nationality Act of 1948, which placed new and stricter limits on immigration, was one response to this anxiety. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 likewise sought to reduce immigration (and was successful in doing so), as did later immigration reforms of 1968 and 1971 which further limited Britishness by geographic residence and familial lineage.

of vocal protests – and dealing with the consequences. As Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed argue, “the alleged self-absorption or provincialism of British culture” in the 60s is a myth (7); instead “foreign influence” was becoming all the more common (as can also be seen in changing tastes in everything from food to fashion).²⁹

Given my project’s emphasis on travel, it is vital to recognize one other cultural shift occurring during this period. In addition to the changes already discussed, the 60s also bore witness to the creation of what Sandbrook terms “affluent society.” Not only did many British citizens find themselves with money to spend and time to spend it, but the very idea of “leisure” itself, especially for the generation coming of age after WWII, came into its own during the 50s and especially the 60s. One dimension of this leisure time was ever-increasing opportunities to travel and an exponentially growing tourist industry which catered to – and in fact helped to create the very desire for – travel at home and abroad. With the explosion of the new affluence in British society and “the arrival of cheaper air travel” came an upsurge in British travel (Donnelly 32).³⁰ Travel, during this period, meant with greater and greater frequency, tourism. All of these changes fed into shifting attitudes towards English identity and a revised imperial nostalgia, as well as literary attempts to either ignore or address the end of the British Empire.

Taken altogether, the changes of the 60s – imperial contraction, massive immigration, foreign influence, increased travel – remapped the relationship between geography and English nationality. The two no longer matched up neatly. Being English was not

²⁹ To take one example, consider the British music scene and the infusion of Indian and Jamaican genres and instruments. The Beatles’ visit to India is the most visible symbol of this shift.

³⁰ The number of mostly middle class Britons who holidayed abroad doubled from two million in 1955 to four million in 1961, and doubled again by 1971 to eight million (Donnelly 32).

equivalent to living in England. Although it never really was, that truth now became an irreversible, irrefutable fact that simply could not be ignored. This fact had a profound effect on how the relationship between travel and Englishness was conceived by writers trying to make sense of how travel and national identity were evolving in the postimperial turn. In the next section, I detail that relationship to clarify how discourses of travel have helped define English identity and how changes to the material realities of travel during the postwar decades loosened the traditional association between travel and Englishness. I do not wish in the preceding material to imply that Englishness is a coherent and singular identity. Rather, I want to emphasize how the historical and cultural conditions of the 1960s shaped certain commonplace notions of Englishness and how those notions dovetail with cultural attitudes towards empire and travel during this period.

3. Travel and Englishness

Essential to my project is the idea that travel forms a crucial dimension of English identity and therefore how this travel has been represented highlights the imbrication of Englishness with empire. England's history has long intertwined with travel. The prolonged build-up and maintenance of the British Empire can be understood as partly an effect of, and partly helping to produce, all kinds of travel: exploration, missionary work, colonization, the transportation of goods and slaves, scientific expeditions, the spread of civil servants. Indeed, the history of the Empire is in many ways the history of the British travel experience. As the editors of *In Transit: Travel, Text, Empire* (2002), write, "it is almost impossible to think of travel in any historical way separately from the various post-Enlightenment imperial projects in which it has been instrumental" (1). For the past two centuries especially, there has been a strong link between the British and

travel. The editors of *The Making of Modern Tourism: The Cultural History of the British Experience, 1600-2000* (2002) argue that tourism itself is in large part a “British invention” born out of the creation of The Grand Tour, which dates back to at least the mid-17th century, and out of the 19th century promulgation of seaside resorts and the popularity of romantic escapes to the countryside.³¹ The British, they claim, were the world’s first extensive travelers and the creators of the world’s first significant domestic tourist infrastructure. As such, the British are commonly viewed as a nation of travelers who enjoy trips both in their home country and abroad.³²

Although the 19th century is often viewed as “the heyday of British travel” (Korte 18) and the interwar years of the 1920s and 30s as the “final age of travel” (Fussell vii) for the British (and Americans), the 1960s was also a time of intense travel. During this time, travel within England and to and from England increased exponentially as travel became more convenient, more affordable, and more desirable. Not only was “the holiday industry [seaside resorts and holiday camps] booming as never before” (Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good* 124), but, with the opening of the new, modern Gatwick Airport in 1958, more and more British citizens were traveling abroad. In 1960, for instance, 3.5 million British travelers went to the Continent for their holiday and those

³¹ See John K. Walton’s “British Tourism between Industrialization and Globalization” in this collection for an overview of this history. Chapter 7 in Eric J. Leed’s *The Mind of the Traveler* traces the origins of the Grand Tour back as far as the late 15th century and describes its evolution of the tour as, quoting from E. S. Bates’s *Touring in 1600*, “the habit, among the English upper classes, of sending their sons abroad as part of their education [which] became successively an experiment, a custom, and finally a system” (qtd. in Leed 184). For a more in-depth presentation of the history of travel, see John Towner’s *An Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World 1540-1940* (1996). For more on the history of travel writing specifically, see Barbara Korte’s *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (2002).

³² Arthur Asa Berger discusses the British love of travel in greater detail in *Deconstructing Travel: Cultural Perspectives on Tourism* (2004).

numbers were only to increase as the decade advanced (Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good* 135). By 1965, “the extended holiday was now part of the fabric of everyday life” for the British (*Never Had It So Good* 184). Indeed, by the late 60s the growth of tourism was so spectacular that in 1967 the U.N. General Assembly declared it to be the “International Year of the Tourist” (Teo). Tourism, that is, in the postwar years, became a major worldwide industry, and travel in the public imagination was becoming increasingly synonymous with “tourism.”³³ It was indeed during the postwar years that the tourist industry as such – an industry made possible by new innovations in transportation and advertising and which was designed specifically to cater to the new affluence of the Western world – came into its own.

Travel was right at the heart of how the English experienced the 60s and so served as an especially potent theme for Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys to explore the correlation between national belonging and geographic movement. The phenomena which contributed to this central role of travel include immigrants coming to England from the Caribbean, China, India, and Pakistan; British citizens emigrating from the U.K. in increasing numbers to America, Europe, and the former colonies; tourists visiting England in increasing numbers; and British citizens travelling within and beyond their borders on holiday. Also part of the growing importance of travel was the building of airports and manufacture of airplanes; the expansion of the tourist industry and all of its related businesses in locations around the globe; and the new ease of conveying images

³³ As a number of cultural studies scholars have argued, the distinction between tourism and travel is itself a construction designed to value certain kinds of experiences as more “authentic” than others. The distinction imagines some form of travel that exists untouched by any facet of the tourist industry. However, in fact, there is an entire portion of the tourist industry that caters specifically to this kind of traveler. Even travel writing can be seen to be an armature of it. Barbara Korte and Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan discuss this in more detail in their respective works.

and impressions of other locales via new media like television and magazines. People were traversing the globe in unprecedented numbers and the British were at the forefront of this phenomenon. Travel during the postwar years was both unsettling traditional forms of collectivity and becoming the province of ordinary experience. Thus it was entering the public imagination in new ways, with fresh immediacy, as in Philip Larkin's poem "Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses," where the speaker is "Hurrying to catch my Comet³⁴ / One dark November day, / Which soon would snatch me from it / To the sunshine of Bombay."

How, then, does all this travel and all these new forms of traveling relate to English identity and to the appeal of writing about travel as a way to conceptualize nationality? Travel, by its nature, both highlights national and cultural differences and offers the possibility of upsetting those differences. In *Tourists with Typewriters* (1999), Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan make this argument in regards to the genre of travel writing specifically. "[T]ravel writing," they claim, "frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallation of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to 'other' cultures, peoples, and places" (viii). Furthermore, tourism "has strongly relied on the creation and exploitation of national stereotypes" (Berghoff et. al. 9). Indeed, in the literary texts I will be discussing, the commodification of Englishness or of other, "exotic" locales and the selling of the nation are often precisely what is at stake in how characters experience, resist, or reject the places they visit. The flip side of this argument, though, as Holland and Huggan claim, is that travel writing contains "defamiliarizing capacities" (viii) and can "intervene in and challenge received ideas on cultural difference" (ix). Dennis Porter

³⁴ The world's first produced commercial jet airliner.

identifies these capacities in *Haunted Journeys* (1991) as travel writing's potential for "critical, oppositional practice" (6) because it "embodies powerful transgressive impulses" (9). Travel experiences can thus perpetuate notions of national difference and, at the same time, undermine those differences. The case Holland and Huggan make for travel writing is equally true for fictional treatments of travel and speaks to the great appeal of the journey as an archetype of Western literature.

Travel, in addition to serving as a cornerstone literary trope and a framework for crafting national identity, is an especially powerful metaphor for understanding contemporary existence and identity.³⁵ Travel is tied to many of the same features of culture, identity, and nationhood which are privileged by postmodern theory, as demonstrated by James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of "nomadism." Indeed, as their work demonstrates, travel has over the past several decades been co-opted by theory as a powerful metaphor for understanding contemporary culture, mass media, and globalization.

Viewing travel as a metaphor has its own dangers, though, for it ignores all too often the material realities of travel and the ways that various forms of difference can shape travel experiences. As J. Michael Dash writes in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998), Clifford, in emphasizing metaphors of travel,

³⁵ For more examples of theoretical approaches which rely on travel metaphors, see *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (1994), especially Jacques Rancière's "Discovering New Worlds: Politics of Travel and Metaphors of Space," Edward Said's "Traveling Theory" in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), and Barry Curtis and Claire Pajackzkowska's "'Getting there': Travel, Time and Narrative," in which they claim that the "'outer' journey of physical and spatial mobility can function as a metaphor for the 'interior' journey of the soul, the mind or consciousness" (200). The metaphor of travel and its affiliated concepts are also employed by gender theorists, especially Jay Prosser in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998).

is “succumbing to a romantic fantasy of liberation derived from an exotic notion of other cultures” (41). In a similar vein, Cara Kaplan, reacting against the abstraction of travel by theorists like Clifford, strongly cautions against easily equating all forms of human global movement. As she argues in *Questions of Travel* (1996), contemporary theory – which privileges notions of travel, movement, home, and location – rarely take material conditions like imperialism, industrialization, power differentials between nations, or globalizing capital into consideration:

All displacements are not the same. Yet the occidental ethnographer, the modernist expatriate poet, the writer of popular travel accounts, and the tourist may all participate in the mythological narrativizations of displacement without questioning the cultural, political, and economic grounds of their different profession, privileges, means and limitations. Immigrants, refugees, exiles, nomads, and the homeless also move in and out of these discourses as metaphors, tropes, and symbols but rarely as historically recognized producers of critical discourses themselves. (2)

Kaplan’s analysis of the trope of exile is of particular relevance to my project since in all three of the novels I focus on, the central male character sees himself as an exiled figure, separated from his home country either by choice (Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus*), by historical reality (Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*), or by economic necessity (Edward Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*). As Kaplan notes, exile is a particularly “modernist trope” which “works to remove itself from any political or historically specific instances in order to generate aesthetic categories and ahistorical values [...]. [T]he *formation* of modernist exile seems to have best served those who would voluntarily experience estrangement and separation” (28). Kaplan identifies the necessity for this estrangement and separation as the prerequisite for the production of modernist art. This is clearly the case for Ralph Singh, who wants to be a writer, and is also partly the motivation for Nicholas Urfe, who imagines himself as a poet. But even in the case of Rochester, who

holds no artistic pretensions, a major component of the sexual and psychic pleasure he experiences while in the West Indies is rooted in his sense of “estrangement and separation” from England.

While Clifford’s claims about travel and nationality are useful for understanding the interrelationship between travel and identity, Clifford alone offers an inadequate framework for analyzing travel in postimperial fictions of the 60s. I also find it necessary to heed Dash’s and Kaplan’s corrective.³⁶ This requires keeping at the forefront of my analysis the role that romantic fantasies of travel and exile play in obfuscating the economic and ideological motives of the travelers moving through these novels. Doing so means thinking about how the writers under discussion in the following chapters themselves employ travel as a metaphor for national rejuvenation, self-exploration, or imperial adventuring and how they integrate into their fictions the acknowledgement that the forms of travel they write about are neither equivalent nor reducible to those metaphors. Fowles constructs the entire travel experience in *The Magus* as a master metaphor for personal, existential development but reveals the colonial tropes necessary for such a fantasy. Naipaul tries to present travel as a metaphor for postcolonial subjectivity in *The Mimic Men* but in the end demonstrates the debilitating effects of this formulation. And Rhys explores the sexual and epistemological violence behind the myth of the Victorian gentleman traveler and the metaphors of conquest and control that frame Rochester’s experience in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

³⁶ See also Susan Koshy’s essay, “The Postmodern Subaltern: Globalization Theory and the Subject of Ethnic, Area, and Postcolonial Studies” in *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), and Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan’s *Tourists with Typewriters* (1999) for cautions against turning travel into metaphor.

4. (Dis)locating England

At this point, I refocus on the issue of English identity to specify the role that travel plays in shaping discourses of Englishness and explain how I define the term “Englishness” in terms of my project. Clarifying Englishness will allow me to further contrast the three novels at the center of my study with the more commonplace depictions of travel and nationality published during the 60s. Doing so will also clarify the special relevance travel has for my understanding of English identity. I use the term “Englishness” rather than “Britishness” to emphasize the ethnic element of national identity in contrast to the overarching inclusiveness of the term “British.” The slippage between these two terms is discussed exhaustively in the body of work which addresses England’s national identity; I agree with the editors of *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* (2007), who, while discussing Ian Baucom’s work, “[locate] the power of both terms precisely in their persistent conflation and confusion,” especially in regards to England’s relationship to empire (6). What I do not wish to do here is reiterate a version of Englishness which merely conforms to nationalist rhetoric. Such a definition maintains the myth that national identity is an intrinsic and self-evident quality and does not allow us to question the entrenchment of 1960s Englishness. Although national identities and allegiances are (partly) constructed through discourse, they nonetheless are fictions that profoundly shape structures of feeling. As Gikandi puts it,

What needs to be underscored here, then, is the persistence of the nation-state in the very literary works that were supposed to gesture toward a transcendental global culture. [...] One of the great ironies of the discourse of globalization is that although English literature has become the most obvious sign of transnationalism, it is continuously haunted by its historical – and disciplinary – location in a particular national *ethos* and *ethnos*. What are we going to do with those older categories – nation, culture, and English – which function as the

absent structure that shapes and yet haunts global culture and the idea of literature itself? (“Globalization” 633)

Borrowing from Gikandi, I wish to underscore here the notion of Englishness as a powerful and flexible construct that both *haunts* English culture because vague notions of its permanence persist despite globalization and *is haunted* by its past imperial associations and its imbrication in hazily differentiated notions of Britishness.

Taking Gikandi’s point, then, because Englishness is an absent structure, it is thus always dispersed, never fully present in language nor in any individual subject. It is a spectral presence both everywhere and nowhere. Thus travel serves as an especially potent theme for exploring changing notions of Englishness since travel is itself a symbol of displacement and the search for presence. Understanding constructions of Englishness in terms of travel forces us to think of them as fluid, permeable, and interactive. Travel, that is, both defines *and* destabilizes Englishness as a category of collective identification because it constructs that national identity through an ongoing process of contrasting the self with others. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on how this absence was made more apparent by the end of the empire. The historical conditions of the postimperial turn brought this truth to the forefront because as England lost its empire, the nation was forced to reconsider what it meant to be English.

Thus, understanding how travel in 1960s fiction involved a search for and a reworking of English identity requires seeing that this identity always necessarily was formed around an absence and that this absence was highlighted by the historical events of the 1960s, primarily the collapse of the British Empire. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys are not simply redefining Englishness via travel; they are demonstrating that English identity as it was constructed through travel was always a fantasy enacted through discourse. The

contraction of the empire brought this absence to the forefront by unveiling one of the frightening truths behind empire's mask: the arrogant certainty of imperial discourse hid an ever-present anxiety that English identity was always a myth and was always displaced. Although in the following chapters I emphasize the material realities of travel and how those realities impinge on the purity of travel metaphors, it is equally necessary to recognize the imaginary and discursive dimension of Englishness. I discuss these dimensions of Englishness in tandem because in each of the novels I analyze I find that their use of narrative structures and figurative devices are best framed by how they respond to the changing realities of travel during the 1960s.

My analysis in the following chapters relies in particular on Bhabha's influential formulation of dissemination, his argument that the nation is always already ambivalent and is rooted in narrative form, is indeed inseparable from narrative. In his famous essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" he writes about the nation as a "cultural construction" and a "form of social and textual affiliation" (201). The nation, he claims, is always ambivalent, and so it "produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing the nation" (201). Rather than think in terms of nations, then, what Bhabha calls for is for us to think in terms of "disseminations" which are split, internally contradictory, liminal within themselves.³⁷

³⁷ I do take seriously as well Craig Calhoun's counterargument that nations and national identity may be fictions, but, as he puts it, "it is a mistake to leap from the historical character of national and other solidarities to an account of 'the invention of tradition' which implies that national traditions are mere artifice and readily swept away" (27). What this means is that national identity may be structured by narrative form but that such structures are difficult if not impossible to shake.

In other words, nationality is never self-same and is always mediated. As Suzanne Gearhart, following Bhabha, puts it in “Inclusions: Psychoanalysis, Transnationalism, and Minority Cultures” (2005), nations are always already transnational and ambiguous; national identity is thus based “neither on the total identification of citizenship with nationality nor on the abstraction of a culturally disembodied citizen-subject” and is therefore always involved in processes of “negotiation and conflict” (34, 32). Anne McClintock likewise sees national identity as caught up in Lacanian processes of self-division and othering. Borrowing from Julia Kristeva, in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995) McClintock names the process by which national identity is formed “abjection”: “the self has to expunge certain elements that society deems impure,” but “these expelled elements can never be fully obliterated; they haunt the edges of the subject’s identity” (71). She goes on to write, “the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary; that which is repudiated forms the self’s internal limit” (71).³⁸ That is, there can be no “pure” English subject since national identity is inherently schizophrenic. The erasure or masking of this incompleteness, this uncertainty, this anxiety, is the aim of nationalist rhetoric: tourist sites which present “authentic” English history (and thus English character); political discourse (such as that of Enoch Powell and like-minded anti-immigration politicians); historiography; and cultural products (novels, television programs, movies, advertisements, poems, websites, fashion, architecture, or music) which situate some version of English identity as their homeland, their ontological horizon.

³⁸ See also Judith Butler’s argument via Hanna Arendt in *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (2007) which makes a similar claim about the relationship between national identity and the discursive and actual “expulsion of national minorities” (30).

Despite the many ways that critics have scrutinized and deconstructed English national identity, that identity retains a sense of timelessness and homogeneity.³⁹ Antony Easthope, in *Englishness and National Culture* (1999), has laid out one of the most thorough and compelling cases for how Englishness in particular must be conceptualized from the start as internally fractured, as incoherent. Focusing on how nations function through deep, emotionally intense processes of “collective identification,” Easthope explains that discourse both enables group identity (the nation is “a particular discursive formation” which speaks through national subjects) and, at the same time, undercuts the very cohesion it hopes to create. Further, because the “nation as a form of identity [is] made available in and through discourse” and because language, as Derrida has demonstrated, is founded on absence, national identity is “structured around lack” (21). Derrida, Easthope continues, enables us to understand “a nation imagining itself as an absolute and undivided self-presence” (22) and to understand why this imagined unity is, in the end, impossible because it is founded on the provisionality, projections, and fantasies of language and subjectivity. “In this sense,” Easthope states, “all identity is plural and disjunct; all identity (one might say) is queer identity, including national identity” (22). Or, in the words of Slavoj Žižek: “The final answer is of course that *nobody* is fully English, that every empirical Englishman contains something ‘non-English’ – Englishness thus becomes an ‘internal limit,’ an unattainable point which

³⁹ One example of how mythic Englishness persists in the popular imaginary is in the heritage industry, which is entirely dependent on conceiving English character as the constant thread running through the nation’s history. See the work of David Lowenthal for more on this phenomenon.

prevents full identity with themselves (qtd. in Easthope 22).⁴⁰ Nationalism is born out of the desire for this “unattainable point,” a national ideal which is forever gestured at but never fully achieved: “the feeling for nation [is] desire for a single, mastering identity which would entirely dominate other possibilities” (49).

In the novels I have selected, Englishness founders in its desire for ontological purity and wholeness. Even in *The Magus*, the only novel featured here which by an England-born writer, Englishness becomes an ideal striven for but never achieved, an absence which indeed prompts the very search for wholeness that the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe, seeks out by exiling himself to Greece. This search for a totalizing Englishhood which is indeed self-same and unified animates not only Nicholas’s journey but that of the other characters in the novels I analyze at length: Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, Edward Rochester and Antoinette Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Each of these characters, whether they are “proper” Englishmen or outsiders coming to England to mimic Englishness, are all, in a sense, motivated by their desire to locate and embody a specific form of Englishness. Each of these characters, moreover, feels compelled to enact one of the most ancient of narratives: the journey to find a homeland. Travel in these novels, whether conducted as a form of migration, discovery and conquest, or self-exile, is often deeply invested in and indeed spurred by the desire to locate Englishness, to unite the fantasy of England with the self, to make it whole. The abiding irony is, though, that these novels about travel make apparent the diffusion of national identity and its

⁴⁰ “Pure” Englishness is not only impossible for psychoanalytic and discursive reasons but also historical ones: “The English are a mingling of Celts, Romans, Germanic Angles and Saxons, Nordic Jutes, Vikings and Norman French, and that only takes you to 1500. So no one is purely English, not even the Queen” (Easthope 48). Raymond Williams makes a similar point: “[I]n its culture every nation, including England, is hybridic and heterogeneous” (qtd. in Easthope 48).

imbrication in its vast network of alliances, its colonies and former colonies, its others. Crucially, depictions of travel actualize, at the level of plot, an understanding of identity, and, most crucially, nationhood, in motion.

5. Not All Who Wander Are Lost

Writers like Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys represent English national identity in terms of travel as a means to explore, embrace, and reject various versions of Englishness. In each of their fictions, travel away from and travel to England took on special meaning which fit with their differing reassessments of Englishness. But they were not the only ones articulating their understanding of English identity through travelling plots. Indeed, a number of writers during the 50s and 60s were using travel fictions as a way of either reaffirming very traditional notions of Englishness, trying to understand how Englishness had changed, or critiquing the failings of the English character. Although these texts demonstrate the appeal of using travel to think through English character in a postimperial world, reviewing them also reveals the degree to which most of them conform to more traditional conceptions of travel and identity. I chose the three novels which are the core of my project because unlike much other fiction of the time, their authors turn their critical eye not just on Englishness but on travel itself and demonstrate travel's insufficiency in maintaining a nostalgic myth of imperial glory.

Much popular fiction of the 60s presented travel explicitly in either conservative or neo-imperial terms. In the case of J. R. R. Tolkien, an idyllic, harmonious, archaic version of the English country village – the Shire – needed to be saved in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (which was published in the mid-50s and gained a massive popular

following in the 60s and 70s).⁴¹ The epic journey undertaken in this case by Frodo and Sam was motivated precisely by their need to protect the Shire, that perfect fantasia of Green England. C. S. Lewis offered a similar vision in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949-1954) in which a group of siblings journeyed to and fought to defend a myth-drenched and romanticized medieval world, Narnia, a world which at its best was an idealized fantasy of Englishness and Christianity.

Likewise, the protagonists of John le Carré's espionage fiction and Ian Fleming's James Bond series were spurred in their global travels to defend the national integrity of England (and of the West more generally) – even when the mother country's methods and ethics were dubious at best.⁴² Fleming's depiction of travel in the James Bond series in particular – which was a pop culture hallmark of the sixties – was enchanted with the notion of tourism, of visiting exotic faraway lands through the privileged perspective of the series' 007 agent. As Sandbrook notes, the Bond books draw on

the enthusiastic prose of travelogues and tourist brochures. [...] One critic has even suggested that Fleming consciously set his stories in the tourist 'pleasure periphery' of the Mediterranean, the Caribbean and South-East Asia: warm, exotic locations that were becoming increasingly popular during the fifties and sixties as holiday destinations for affluent American and British travelers. (*Never Had It So Good* 581)

These travel fantasias – coupled with the celebration of affluence for which the Bond franchise is so well known – were the perfect antidote to malaise about the status of England on the world stage:

The context of imperial decline might have been thought unpropitious for a series of spy stories about a secret agent devoted to Queen and Empire, but Fleming's

⁴¹ The title of this chapter section – “Not All Who Wander Are Lost” – takes its title from a popular slogan of the time, quoted from Tolkien's opus.

⁴² See for instance le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963).

timing was perfect. Tired of hearing about imperial retreat and the grim realities of postwar retrenchment, the British middle classes were the ideal market for his reassuring fantasies of enduring power and influence. (*Never Had It So Good* 575)

These are precisely the sort of fantasies that writers like Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys were reacting against in their fictions. They complicate the notion of reading as a form of second-hand tourism and implicate the reader's desire for touristic literary fantasies. The fact that the Bond series was read in this way is encapsulated by a statement made by the editor of Fleming's collection of travel essays, *Thrilling Cities* (1964): "In your James Bond books, even if people can't put up with James Bond and those fancy heroines of yours, they seem to like the exotic backgrounds" (4).

In the novels of writers such as William Golding, Anthony Burgess, Aldous Huxley, and Doris Lessing, travel served as a powerful means to both critique Englishness and, in some cases, reaffirm traditional English virtues in contrast to debased contemporary English culture. *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), Golding's most famous novel, strands a group of boys on a deserted island as a way of stripping them of their civilized – their English – pretences. Huxley, on the other hand, wrote about an alternative, utopian society under threat of corruption from imperial and corporate forces in *Island* (1962). In a similar vein, Lessing's five-book series *Children of Violence* (1952-1969) ends with a number of the principle characters moving to an island off the coast of England in order to survive a future apocalypse. Ironically, these characters seem to form a more healthy and just society once England and the capitalist order has been utterly decimated (Lessing was a self-proclaimed socialist). In Burgess's *The Right to an Answer* (1960), on the other hand, an Englishman, J. W. Denham, returns home from his travels in Singapore to discover an England he barely recognizes and can hardly stand. He describes himself as

someone for whom home "is not a place but all places, all places except the one we happen to be in at the moment" (64). What all of these writers have in common – despite their range of styles and ideologies – is their employment of travel and geographic dislocation as a means of reassessing postimperial Englishness.

Unlike the travel fictions I described above, however, the novels by Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys examine in a sustained manner the meaning of travel in light of empire's contraction and the interplay of movement and identity as a dialectic of transformation. Even *Wide Sargasso Sea*, set in the colonial past, relies in its reassessment of travel on the critically removed perspective made possible by the dissolution of empire. In each of these three cases, these travel fictions narrate – with difference – colonial discourses of travel; each of these novels draws on specific literary traditions and representations of travel so that they can translate those discourses into new, potentially liberating forms of meaning-making beyond the dominance of colonial thinking. In their fiction, Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys discover no easy answers and find little cause for celebrating travel's transformative powers; but, in each case, they work through to some hard-fought insight into how travel can begin to challenge the persistent dominance of imperial nostalgia in postimperial representations of English identity.

Beyond their obvious employment of travel plots, I have selected these three novels so that I can approach the knot of travel and identity from three different angles; each one contributes to the growing cultural conversation about the meaning of travel and Englishness in particular ways. Geographic location is an essential component of how these novels contribute to that conversation. The geographic settings of these novels represent a narrow bandwidth along an Atlantic-Caribbean-Mediterranean axis, but the

virtue of this focus is that in all these cases the specific settings are potent tourist locations: Greece, the Caribbean, and England, especially London. Although I do not discuss other travelers' destinations with ties to the British Empire, the settings I do focus on are popular sites for travel and thus especially relevant for coming to terms with evolving attitudes towards travel and tourism during this period. This was notably the case in the 50s and 60s when travel to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean became major pathways along the rapidly emerging late capitalist tourist itinerary. Other locations, though not as essential, are also "visited" in these novels through actual travel or imagined visits: India, continental Europe, Australia, and the United States. Kaplan's insistence on the material and economic realities of travel is of particular importance here since it enables me to consider these geographic realities in conjunction with thinking about national belonging as a structure of desire. This overall emphasis on certain locations aids my ability to relate in historically specific ways what it meant to travel to particular locations during the dissolution of empire. The travel of these characters alters not just their identities but the very meaning and structure of that travel within a transitional period in empire's history.

These three novels also share a common textual strategy. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys recycle Victorian and modernist British travel narratives in order to test travel's potential for reimagining postimperial British and colonial identities. The impulse behind Fowles's and Naipaul's employment of such narratives reveals the nostalgic impulse in their work, whereas Rhys's intertextual strategy is explicitly an anti-nostalgic gesture. Fowles turns to Mediterranean travel narratives like E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* and Lawrence Durrell's *Prospero's Cell* to attempt his own tale of a Mediterranean

journey. In the end, though, he is unable in a postimperial context to sustain the myth of an essentialized Greekness which could rebirth English identity. In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul attempts to transpose the figure of the Victorian gentleman traveler *and* the exiled modernist writer, exemplified for the author by Joseph Conrad, onto his protagonist. In the process of doing this, however, Naipaul discovers the myriad ways this identity won't work for a non-white, (post)colonial subject. Rhys, unlike Fowles and Naipaul, intentionally subverts past British fantasies of travel – and a canonical literary text in *Jane Eyre* – in order to reveal how myths of British travel were always fictions founded on the privilege of the male colonizer's illusion of free travel. Bringing these three writers into conversation demonstrates how, in confronting the dawn of the postimperial age, they interrogated travel as a metaphor for new forms of identity and discovered the inadequacies of that travel to serve its traditional ideological function.

In returning to travel narratives of the past as a means to locate, reanimate, reinforce, or reject Englishness, the three writers at the center of my study – Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys – each discover that these traditional travel fictions no longer function in a postimperial context. If travel narratives of all varieties have for centuries helped to construct and define national identities, then during the immediate years of the postimperial turn, those narratives ceased to function in this traditional sense. Instead, these three writers ultimately explore the inadequacies of using travel to discover – and create – national and individual identity. Each of these novels enters into a specific literary tradition in order to demonstrate that the nascent elements of those texts – the privileges of movement, the myth of the gentleman traveler, the gendered logic of travel, the process of self-definition via the other – can no longer be suppressed when they lack

the material and institutional structures of empire to offer them *de facto* justification. After the end of empire, travel can no longer serve its prior ideological-narratological function. Each of these writers – and each in their own way – writes in the shadow of colonial travel fictions and travelogues, intentionally drawing on specific literary traditions to recode the use of travel to affirm identity.

Furthermore, each novel contains a meta-textual dimension that allows the novel to reflect on the very act of narration and narrative-making involved in defining Englishness. This dimension of their work further distinguishes their travel fictions from those of their contemporaries. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys highlight the narrative dimension of national identities through their self-reflexive fictions in order to reveal the role language and story play in shaping national identity. They highlight the anxieties and aspirations at stake for different kinds of travelers as they turn their travel experiences into stories about national identities. The metafictional/masque elements of *The Magus* repeatedly focus the readers' attention on the artificiality of Nicholas Urfe's experiences and the relationship between how we live and the fictions we believe in. By emphasizing the performative dimensions of subjectivity, the novel ultimately reveals the constructed nature of national identities and the process of othering that defines Englishness. *The Mimic Men* is presented as if Naipaul's protagonist, Ralph Singh, had written the very book the reader holds in his hands and constantly presents Ralph's reflections on the act of writing. It correlates the writing process to the process of national identification central to Ralph's journey and suggests a possible counter discourse to the imperial discourse of travel prevalent throughout the novel. In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys explicitly weaves her story around and through *Jane Eyre*

and so forefronts the textuality of her narrative and its status as writing. In the process, Rhys underlines the interpenetration of textual practices and the powerful forces motoring the movement of peoples under the umbrella of empire. In all three cases, writing and fiction-making become integral aspects of their characters' experience of movement and of how they imagine their own national belonging and their relationship with the spaces they journey through.

A final rationale for bringing Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys together is so that I can assess how their specific subject positions shape their perspectives on travel and Englishness. Of the three, Fowles is the only native "British" writer, though both Rhys, who is Welsh-Dominican, and Naipaul, who is Indian-Trinidadian, spent substantial time in England and based much of their writing on their experiences there. In addition, all three writers' lives challenge accepted categories which persist in literary scholarship in a way that parallels critics' problems with adequately framing the 1960s as a whole. This difficulty in locating them within the categories employed by critics makes them exceptionally suited to my project since I reassess how critics comprehend 1960s British literary production within the larger framework of literary history.

One of the central debates about Rhys concerns how to categorize her and appropriately frame her identity. She is a creole; a resident of England but an outsider; a British and a postcolonial subject; a politically committed woman writer who was also deeply influenced by modernist techniques. She published most of her work in the 30s, was largely forgotten, and then published her most celebrated novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, three decades later. Throughout her life, she struggled financially, entering into various romantic and sexual relationships with men to survive, and felt like a misfit in English

society and an outcast from the literary establishment because of her class and creole status. She also moved about extensively in her life, especially as a young woman: Dominica for the first 16 years of her life, cities and towns throughout England (including London), Paris, and Vienna.

Naipaul is similarly difficult to locate. His Indian ethnicity made him a minority and something of an outsider within the complicated diversity of Trinidad. Like Rhys, he too spent substantial time in England. His writing straddles the line between memoir and novel, travel writing and fiction, and much of his work has been controversial due to the often critical stances he has taken towards Indian and Caribbean culture. He is at once a postcolonial writer and one who seems to reject the heritage of his colonial past; he has been both lionized as *the* postcolonial writer of his time and derided as a traitor to his people. As a travel writer, he has visited locations around the globe and is by far the most well-traveled of the three and the only one known as a travel writer in his own right.

Fowles, in less obvious ways, is also difficult to pin down. Though he is a native of England and lived a relatively privileged life, he is deeply critical of his home country. He is a self-pronounced feminist; a “green” writer devoted to the ecological concerns; a postmodernist who also often draws on a 19th century realist tradition. In some literary histories, he is viewed as a key transitional figure ushering in a wave of historiographic metafiction, in others he is ignored.⁴³ Although he lived in England for most of his life, he also traveled widely through Europe, the United States, and Greece.

The differences among these writers play a vital role in their attempts to reassess the meaning of travel and its usefulness in exploring postimperial identities. What

⁴³ See Linda Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) for an example of a critic who foregrounds Fowles’s work in 20th century literary history.

distinguishes Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys from each other illustrates how travel and nationality take on very distinct valences even among writers with a common investment in articulating through travel fiction their own postimperial vision of national identity.⁴⁴ Fowles was clearly critical of what he terms “Britishness,” and yet of the three he is most closely aligned with preserving a more traditional notion of English identity that is geographically and racially delineated. He advocates for a “little” Englishness which eschews its imperial past but maintains the glories of its political and philosophical triumphs. In *The Magus*, this modest Englishness is renewed, via travel, through an infusion of Greek vitality, mystery, and freedom. Fowles’s writing represents the most conservative model of the three and serves as a case study of a British author desperately trying to redefine Englishness in the wake of empire, but who in the end acknowledges the imbrication of empire and English identity. Rhys was a harsh critic of England, more than Fowles and far more than Naipaul, and in her work she is, unlike Fowles and Naipaul, intent on revealing the inadequacies of the British travel master narrative which predominated in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She directly confronts the historical association between travel and empire and redefines the meaning of much of that travel as a form of coerced migration. In the process, she also exposes the unique complicities and complications of the female white creole Caribbean experience.

⁴⁴ Although their points of contact were rare, there were some. Fowles was one of the panelists on the 1971 Booker Prize committee which voted for Naipaul’s *In A Free State*; Fowles voted against it on the grounds that he didn’t consider it a novel in spite of what he saw as its literary merit. Meanwhile, Naipaul wrote an essay on Rhys, “Without a Dog’s Chance: After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie,” in which he lauds her work and writes, “she was outside that tradition of imperial-expatriate writing in which the metropolitan outsider is thrown into relief against an alien background. She was an expatriate, but her journey had been the other way round, from a[n alien] background” (54).

Along this spectrum, Naipaul is located somewhere between Fowles and Rhys. Naipaul forwards an inclusive English identity that incorporates and values the colonial and racial other but that also excludes or elides certain subjects in order to claim the mantle of “the traveler” as his own: the lower classes, black West Indians, women, and “mimic men” who too slavishly imitated English culture and habits. He is deeply indebted to colonial ideologies of travel but is trying to reconfigure the meaning of travel for a historically disempowered, racially other protagonist. The contradictions this search creates lead Naipaul to question the very logic and metaphoric power of travel and seek an alternative way out of his narrator’s endless journeying. Understanding these three writers’ reappraisal of travel therefore requires close attention to how the dynamics of race, class, and gender inform their conceptions of national identity and the role of the traveler. In the following chapters, I move from Fowles, whose work involves the most conservative representation of travel, to Naipaul, who is caught between traditional travel narratives and emerging postcolonial reassessments of travel, and Rhys, the most anti-nostalgic writer of the three.

The texts under study here suggest that travel became a powerful framework for representing the confusions of English identity at a time of great racial and national anxiety. Tracing how Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys represent Englishness in terms of travel narratives helps shed light on this dynamic relationship and furthers scholarly understanding of how they worked through the abiding paradox of travel fiction after empire: travel was no longer undertaken in the service of empire, and yet travel could not escape empire’s shadow. As opposed to the commonplace assessment which sees postwar literature as flat and uninspired, I argue that the fusion of travel fiction and

reassessments of national identity pursued in certain key texts speaks to its vigor, its energetic attempt to rethink the relationship between location and self in a new age. As empire slowly crumbled, as tourist-bearing planes soared overhead, as the Sixties started swinging, Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys captured the potential – and the pitfalls – of travel.

CHAPTER TWO

EXILED IN GREECE: BRITISHNESS, ENGLISHNESS AND AN ANGRY YOUNG MAN IN JOHN FOWLES'S *THE MAGUS*

1. Introduction

This chapter redirects the critical conversation on John Fowles's *The Magus* by focusing on what has largely been unacknowledged by scholars: that the novel's entire plot hinges on reassessing postimperial English identity by employing a Mediterranean travel narrative. Critics have not discussed the novel's engagement with discourses of Englishness during the dissolution of the British Empire, and yet, as I argue, those concerns form the basis for the novel's convoluted plot machinations. In *The Magus*, Fowles chronicles the gap between imperial travel rhetoric and the lived reality of travel in the wake of empire's demise. He thereby demonstrates the insufficiency of travel narratives to resurrect archaic notions of Englishness. Fowles proves those narratives insufficient by confronting the dependence of travel fictions on imperial discourse. His novel serves as an antidote to popular myths of the 1960s which insist on an unchanging English identity and ignore the realities of imperial decline. For Nicholas Urfe, the novel's protagonist, travel leads not away from Englishness, in the end, but to a form of English identity that relies on imperial rhetoric even as it simultaneously denounces that very same rhetoric. The novel's most insightful understanding of nationality emerges from a paradox: in trying to transform himself and the limits of his Englishness, Nicholas

discovers that his journey has been powerfully shaped by an imperial discourse he thought he had left behind.

The Magus, which Fowles started writing in 1956 and first published in 1965, hinges on its protagonist's travels to Greece, but the plot resists any simple summary – intentionally so.¹ Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to provide an overview of that plot so my following references to the novel make sense. The novel is divided into three parts, and the plot of part one is straightforward: Nicholas Urfe, a directionless and cynical young Englishman who has just graduated from Oxford and is deciding what he wants to do with his life, becomes involved with Alison, an Australian air stewardess, but then decides to leave England and Alison for a teaching post in Greece. Once he arrives in Greece he finds himself increasingly enchanted by Phraxos (the fictional island he is living on), yet frustrated by his teaching work at the Lord Byron School² and depressed by the prospects available to him. This section culminates with his failed suicide attempt and his discovery of a mysterious part of the island, Bourani, where the enigmatic and powerful Maurice Conchis, the island's most notorious resident, lives. Part two, by far the longest of the novel, relates what happens once Nicholas meets Conchis. Nicholas learns that Conchis, using his vast resources and imagination, has involved Nicholas in what he terms “the godgame,” a series of labyrinthine experiences

¹ In keeping with my project's focus on travel and Englishness in the 1960s, I use the original 1965 edition of *The Magus* and not the revised 1978 one, which contained minor changes, most notably more explicit sexual references as well as modified versions of some events in the plot, including a different ending. In the main, the two editions are not radically different in any way; they both treat the material involving travel and Englishness in virtually identical manners. Fowles first wrote of his own time teaching and living in Greece in the unpublished *A Journey to Athens: A Fragment of Growth*. See Eileen Warburton (96-97) for details on *A Journey*.

² This allusion is a wink at Byron's influence on both Fowles and Nicholas. The parallels between Byron and Nicholas are striking. Both exiled themselves from England to Greece. Byron was a poet; Nicholas wanted to see himself as one. Byron became a national hero in giving his life fighting for Greece; Nicholas certainly imagines himself as becoming, like Byron, a kind of adopted Greek citizen who has shorn his Englishness.

which are intended to manipulate Nicholas towards a new understanding of himself and his ethical relationship to the world. Part three, like part one, is more straightforward; in it, the godgame ends and Nicholas returns to England where he tries to discover the truth about Conchis and the godgame and also attempts to track down Alison, all the while psychologically processing the bizarre set of experiences he had undergone in Greece.

Two literary contexts are especially crucial for my analysis of *The Magus*. First, Nicholas is meant to stand in for a whole generation of disillusioned, frustrated young men pushing back against an England they see as awash in mediocrity and hypocrisy; thus, Fowles crafts him as an Angry Young Man like those depicted in the work of Movement writers like John Osborne, Philip Larkin, and, most notably, Kingsley Amis. As I discuss in this chapter, by drawing on this construct and transposing it to his middle class protagonist, Fowles was responding to a particular set of concerns specific to the 1950s and 60s: imperial contraction, literary expressions of anger and social critique, the changing interrelationship amongst the English, travel abroad, and the racial makeup of London and other urban centers. This context has been rarely acknowledged in the critical discussion of Fowles; framing my analysis in these terms reveals how *The Magus* responds – often in highly ambiguous ways – to the unique conjunction of cultural and historical forces in the 60s.

The other crucial context which explains Fowles's rhetoric of Hellenistic redemption is a tradition of modernist narratives of Mediterranean travel. In trying to resurrect a more vital and ethical Englishness to counteract urban, middle class postwar ennui, Fowles relies on narratives of Mediterranean journeys like Virginia Woolf's short story "A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus" (1906), E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908)

and his short story “The Road from Colonus” (1947), and Lawrence Durrell’s trilogy of Greek travelogues (1945-1957).³ From these texts, Fowles draws on imperial tropes of the British traveler abroad and essentialized Greek identity. Thus he is writing at least partially within a modernist tradition whereby Mediterranean locales represent a more natural, holistic, and spiritually nourishing way of being, a state contrasted in these texts with the deprivations of an overly civilized and stultifying English nation.

Fowles’s Mediterranean travel fiction differs from his precursors in one crucial aspect, however. In the final analysis, *The Magus* explores how these narratives break down in a postimperial context, failing to perform their prior function as a balm to Englishness. They fail because, as *The Magus* reveals, without the bulwark of empire, the myth of Mediterranean travel as a form of national and personal rejuvenation loses its myopic arrogance. Traveling to Greece after empire cannot save Englishness in *The Magus*, as desperately as its protagonist wishes otherwise. Fowles at least partly shares in Nicholas’s desire, as many aspects of the novel attest to, but in the final analysis Fowles demystifies that traveler’s myth in order to demonstrate the dangers of his own nostalgic impulses. Fowles exposes that myth’s roots in imperial ideology, unveils its dependence on empire, and charts its inability to function in an emerging postimperial world order.

Although it is impossible to determine in *The Magus* the degree to which Fowles himself

³ This literary heritage extends much farther back, obviously, but *The Magus* is usefully contrasted with writing on Greece and the Mediterranean from earlier in the 20th century to reveal what changed in the decades surrounding the most intense period of imperial contraction. Although I do not discuss him in this chapter, D. H. Lawrence was also a major influence on Fowles, especially in his travelogues such as *Twilight in Italy* (1916). In *Twilight*, Lawrence chronicles the realities of Italian peasant life and mourns the decay of that life due to the corrupting forces of an industrializing process begun in England: “[i]t is as if the whole social form were breaking down, and the human element swarmed with the disintegration, like maggots in cheese. [...] So that it seems as though we should be left at last with a great system of roads and railways and industries, and a world of utter chaos seething upon these fabrications [...] I have always felt this terror upon a new Italian high-road – more there than anywhere” (210-11). Fowles shares Lawrence’s idealization of authentic Mediterranean social life and fear of its demise.

was intentionally demystifying imperial travel myths, the novel demonstrates at the very least his acknowledgement of their limitations to cohere in a context where the British Empire was rapidly contracting.

Fowles is rarely discussed as a writer responding to the end of empire. In fact, more often he is viewed as one who ignores that historical process and clings to an outmoded vision of Englishness. For instance, Salman Rushdie dismisses another of John Fowles's novels, *Daniel Martin* (1977), originally titled *The Englishman*, as invested in an antiquated and dangerously Anglocentric worldview:

The Fowles position seems to me a way of succumbing to the guru-illusion. Writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of the centuries. And those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us. We can't lay claim to Olympus, and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day. (*Imaginary Homelands* 12-13)

Here, Rushdie accuses Fowles of committing the sins of omniscient authorship, of monoculturalism, of laying claim to a vantage point – Olympus-like – that is rooted in place and therefore uninformed by geographic displacement. According to Rushdie, Fowles represents the arrogance of the English, a people who have not, like Rushdie, “been forced by cultural displacement” to recognize the “provisional nature” of reality. In sum, Rushdie accuses Fowles – and a generation of British writers he is meant to represent – of naïveté, myopia, arrogance, provincialism, and imperial nostalgia.

Rushdie is right in assigning a degree of Anglocentrism to Fowles; however, Rushdie does not acknowledge, let alone engage with, Fowles's pointed critique of English society nor his representation of empire's collapse. Rushdie's failure to read Fowles's work in the context of imperial decline and of Fowles's own Anglocentric critique of

English society is in keeping with the critical commonplace on Fowles. Critics read him as a British writer, but rarely as a writer dealing with the end of the British Empire and the troubling questions raised for him about national belonging in the wake of a transforming Englishness. Critics have failed to attend to these crucial aspects of the novel for several reasons. First and foremost, because *The Magus* presents itself within the terms of existentialist philosophy⁴ and thus as an expression of universal ideas about freedom and the self which transcend the details of the narrative, many critics have focused on this theme in their analysis.⁵ Susan Onega's analysis is typical of this view. She writes in her essay on Fowles in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (2002), "The major lesson of the godgame is that individual existential freedom, the insistence upon ones right to an authentic personal destiny, is the highest human good" (4). Dwight Eddins makes a similar case in "John Fowles: Existence as Authorship" (1986) when he argues that Fowles's novels are principally about creating personal freedom from the tyrannies of all sorts of narratives – fictional, scientific, religious, political, etc. – which straightjacket the self.⁶

⁴ Fowles wrote a short book of aphorisms, *The Aristos*, at the same time as he was working on *The Magus*. It was inspired both by Greek philosophy and by his extensive reading in existentialism.

⁵ My claim here is informed by the work of scholars who have criticized universalist and ahistorical readings of 19th and 20th century texts and ignored their engagement with empire and imperial discourse, such as Chinua Achebe's intervention in Conrad scholarship in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1977).

⁶ Others have written about the novel's deployment of mythical and Jungian elements, its reflection on the relationship between history and fictionality, and its depiction of the feminine/textual as the source of mystery and unknowability in the world. For more on the role of narrative form and the themes of freedom and ethics in the novel, see Katherine Tarbox's *The Art of John Fowles* (1988), David H. Walker's "Remorse, Responsibility, and Moral Dilemmas in Fowles's Fiction" in *Critical Essays on John Fowles* (1998), and Mahmoud Salami's *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism* (1992). More recent analyses of *The Magus* have focused on its historical veracity, its sexual optics, and its treatment of ecological issues: Stylianos Perrakis's "Spetses 1943-1944: Occupation, Resistance, and Terror in Reality and in Fiction" in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (2007), Alice Ferrebe's "The Gaze of the Mágus: Sexual/Scopic Politics in the Novels of John Fowles" in *Journal of Narrative Theory* (2004), Thomas M. Wilson's *The Recurrent Green Universe of John Fowles* (2006), and the edited collection, *John Fowles and*

Even when critics focus on Fowles's depiction of landscape, as does James Aubrey and the contributors to *John Fowles and Nature* (1999), they pay little attention to the cultural climate of England in the 60s, preferring instead to emphasize Fowles's work as a nature writer and an existentialist. Aubrey, for instance, claims that natural landscapes in Fowles's fiction "help enable a character, a writer, and a reader to attain heightened awareness of his or her freedom" (24). Readings like these downplay the degree to which the novel seeks out this philosophy in response to the limitations and failings of Englishness. *The Magus* is not merely a universal story of an everyman's journey towards a more ethical engagement with his world and a more honest understanding of himself. Specifically, the novel's ethical impulse is made necessary by what Fowles perceives as the limitations of postwar Englishness. English narrow-mindedness, parochialism, arrogance, and insipidity thus become the foil against which the lessons of the godgame are contrasted. And it is Nicholas's Anglocentric travel experiences in particular that enable this contrast to be drawn.

Critics have also failed to recognize that, despite of his lack of direct representation of the colonial world, Fowles's literary output was profoundly shaped by the decline of empire. Fowles is seen to be a writer neither interested in nor affected by the end of empire – which explains in part the falloff of critics publishing about Fowles over the past decade – and so his fiction is treated as if that history is irrelevant. One critic who does discuss the problem of English identity in *The Magus* – albeit in an indirect manner – is Alan Kirby. In "Resurrecting London: From Drab Elsewhere to Rumored Truth in John Fowles's 1960s Novels," Kirby focuses on Fowles's redemption of London as a site

Nature: Fourteen Perspectives on Landscape (1999). None of these analyses discusses Fowles's response to imperial contraction or his use of the travel genre.

of artistic plentitude and excessive vitality. He claims that Fowles taps into a convention that was in “widespread existence by the early 1960s” whereby “London was equated with spiritual deathliness and almost insurmountable cultural sterility.” In subscribing to this cultural commonplace, though, Kirby argues that Fowles also ushered in an emerging concept of London as “invested with Fowles’s highest values: notions of existential authenticity, personal ‘truth,’ freedom and responsibility, commitment to art; the rejection of soul-destroying convention, inhibition and narrow-mindedness.” Kirby usefully contextualizes Fowles’s writing within the emergence of 60s “Swinging London” culture; however, he does not once mention the critical role that empire’s contraction played in Fowles’s writing. Not only is the end of the British Empire the never mentioned but nonetheless powerful trauma that haunts all of *The Magus*, but in trying to sort through what it means to be English after empire, Fowles uses travel – in the end, unsuccessfully – to reimagine an English identity remade through its contact with the exotic Greek other. Furthermore, although Kirby astutely notes the crucial role of London as an emblem of English identity, as my analysis reveals, London, in the end, and in spite of the novel’s intentions, fails to register any real change. As the novel demonstrates – and to the contrary of popular 1960s imperial nostalgia – the imperial narrative whereby London, the center of empire, is infused with the bodies, the material goods, and the symbolic energy of its far-flung colonial spaces cannot work in a context where the British Empire is rapidly constricting.⁷

⁷ One other example of a rare critical reading of Fowles’s views on Englishness is found in Raphaël Ingelbien’s “Imagined Communities / Imagined Solitudes: Versions of Englishness in Postwar Literature” (2004), but Ingelbien also barely registers the role of empire’s demise in Fowles’s conception of English identity nor does he recognize the centrality of this theme to Fowles’s fiction.

My reading of *The Magus* demonstrates that despite Fowles's desire to revivify postwar middle-class Englishness, doing so requires the very assumptions made possible by a history of empire that his novel would otherwise ignore. Fowles relies on established tropes of the English traveler seeking transformation and redemption in a Mediterranean climate, but in trying to graft that narrative onto a postimperial context, Fowles encodes the same jingoistic and racist ideologies of empire into his novel that he set out to critique in the first place. In this chapter, I reframe *The Magus* to read the novel in light both of Fowles's own project of articulating a new form of Englishness in this novel⁸ and of the larger context of postwar imperial decline, loss of empire, and culture-wide anxieties and confusions about what it means to be English.

Recontextualizing Fowles in light of postimperial history enables us to understand how travel and English identity intersect in original ways for a writer like Fowles who was grappling with an emergent Englishness born out of England's new relationship to the world. Fowles's novel places the vexed problem of English national identity at the heart of its narrative pyrotechnics, forcing both its protagonist and the reader to undergo a sustained interrogation into how an outdated model of Englishness still rooted in fantasies of empire can be reimagined for a postimperial, postwar age. In the process, Fowles reveals just how treacherous that journey will be.

2. Greening England

“If I had a true homeland north of the Channel, it lay a thousand times more in a green island called England than behind the blanketing, claustrophobic Union Jack of Britain and the United (increasingly disunited) Kingdom.” (Fowles, “Greece” 69)

⁸ Fowles pursues this interest in his other work as well. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), for instance, can also be read fruitfully as a novel about Victorian English identity shaped by empire.

In *The Magus*, Fowles expands on ideas he expresses elsewhere about the problems with English national identity in the 60s. He wrote about what he saw as the failings of Englishness explicitly in an essay he published in 1964 entitled, “On Being English but Not British.” This essay provides us with the best entry point into my reading of *The Magus* and so I discuss it here briefly in order to demonstrate how its ideas play out in fictional form. Fowles opens the essay by stating that “For a decade now I have been haunted by the difficulty of defining the essence of what I am but did not choose to be: English” (79). What exactly “being English” is Fowles defines arbitrarily, acknowledging that few people are “purely” English; but he then goes on to set his parameters: it must mean having two out of four English grandparents (which of course then begs the question of what makes *them* English), living at least half of your life in England, being educated there, and having English as your “mother tongue.” Fowles’s definition is an insulated one, rooted in a geographical place and a demarcated sense of cultural difference. Although arbitrary, the line it draws in the sand does, without ever stating so explicitly, aligns Englishness with whiteness; those who would fit his definition would most likely have to be white.⁹ Unlike writers from former colonies like Naipaul and Rhys, Fowles is invested in an English identity which is decidedly *not* transportable and thus *not* part of the inheritance of postcolonial subjects.

Even more than these parameters, though, being English means to Fowles a set of “vices and virtues” – by no means new ones – which he then spends the rest of the essay describing: an obsession with justice, an ingrained intellectual “critical opposition,” and “habits of withdrawal” which result in the English being the “most self critical people in

⁹ Even though England, primarily in urban areas, had been at this point multiracial for centuries, Fowles’s prejudice here is weighed against recent immigrants.

the world, and the most self-conscious, and one of the most tolerant” (84). This national character, derived from Victorian notions of Englishness as expressed by such cultural critics as Matthew Arnold, extends specifically from a sense of place. As a result of England’s geographic isolation they became “observers rather than experiencers” and “pioneers in law and democracy” (82). Furthermore, as a combined product of geography – being an island nation – and of temperament – in their love of justice – the English have a “love and need of emigration in all its forms: as pioneers; as colonists, as sailors, as proconsuls, as liberators (rejecting the role of voyeur), as lovers of the south, [...] as refugees from the double-talk of the homeland” (83). The English, in other words, are natural travelers. And even though much of this travel has been done in the service of empire and with the winds of imperialism at its back, Fowles argues that the “*quality* of the emigration has depended and still depends much more on its Englishness (that is, on the spreading and maintaining of our concept of justice) than on its Britishness (the desire to spread and maintain imperialistic and master-race ideals)” (83). Fowles here imagines that the nature of most English travel around the globe has been done in service of a judiciary ideology rather than a racial one. The wish of his essay therefore is rooted in what he views as a deep English identity that supersedes a more recent and only temporary British one: “I see my Britishness as a superficial conversion of my fundamental Englishness, a recent façade clapped on a much older building [...] *We have to be British and we want to be English*” (80-82).

Set against what Fowles sees as the real English identity, what he terms “Green England,” is “Britishness,” a “slogan word” for “when we had a historical duty to be a

powerful military nation” (79). This transient and more recent dimension to the national psyche, “Red-White-and-Blue Britain,” is the target of Fowles’s most virulent attack:

[t]he Britain of the Hanoverian dynasty and the Victorian and Edwardian ages; of the Empire; of the Wooden Walls, and the Thin Red line; of “Rule Britannia” and “Elgar’s marches; of John Bull; of Poona and the Somme; of the old flog-and-fag public-school system; of Newbolt, Kipling, and Rupert Brooke; of clubs, codes, and conformity; of an unchangeable status quo; of jingoism at home and arrogance abroad; of the paterfamilias; of caste, cant, and hypocrisy. (82)

These two forms of national identity, Englishness and Britishness, play against each other throughout *The Magus*. In trying to recoup Englishness through its contact with a revitalizing Greek wellspring, Fowles structures his novel around rejecting Britishness and embracing a reimagined Englishness. This form of Englishness magically synthesizes the more ancient notion of English identity he defines in “On Being English” with an essentialized Greekness which could be capable of breathing new life into an English identity which has lost its way. In *The Magus*, Fowles’s solution to returning to “being English” is to take a protagonist who is representative of the middle class postwar generation and thrust him into a transformative travel experience that could return to him the vitality which “Britishness” has extinguished.

3. Postwar Melancholia

“I already knew I was a permanent exile from many aspects of English society, but a novelist has to enter deeper exiles still.” (Forward to *The Magus: A Revised Version* 9)

Nicholas’s decision to leave England for Greece – to exile himself – is the hinge upon which *The Magus* turns and is rooted in his disillusionment with his native country. From the very first lines, the novel couples Nicholas’s English background with his unhappiness in life:

I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose

sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria. I was sent to a public school, I wasted two years doing my national service, I went to Oxford; and there I began to discover I was not the person I wanted to be. (3)

Nicholas, as we learn from the outset, has a very traditional English background, and, as we also learn immediately, deeply resents that background.¹⁰ Even though he is a child of the 20th century, Victorian England still casts its “elongated shadow” over his world. The first chapter develops this idea, creating a portrait of post WWII Englishness in brief, a national identity in flux as it wakes up to a new world, one where the British Empire has transmogrified into something called the British Commonwealth.¹¹ Nicholas’s father in particular is a representative of the kind of traditional English identity associated with imperial power that Nicholas himself is rebelling against. His father was a brigadier during WWI and so was involved in the kind of heroic fighting and defense of empire that was idealized in war propaganda and in literary texts such as the poetry of Rudyard Kipling and Rupert Brooke and in T. E. Lawrence’s account of the Arab Revolt, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935).¹² Like the good soldiers depicted in such works, Nicholas’s father was “a stickler for externals and petty quotidian things,” who was devoted to “an

¹⁰ Further, these opening lines invite comparisons with the novels of Charles Dickens, especially *Great Expectations*, and thus partly situate *The Magus* within a lineage of English fiction. This is a lineage that the novel invokes (in the revised edition’s forward Fowles explicitly acknowledges Dickens’s influence), but then distances itself from to a large degree as the novel asserts its homage to the French novelist tradition, particularly the fiction of Alain-Fournier. So the novel, like its protagonist, has English roots which it partly rejects.

¹¹ Although the novel rarely directly addresses the end of the British Empire, it does contain a number of references which invoke without ever confronting this new reality. For instance, in the early chapters of the novel Nicholas mentions that his parents were killed on their way to India, that his only other living relatives live in Rhodesia, and that the jobs he was considering after graduating from Oxford included joining “the Foreign Service, the Civil, the Colonial” (6). Another example of the novel’s oblique attention to empire’s fallout is a party he attends at a neighbor’s, where he finds “[l]oud male Australian voices; a man in a kilt, and several West Indians. It didn’t look my sort of party” (10). Despite Nicholas’s disdain of the middle class, he is presented as someone unprepared for the social and racial upheaval of the empire’s implosion.

¹² *Seven Pillars* was first published in a limited basis in 1922; 1935 was the year of its first mass market publication.

armory of capitalized key words like Discipline and Tradition and Responsibility” (3). These references to the cornerstone values which helped build the British Empire represent the Urfe family lineage dating back to their supposed emigration from France to England in the late 17th century. His, Nicholas claims, was a family of unimaginative sods: “generation after generation of captains, clergymen, sailors, squirelings” (4); in other words, a long lineage of men who worked in service of empire in one way or another.

The world that Nicholas rebels against, represented in his father, his lineage, and the dull conformity of the middle classes, aligns him with the views of the Angry Young Men who populated the works of Movement writers like Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Philip Larkin, John Braine, and Alan Stillitoe.¹³ These angry young men – typically but not only working class and Northerners – were a symptom of empire’s implosion and a generally felt sense that England was on the decline. Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1958) – a campus satire aimed specifically at skewering the aspiring middle class and intelligentsia – provided Fowles with the clearest model for Nicholas.¹⁴ Cynical and blithe, the novel’s protagonist, Jim Dixon, repeatedly mocks the university he teaches at and all forms of pretension. He learns how to play the game of academia, a game based on politics and image rather than real learning or skill. The climax of the novel is Jim’s lecture on “Merrie England,” which he delivers drunk and with vicious irony. At the end of his

¹³ In *Literature, Culture and Society in Postwar England 1945-1965* (2002), John Brannigan carefully distinguishes the Angry Young Men from the Movement writers, but for my purposes what is most important is the commonality of the angry young men who populated their works and their perspectives. By the 60s, Fowles could easily draw on this cultural type as it had been popularized in 1950s fiction by these writers. For more on this literature, see Blake Morrison’s *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* (1980) and Robert Hewison’s *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* (1981).

¹⁴ See Greg Londe’s “Reconsidering *Lucky Jim*: Kingsley Amis and the Condition of England” in *British Fiction After Modernism* (2007) for more on the novel’s complicated relationship to the stereotype of the angry young man.

lecture, Jim concludes that, “[t]he point about Merrie England is that it was about the most un-Merrie period in our history. It’s only the homemade pottery crowd, the organic husbandry crowd, the recorder-playing crowd [...]” (231). In his vision, contemporary England is composed merely of collections of people engaged in banal, meaningless, and hopelessly backwards-looking pursuits: making pottery, raising livestock, and playing antiquated wind instruments. As this speech demonstrates, by *Lucky Jim*’s closing chapters, Jim has become totally disillusioned by his country and so gets by in life by crassly manipulating everyone he encounters.

Fowles was familiar with the work of Amis and other writers associated with the Movement but saw their writing as a dead-end, a failed response to England’s changed world status. For example, he viewed the characters of Kingsley Amis as “‘profoundly unreal’” and “lacking in ‘moral depth’” (Warburton 190). He did have a more favorable opinion of Jimmy Porter in John Osborne’s drama *Look Back in Anger* (1956), a character described by Osborne as “a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride” (9-10). During the course of the play, Jimmy laments that “Reason and Progress, the old firm, is selling out! [...] Those forgotten shares you had in the old traditions, the old beliefs are going up - up and up and up” (55-56).¹⁵ Jimmy “gave voice to what Fowles thought was the legitimate resentment of a marginalized, hopeless generation” (Warburton 191). Still, Fowles complained that the play “celebrated an uneducated, inarticulate antihero”

¹⁵ Nandi Bhatia makes a compelling case for why Osborne’s play should be read against the context of imperial decline – and why it traditionally hasn’t been – in “Anger, Nostalgia, and the End of Empire: John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*” (1999). Likewise, David Cairns and Shaun Richards discuss the play as an instance of the “open way in which imperial discourses were still being reproduced and productively activated at a time when it is often assumed that the Empire was widely perceived as defunct” (199). Jimmy’s anger is therefore partly an expression of “[e]mpire [as] the yearned for, but absent, guarantor of purpose” (Cairns and Richards 202).

(Warburton 191). In the end, Fowles dismissed these kinds of antiheroes. Whereas writers like Amis presented their protagonists as heroically resistant to mainstream English culture, Fowles, by writing Nicholas as an Angry Young Man type, shows us the callowness of such a response. Like Jim Dixon, Nicholas Urfe is highly critical of the middle class, a womanizer, and rather ambitionless and cynical. In order to break Nicholas's postwar anger and ennui, Fowles, unlike the Movement writers, turns to narratives of travel so that he might rekindle in Nicholas that more archaic, pre-empire Englishness which Fowles saw as England's natural heritage, the "Green Englishness" he wrote about explicitly in "On Being English but Not British."

The remainder of *The Magus*'s first section establishes the connection between its critique of England and Nicholas's desire to travel. When he graduates from Oxford, Nicholas only knows what he does not want, what he does not believe in: his middle class background and all that it stands for. And the place that he finds himself in after his studies only further exacerbates his desire for escape; he ends up teaching in East Anglia to "mass-produced middle-class boys" in a "claustrophobic little town" and a school where "[b]oredom, the numbing annual predictability of life, hung over the staff like a cloud" (6). The problem for Nicholas is not just a matter of this one school, this one town. It is the entire nation, his life in East Anglia serving as a synecdoche for England. As time wore on, Nicholas tells us, "the more I felt also that the smug, petrified school was a toy model of the entire country, and that to quit the one and not the other would be ridiculous" (6). This attack is specifically targeted at an English identity tied to the complacent middle class of southern England's cities and suburbs.

As an archetypal Angry Young Man, Nicholas is totally disillusioned with his country and the prospects for his future. But Nicholas represents another turn of the screw of this character in that he is hyper-aware of and disdainful of his own disenchantment with England: this is what directs him towards an outward journey. For instance, Nicholas complains that “nothing could have been less poetic than my pseudo-aristocratic, seeing-through-all boredom with life in general and with making a living in particular. [...] I had got away from what I hated, but I hadn’t found where I loved, and so I pretended there was nowhere to love” (5). What his desire to find “where” he “loved” demonstrates is that right from the start of this novel, Nicholas conceives of his lack of purpose in terms of location specifically. It is not a matter of what, but of where. As this expression of confusion reveals, Nicholas wants more than the satisfactions of embittered anger and performed aloofness; unlike Jim Dixon, he is prepared to leave England behind and believes the solution is to travel.

The final chapters of part one establish Greece as the foil against which Nicholas’s Englishness will be set. He proceeds to inquire about teaching opportunities abroad through the British Council¹⁶ and is placed at the Lord Byron School on Phraxos, a fictional Greek island based on the real island of Spetses that Fowles visited in the early 50s.¹⁷ The opportunity to travel becomes for Nicholas the opportunity to escape a nation that has failed him. His self-exile in Greece therefore represents for him a rejection of the nation that he already feels so distanced from and a chance to remake himself anew.

¹⁶ Ironically, an organization formed with the quasi-imperial agenda of spreading British culture and maintaining for the nation a strong image around the world.

¹⁷ Fowles taught at a private school on Spetses in 1951 and ’52 and traveled there for two months in the summer of ’63. During this return visit, he discovered that Greece’s tourist industry had grown exponentially and felt “rage at this dreadful new thing: tourism, destroyer of all it touches” (qtd. in Warburton 237). See Warburton chapters 5, 6, and 11 for an account of his time there.

Greece, he imagines, will be an untainted wilderness, a place where “real” travel is still possible as opposed to tourism. “It sounded so good,” he thinks.

“I’m going to Greece.” I knew no one – this was long before the new Medes, the tourists, invaded – who had been there. I got hold of all the books I could find on the country. It astounded me how little I knew about it. I read and read; and I was like a medieval king, I had fallen in love with the picture long before I saw the reality. (27)

Greece at this point is pure speculation, pure possibility. Crucially, his only understanding of Greece at this stage is both metaphorical – with the landscape representing the untainted and mysterious wilderness – and textual – “all the books I could find.” As a result, despite his move to distance himself from the hordes – the tourists – Greece for him has been pre-packaged as both comprehensible and desirably and sufficiently mysterious prior to his travel experience. And, like the medieval king, or the modern day tourist, his is a desire for conquest that is both sexual and territorial.

Thus, in rejecting the identity of the Angry Young Man, Fowles, through the character of Nicholas, embraces an equally problematic identity: the British middle class traveler seeking thrilling contact with his exotic others. As a result, Nicholas’s expressions of joy at his impending travels, once he lands a teaching job in Greece, exemplify his desire to turn himself into an exile and the degree to which his travel fits neatly into the established mold of British travel during the imperial period. Even though he rejects the Victorian worldview of his parents, his view of travel is decidedly couched in the same jingoistic, privileged, and romanticized terms that ennobled many British travelers to seek adventure abroad during the Victorian period. For instance, Nicholas is overcome by a sense of awe at the possibilities inherent in travelling outward from England: “I was filled with excitement, a strange exuberant sense of taking wing. I didn’t know where I was going,

but I knew what I needed. I needed a new land, a new race, a new language; and, although I couldn't have put it into words then, I needed a new mystery" (7). The very possibility of travel here is what thrills him – the adventure and romance of escape – and it is the same clarion call which spoke to legions of British travelers abroad during the peak of the empire. Noting the continued intersection of travel writing and staid middle class values in 20th century travel accounts, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan argue that writing about travel mainly appeals to “white, male, middle-class, heterosexual myths and prejudices” who are “eager consumers of exotic – culturally ‘othered’ goods” (viii). Their thesis is that “travel writing frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallation of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to ‘other’ cultures, peoples, and places” (viii). In this vein, Nicholas’s thirst for “a new land, a new race, a new language [...] a new mystery” (7) clearly links up exotic mystery with cultural otherness and territory. To seek a new land is to discover a new way of being in the world, what becomes for Nicholas a reified, reinvigorated Englishness.

4. Greece, Land of Myths

“[The Greek island of Spetsai’s] pine-forest silences were uncanny, unlike those I have experienced anywhere else [...]. They gave the most curious sense of timelessness and of incipient myth.” (Forward to *The Magus: A Revised Version* 8)

Nicholas’s freedom to impose his own exile would be impossible if it were not for the very condition which he seeks to escape: his own Englishness.¹⁸ He is a privileged traveler, not only because of his class status, gender, nationality, and race, but because his

¹⁸ Nicholas is forced to recognize the artificiality of his “exile” at the end of the godgame when he is told, in clinical terms, how his “family, caste, and national background have not helped in the resolution of his problems. [...] [After quitting his teaching job in England] [p]redictably he then felt himself forced both out of the school and out of the country, and adopted the role of expatriate” (438-39). As this accusation makes clear, Nicholas is an exile in name only; it is a “role” he has “adopted.” It should be noted here that this is a pose commonly struck by those suffering from cultural ennui and seeking creative rejuvenation abroad. As Caren Kaplan argues, the division between authentic and inauthentic exile is hard to maintain and indeed an aspect of travel discourse which attempts to privilege certain forms of movement.

travel is voluntary and rendered secure by the guarantee of a job at the other end. He has the luxury of existential angst, the opportunity to teach English, the seeming security of a male, middle class traveler. As Holland and Huggan write, the “English gentlemen” traveler has served as a model for male, middle class travelers since at least the early Victorian period, if not earlier. The gentleman traveler is defined by the relative ease of his travel, his view of himself as a kind of universal traveling subject, and his conflict between anxiety and curiosity about his destination. This conflict is informed by his desire to “[reinstall] a mythicized imperial past” (xi); the desire to resituate this mythic past is Nicholas’s. In asserting Nicholas’s self-perception as a gentleman traveler journeying to the Mediterranean, Fowles claims for Nicholas the authorizing power of a narrative tradition in which the Mediterranean serves as a special source of renewal and mythic regeneration to the British traveler.

The choice of Greece is significant in this novel: Greece was not only a major tourist destination for British travelers during the 20th century,¹⁹ but England has a longstanding political association with Greece dating back to the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s.²⁰ Although Greece was never a colony of the British Empire, during the 19th and early 20th centuries it represented something akin to what the Caribbean later came to represent: a space of natural wonder and magical possibility contrasted with Western European civilization. As J. Michael Dash writes, the West Indies were the site of a “revival of a world that Europe has left behind. To be more precise, Europe’s

¹⁹ In *Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing* (1992), Mark Cocker writes how Britain in the 20th century experienced “a great wave of enthusiasm for Greek travel and for books about the country, which reached its peak in a twenty-year period after the Second World War” (175).

²⁰ See Richard Clogg’s *A Short History of Greece* (1986) for details on England’s involvement in Greek history.

Mediterranean origins are replayed in the Caribbean” (90). Specifically, “[t]hrough the Mediterranean as intertextual matrix, a number of powerful tropes enter Caribbean writing: the field of play, the city as a polyglot Athens, the Babel of the Caribbean Sea, the magic of the twilight” (106). Greece, that is, can be framed as an earlier incarnation of the sunlit vacationer’s paradise – associated with cross-cultural contact but further enriched by its classical associations with philosophy, myth, and learning. Greece, in keeping with Hellenistic discourse, is represented in the novel as the wellspring of a philosophical tradition that England has inherited and developed. Fowles’s Hellenistic rhetoric thus provides us with a compelling point of departure from the other two primary texts I discuss in this project – *The Mimic Men* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* – and allows us to observe ways that Greece coheres to certain representations of Edenic islands and how it signifies its own unique set of associations.

The link between modern Greece and classical Greece is one such association which is central to the appeal of Greece as a destination point. Writing about this connection between present-day Greece and an idealized ancient Greece in *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English & American Imagination* (2002), David Roessel argues that modern Greece has been imagined by British and American writers as “the original font of Western culture” that had been “embalmed in the time of Romanticism” through the life and writing of Lord Byron. The tension between modern and ancient Greek culture described by Roessel plays out in *The Magus*’s “philhellenism.” As seen in *The Magus*, because of Greece’s history and how it had been represented in the Western imagination, Nicholas’s travel becomes another form of cultural imperialism and Orientalism. Nicholas’s attitude toward Greece reflects a long tradition of viewing the

country as temporally and spatially fluid, a tradition born out of the difference between classical and modern Greece. As Roessel claims, modern Greece is viewed in the Western mind as always becoming. From that perspective, Greece is caught in a never-ending tumultuous present between its classical past and a future where that glorious past is rejuvenated. In addition, it is caught between the West and the East and thus “in the process of throwing off the ‘Orientalism’ it acquired during four centuries of Turkish rule and reacquiring a European nature” (7). Roessel’s assertion that Greece has historically held great meaning in the Western imagination is evident in *The Magus*. Nicholas never really encounters Greece; what he encounters is a British construct of Greekness rooted in the Hellenistic tradition that Roessel describes.

The tradition of Mediterranean travel as rebirth has a long history that extends at least as far back as the Romantics and Lord Byron. *The Magus* draws on this tradition to recuperate a “Green” English identity which has been obscured by the history of the British Empire. In this endeavor, Fowles echoed writers from earlier in the 20th century for whom the Mediterranean was a destination of replenishment, spiritual nourishment, and intellectual stimulation. By attempting to assert *The Magus*’s place in this tradition, however, he also discovered that such narratives founder in a context of imperial contraction. I detail here the key tropes of such modernist narratives to establish *The Magus*’s adherence and departure from these texts. Virginia Woolf, for instance, wrote the short story “A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus” about a group of English travelers in Greece. “It so happened not many weeks ago that a party of English tourists was descending the slopes of Mount Pentelicus,” she inauspiciously observes as the story begins. These “tourists,” however, would have chafed at that label, since, as the story’s

narrator – with a touch of irony – admonishes us, “Germans are tourists and French are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks” (63). As they trek the mountain, these “Greek” Englishmen glory in the transcendent rapture of the countryside. Descending the mountain, “they felt themselves charged on each side by tremendous presences,” and where they rested, “nature and the chant of the classic spirit prompted the six friends to dismount” (64). There they spoke of “the tough old Riddle of the modern Greek” until a Greek monk discovers them and silences their debate with his soothing, “statue”-like demeanor (65). Their encounter with this monk renders their empty debates meaningless and his presence evokes for them the meditative and earthly inner life of the Mediterranean. In the character of this monk, they have found the real Greece.

E. M. Forster employed variations of this narrative several times, but in an Italian context, and further asserted the power of the Mediterranean to transform Englishness. In *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch travels to Italy and eventually discovers, because of her contact with the true Italy, the courage of her passions and the commitment to her own happiness – societal conventions and expectations be damned. In one of the novel’s pivotal scenes, Lucy runs into George Emerson, a young man she finds herself drawn to, out in the countryside. The landscape is pure magic, resonant with the soul of life itself:

From her feet the ground sloped sharply into view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth. (78)

Moved by the eroticized, Edenic Mediterranean climate, the “primal source,” Lucy and George kiss. The contrast between Italy and England is firmly established later in the

novel when Lucy has returned home and discovers, with fresh insight, the “horror of Suburbia” where “Life, so far as she troubled to conceive it, was a circle of rich, pleasant people, with identical streets and identical foes. In this circle, one thought, married, and died. Outside it were poverty and vulgarity for ever trying to enter” (127). In Italy, however,

where any one who chooses may warm himself in equality, as in the sun, this conception of life vanished. Her senses expanded; she felt that there was no one whom she might not get to like, that social barriers were irremovable, doubtless, but not particularly high. [...] She returned with new eyes. [...] Italy was offering her the most priceless possession of all – her own soul. (127-28)

The gulf between England and Italy couldn’t be any wider here; it is the difference between a stultifying and limited cage versus the expansiveness of freedom.²¹

An even more direct line of influence lies between Fowles and Lawrence Durrell’s Greek travelogues. Durrell, whose work Fowles read and acknowledged as an inspiration, wrote a trilogy of books about the time he spent living in Corfu, Greece; the first of these books, published eight years before Fowles wrote the initial draft of *The Magus*, is *Prospero’s Cell* (1945). Durrell opens the book by boldly declaring “You enter Greece as one might enter a dark crystal; the form of things becomes irregular, refracted. Mirages suddenly swallow islands, and wherever you look the trembling curtain of the atmosphere deceives. Other countries may offer you discoveries in manners or lore or landscape; Greece offers you something harder – the discovery of yourself” (11). His claim that travel to a Mediterranean space is a kind of inward journey of self-actualization dovetails with Woolf’s staged encounter between English tourists

²¹ In the short story “The Road from Colonus,” Forster wrote about an aging Grecophile, Mr. Lucas, and his trip to Greece. At first highly disappointed with what he finds, Mr. Lucas eventually hears the voice of Greece calling to him: “silent men, murmuring water, and whispering trees. For the whole place called with one voice, articulate to him” (103). This voice is akin to the offering of Italy in *A Room with a View*: Lucy’s “own soul.”

and a Greek monk, Forster's declaration that Lucy Honeychurch discovered her "soul" in Italy, and Fowles's depiction of the godgame as an essentialized Greek experience of intense inner change. Further, Fowles's notion of Greece as a land of myths that is at once a real space inhabited by modern day Greeks and a fertile ground for a theater of myths – the godgame – can be traced directly to Durrell. As Durrell writes, "In this landscape observed objects still retain a kind of mythological form – so that though chronologically we are separated from Ulysses by hundreds of years in time, yet we dwell in his shadow. [...] [W]ith what delightful and poignant accuracy does [the Odyssey] describe the modern Greeks; it is a portrait of a nation which rings as clear today as when it was written" (59). Durrell's desire to see Greece as a magical place defined by myth perfectly suits Fowles's purposes of moving his protagonist from the mundane world of postwar England into its opposite, a land charged with the archaic wildness of its mythic past.

Following in the footsteps of Woolf, Forster, and Durrell, Greece becomes for Nicholas – and Fowles – a land of myth, femininity, and freedom; a stripping away of culture and a yielding to something natural and wild that exists beyond language and rationality. By drawing on these narratives of Mediterranean travel, Fowles tries to justify Nicholas's journey as one of redemption undertaken under empire's protecting umbrella. Kirke Kefalea describes Fowles's Durrell-esque depiction of Greece: "the borders between real Greek experience and mythical, imaginative Greek experience are intentionally blurred" so Greece can become a "special, even sacred place that [Fowles] associates with Homeric sacred narratives" (230). This blurred border whereby Greece-as-landscape and Greece-as-myth overlap defines Nicholas's time in Greece and his

experience of the godgame; the extreme excesses of the godgame underscore the artificiality of this mythic connection and the lengths Fowles must go to try and affirm the special status of Greece as a land of myths. The novel's exertions – expressed by its excessive imagination leaps and labyrinthine execution of the godgame – speak to the degree to which Fowles is intent on shoehorning prior Mediterranean travel narratives into a postimperial context and serve as symptoms of the novel's ultimate inability to sustain this consoling narrative.

As Nicholas's journey begins, he is intent on finding the heart of wild, mythic Greece; during his first days abroad, he is at great pains to distinguish between the Greece of small, isolated islands and the Greece of Athens and tourist spots. The former is the true, essential Greece; the latter is corrupted, repulsive, and tawdry. For Nicholas, remote, uncivilized Greece, in contrast to what he witnesses in Athens, represents a kind of primordial femininity, charged with the power of ancient, psychically resonant myth, a place both seductive and desiring to be seduced by the right kind of traveler. This attitude reveals itself when, upon his arrival, Nicholas explores the island and reflects on "the lovely illusion that one was the very first man that had ever stood on it, that had ever had eyes, that had ever existed, the very first man" (54). Here he is expressing both a desire to return to a "primitive," redemptive state as well as a desire to conquer the land through a scopic mastery. His identity as an outsider is the necessary condition which creates this "lovely illusion"; he willfully erases people and history from the landscape as he explores it during his first days there in order to imagine his full possession of an

untouched paradise.²² He also repeatedly emphasizes the overwhelming beauty of Greece. For instance, Nicholas takes in the view overlooking Athens from Mount Hymettus and attempts to describe what he sees: “Serene, superb, majestic: I tried for adjectives less used, but anything else seemed slick and underweight. I could see for eighty miles, and all pure, all noble, luminous, immense, all as it always had been” (36). That the Greek landscape defies description only intensifies its appeal for him. He is awed by his inability to name what he sees and seduced by a space that proves language inadequate.

The scene that follows, in which Nicholas reflects at length on his first exposure to Greece, extends this notion and establishes the dualism between Englishness and Greekness that sustains itself for the length of the novel. It is worth quoting at length. From the vantage point of the mountain height, Nicholas

looked down at my pale London hands. Even they seemed changed, nauseatingly alien, things I should long ago have disowned.

When that ultimate Mediterranean light fell on the world around me, I could see it was supremely beautiful; but when it touched me, I felt it was hostile. It seemed to corrode, not cleanse. It was like being at the beginning of an interrogation under arc lights; already my old self began to know that it wouldn't be able to hold out. It was partly the terror, the stripping-to-essentials, of love; because I fell head over heels, totally and forever in love with the Greek landscape from the moment I arrived. But with the love came a contradictory, almost irritating, feeling of impotence and inferiority, as if Greece were a woman so sensually provocative that I must fall physically and desperately in love with her, and the same time so calmly aristocratic that I should never be able to approach her.

None of the books I had read explained this sinister-fascinating, this Circe-like quality of Greece; the quality that makes it unique. In England we live in a very muted, calm, domesticated relationship with what remains of our natural landscape and its soft northern lights; in Greece landscape and light are so beautiful, so all-present, so intense, so wild, that the relationship is immediately love-hatred, one of passion. (36)

²² Only brief references are made to the locals, and often they are highly dismissive. He describes life there as a “stale Levantine provincial society that belonged more to the world of the Ottoman Empire, Balzac in a fez, than the 1950's” (39).

From the outset of his “exile” in Greece, Nicholas creates a very clear dichotomy between Greekness and Englishness. They are mutually exclusive for him – what is Greek can only be understood in contrast to all that is English, and vice-versa. If Englishness is “pale,” tame, and cast as male, Greece is “intense,” natural, and seductively female. And what he longs for – and fears with an “English” caution that is twined with the pleasure of coming rapture – is to be transformed, to have his “pale hands” made alien. To use Fowles’s distinction, this transformation would strip him of his Britishness and return to him his Green Englishness. His staid middle class background, his whiteness, the absence of vibrancy in his life – all symbolized by those hands – are what he seeks to have flayed from him in a process that he anticipates will be both violent and visceral. Furthermore, the hostility he senses from the island itself parallels the hostility he feels from the people. “There was a heavy aftermath of anglophobia,” he confesses, “aggravated by the political situation at that time, which I had to suffer” (39). Despite the recent political reality of the Greek Civil War of the 1940s, the island, he imagines, is far from what he calls “reality” and thus far from England in both space and spirit. Here he has become, in his own words, “Alice in Wonderland.”

The build-up to Nicholas’s first encounter with Conchis and the start of the godgame continue to emphasize the contrast between Englishness and Greekness while intensifying Nicholas’s desire to “conquer” the island of Phraxos and enter into the “real Greece” that exceeds his comprehension. In this manner, his journey initially conforms to what Sieglinde Lemke describes as modernism’s primitivist discourse which is defined by “the romanticization of non-Western peoples, usually idealizing their instincts,

sexuality, and their proclivity to the natural” (26). As Nicholas tells it, in his desire to penetrate the island’s inscrutability and tantalizing beauty, he “began quietly to rape the island” (49) by exploring it on foot, forging a communion with its hidden spaces. This is what Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska describe in *Travellers’ Tales* (1994) as the traveler’s narrative of “inversion of everyday order [which] offers a vicarious participation in the pleasures associated with higher status, symbolically marked by exalted points of view, exclusive spaces and privileged services” (199). As his first term ends and December approaches, these feelings are only exacerbated when Nicholas continues to pursue experiences of pleasure and exclusivity. At the end of section one, Nicholas pronounces that Greece “made conventional English notions of what was moral and immoral ridiculous [...]. Goodness and beauty may be separable in the north, but not in Greece” (44). Greece – “the most beautiful and the most cruel country in the world” (97) – as the epitome of the sublime, could be frightening, it could be unimaginably vital and beautiful, but it could never be dull. England, for Nicholas, could *only* be dull: “I was English; *ergo* puritan” (147). The English are a “xenophobic, continentals-despising” “race” (87) he rails; to be English in *The Magus* is to be mundane, withdrawn, exhausted, dull, urban – above all else, to be entirely plotted and predictable, to be a single plot acted out by characters who are always masked. On the opposite pole, then, is all that is associated with the Greek type: eros, danger, myth, alienation, elusiveness, immediacy, multiplicity, passion, possibility. This pattern of contrasting English prudishness, restraint, aloofness, and emptiness against Greek passion, extremity, exuberance, and sensuality – one he inherits from his literary precursors like Woolf, Forster, and Durrell – continues for the duration of the novel and is repeatedly and

especially emphasized during the next section of the novel: the godgame. This contrast provides the backdrop for Nicholas's struggle to unfetter himself from the confining masks of English vacuity; as he says later about his countrymen: "we were English: born with masks and bred to lie" (318). In the godgame, Greekness becomes the essential foil against which Nicholas's Britishness is dismantled and his Englishness returned to him.

5. The Godgame as Essential Greek Travel Experience

"[M]yth can also be empowering and redemptive. [...] Behind every nation or state there is the state-that-might-have-been. Myth expresses a need for rootedness and identity, but it also allows us to continue to exist when we are uprooted; it allows us to uproot ourselves and still live, to take a seavoyage from our own identity" (Hilary Mantel, "No Passes or Documents Are Needed" 105).

Up to this point in the novel, Nicholas's journey from England to Greece has set the stage for what will become the core of Nicholas's Greek experience: the godgame. The godgame proceeds via a range of sometimes strange, sometimes banal encounters, experiences, and performances put on for Nicholas's benefit, all of which are intended to both teach him the lessons of the godgame and to constantly force him to call into question the truth of what he has learned and assumed.²³ Conchis, for instance, over the months that pass, relates various stories about his own strange life to Nicholas, but, in doing so, directly undermines the truth of what he has told Nicholas already and calls into question what Nicholas thinks he understands about the other major participants in the godgame. Lily/Julie (whose precise identity is never clearly established) is the most important of these participants as she is positioned to become Nicholas's love interest within the game, a plan which succeeds perfectly. At different points in the godgame,

²³ The godgame, as Katherine Tarbox puts it, is "an ambitious piece of symbolic metatheater whose director is an unorthodox doctor of the mind," a choreographed experience enacted to teach Nicholas that "he is leading an inauthentic life" (Tarbox 16). Although intentionally obtuse, the lessons of Conchis's godgame revolve around the relationship between art and life, the importance of balancing existential freedom with responsibility to others, and the necessity of always seeing with "whole sight."

Lily/Julie is alternately presented to Nicholas as the ghost of Conchis's first love, as a paranoid schizophrenic, as a young Englishwoman with a background very similar to Nicholas's who is also being manipulated by Conchis, and as a psychologist who has been callously using Nicholas as part of a larger experiment. Conchis manipulates Nicholas in similar fashion throughout the godgame. At one point, actors dressed as Greek gods put on an impromptu and sexually suggestive show for Nicholas. At another, what appears to be actual Nazi soldiers and Greek peasants encounter Nicholas in the woods and reenact, as if in real life, an event related to the Nazi occupation of Phraxos that Conchis later describes to Nicholas. The godgame's most brutal staging, though, convinces Nicholas through various evidence that Alison, his love interest from part one, has committed suicide (a lie that he is allowed to believe for quite some time before the truth is revealed). As the godgame progresses, Nicholas finds himself drawn, often in spite of his anger at Conchis, to return to Conchis's property, attracted by the mystery, by the feeling of being specially chosen, and by his attraction to Lily/Julie.

The godgame becomes for Nicholas the embodiment of what he sought in journeying to Greece: a transformative, inherently Greek experience which breathes fresh life into his tired English soul. Alienated from his home country, yearning for an essential Greekness which nonetheless seems tantalizingly out of his grasp and comprehension, Nicholas, when he first meets Conchis, has been primed for the godgame. The godgame is indeed the very heart of Nicholas's exile; although he didn't leave England for Greece knowing what would happen to him, in exiling himself to what he wants to believe is a wild, uncivilized, mythic Mediterranean island, he discovers, in the godgame, all that he craved and more. Many references in the novel betray his desire to think of himself as a

mythic traveler entering a classical Greek space; to take one example, when he sees what he is lead to believe is the ghost of Conchis's first love, he had "a knowledge of what it was like physically, moment by moment, to have been young and ancient, an Ulysses on his way to meet Circe, a Theseus on his journey to Crete, an Oedipus still searching for his destiny" (140). Because of the nature of the godgame – steeped in myth, mystery, and what David Roessel calls the "mythical method" – it represents his traveler's wish fulfillment.

If the purpose of a self-imposed exile is always two-fold – escape from one culture, embrace of another – then this experience, as orchestrated by Maurice Conchis and his players, represents that which Nicholas most desires. Midway into the novel, when Nicholas is deeply imbricated in the godgame, he reflects on how "I was now deep in the strangest maze in Europe. [...] Now I was Theseus in the maze" (275-76). In imagining himself as a classical Greek hero immersed in the maze of a mythic Greece, Nicholas is projecting himself into his ideal Greek travel experience, that of the outsider who has penetrated the mysteries of Greece and rediscovered its classical heritage – the mythic beneath the modern.²⁴ He is a Durrell-like narrator, finding resonances of the idealized, heroic past in the Greece of the present. In this manner, Nicholas's travels follow the narrative of travel-as-transformation and travel-as-mystery; to the degree that the godgame thwarts and undermines Nicholas's expectations and stage-manages his mind and his emotions, it fulfills the idealized expectations of a life-altering travel encounter. What a traveler like Nicholas seeks is an experience which does not merely replicate that of the tourist but allows the sojourner the chance to encounter the essential, the true, the

²⁴ A similar tone is struck in a scene added to the revised edition: "I felt a near-absolute happiness, a being poised, not sure how all this would turn out, but also not wanting to know, totally identified with the moment: with Greece, this lost place" (Revised Edition 355)

heart of a people and culture. The godgame, in all its various manifestations and machinations, comes to represent exactly that for Nicholas. Mysterious, seductive, defiant, theatrical, life-affirming, raw: the godgame as an experience represents the very virtues that Nicholas idealizes as defining Greek national identity, an identity which for him is reified into myth.

When *The Magus* is understood as a novel engaged in a sustained manner with reimagining English identity through travel, we can see how the godgame is not merely intended as Nicholas's convoluted reeducation in existentialist thought. Instead, the godgame's particular goal is to unmake the kind of English identity Nicholas represents. Its purpose is to attack and dissolve all that makes Nicholas English within the racial terms of the novel: his rationality, his sense of superiority, his closed-mindedness, his need for explanations, and his certainty in the face of an uncertain world. But why is Nicholas chosen as the sole subject to suffer at the hands of Conchis's extraordinary machinations? This is a question Nicholas keeps returning to, and what he discovers and has confirmed repeatedly throughout the course of the godgame is that he was chosen not because he is unique but because he is not. "What interested [Conchis] was [...] some specificness I exhibited," Nicholas observes, "some category I filled. I was not interesting in myself, but only as an example" (76).²⁵ For Conchis's purpose, Nicholas is a representative of Englishness, but of a specific version. The godgame was never just about transforming Nicholas personally; rather, it enacts a full onslaught against Nicholas as a type, Nicholas as representative of his race.

²⁵ In the revised version, Nicholas notes that "my ignorance, my nature, my vices and virtues were somehow necessary in his masque" (Revised Edition 190)

Additional evidence for this idea lies in the fact that Nicholas becomes fully involved in the godgame whereas the previous holder of his post, Sandy Mitford, is rejected by Conchis. Mitford represents an über-masculinized English attitude of a previous generation, one defined by militarism, blustery arrogance, machismo, and outward racism. Shortly before departing for Greece, Nicholas meets with Mitford, a character who embodies all that Fowles associates most with “being British” but not English. Mitford is ex-military and full of all the bluster and arrogance of a true empire man – cut from the same cloth as Nicholas’s own father. The telling details in his physical description reveal all the outdated arrogance of a man who still believes in the superiority of Britain:

He was two or three years older than myself, tanned, with blue staring eyes in a narrow head. He had a dark young-officer moustache, which he kept on touching, and he wore a dark-blue blazer, with a regimental tie. He reeked mufti; and almost at once we started a guerrilla war of prestige and anti-prestige. [...] He had tried hard to acquire the triune personality of the philhellene in fashion – gentleman, scholar, thug – but he spoke with a second-hand accent and the clipped, sparse prepschoolisms of a Viscount Montgomery. He was dogmatic, unbrooking, lost off the battlefield. (30-31)

Like the famous WWII British officer Nicholas compares him to, Viscount Montgomery, Mitford speaks in pronouncements, inviolably confident in himself and his country, inflexible in his opinions. Mitford, in his blustery way, tells Nicholas that he punched a Greek professor while at Phraxos because you’ve “Got to keep ‘em down, you know” (32). His advice when it comes to the students is similarly laced with delusional authoritarianism: “Treat ‘em tough. It’s the only way. Never let ‘em get you down” (32). At this point, Nicholas is properly disgusted by his predecessor – he also describes him as a “destructive Boy Scout [...] [who] had to live in this dull new welfare world” and as “T. E. Lawrence run totally to seed” (32). The fact that Mitford isn’t selected by

Conchis, but Nicholas is, suggests that the kind of English identity which Conchis and, by extension, Fowles, want to undermine is specifically a postimperial one best represented by Nicholas's ennui and cynicism as opposed to Mitford's cocky certainty in the old ideological bulwarks of empire.

The novel lambasts Britishness. But it is most intent on returning to its angry, young, male protagonist his Green Englishness via his travel experience in a country that serves as a repository for the core values of that identity. Nicholas himself diagnoses his own personal flaws as those of his entire postwar generation; he confesses that "I was rather ambitious once. I ought to have been blind as well. Then perhaps I wouldn't feel defeated. [...] It's not all me. It's in the age. In all my generation. We all feel the same" (128-29).²⁶ Nicholas here explicitly connects his personal failings with those of England in the postwar years, appreciating fully that Conchis loathes in him what has stricken an entire nation. Never mentioned is the end of empire, and yet the postwar ennui and inwardness of the postwar generation that Nicholas describes represent the flip side of empire's end. For Nicholas, as for many others, the end of empire is coded in terms of "retreat" and a loss of collective purpose, with the actual empire never mentioned and yet forming an invisible frame of reference. When conceptualized in this manner, much that seems mysterious or paradoxical during the various stories and "stagings" Conchis presents to Nicholas can be seen as representative of the postwar generation's ideas about England and its relation to the world, their own sense of English

²⁶ Fowles makes this point more explicit in the revised edition when he has Nicholas admit how Conchis "had simply guessed that for me freedom meant the freedom to satisfy personal desire, private ambition. [...] I thought back over the past few years of my life, the striving for individuality that had obsessed all my generation after the limiting and conforming years of the war, our retreat from society, nation, into self" (Revised Edition 448).

identity, and the powerful but unacknowledged effect the end of the British Empire has on their self-image.

The end of the British Empire and the continuing legacy of imperial ideology contribute heavily to the “failure” of Nicholas’s generation and the warped, magnified version of Nicholas’s Englishness which he discovers encoded into the godgame. Much of this encoding happens during the leisurely meals when Conchis shares parts of his life story with Nicholas. A number of striking parallels emerge during the course of Conchis’s storytelling between himself (or the version of himself created in his stories) and Nicholas. Both men travel away from but then return to England seemingly transformed by their experiences; in Conchis’s case, this is when he goes off to fight in WWI. Both are heavily influenced by a wealthy patron with hidden ulterior motives; for Conchis that was a man named Alphonse de Deukans, a figure presented as a very Conchis-like character. Like Nicholas, Conchis leaves England in an act of “exile”; in his case, he lives in Buenos Aires for four years after the war. Conchis’s stories about himself create a kind of Alice in Wonderland effect in the novel, as if they are transmutations of Nicholas’s own life, warped and distorted but still nonetheless reflections meant to reveal. As the author of Nicholas’s Greek experience, Conchis plans the godgame as an immersive, mythic traveler’s experience which offers up that most common of Mediterranean fantasies: Nicholas’s own soul, reflected in Conchis’s supposed autobiography.

As an intense Mediterranean fantasy meant to invoke deep introspection and transformation, the godgame functions through the mirror-effect, by presenting writ large, in all its various stories and stagings, Nicholas’s own ideas about nation, race, and

self. As Conchis states, in a line that could have been uttered by Lawrence Durrell, “Greece is like a mirror. It makes you suffer. Then you learn. [...] To live with what you are” (84).²⁷ Everything in the godgame reveals and manipulates Nicholas’s psychological makeup: his chauvinistic attitude toward women, his fear of the racial other, his arrogance and self-certainty, his need for rational explanations. For example, in terms of how Nicholas views nationality, Conchis tells Nicholas that ““I do not judge countries by their geniuses. I judge them by their racial characteristics”” and goes on to do just that (69), thus reflecting back at Nicholas his equation of race and nation. Repeatedly throughout *The Magus* Nicholas is guilty of the same kind of thinking whereby national affiliation shades into inherent, stereotypical national identity. This is evident in his view of many of the novel’s minor characters: Joe, the threatening American “Negro”; the simple, child-like Greek peasants, the “Beckett-like” Scotswoman Jojo, the German officers, the optimistic American Briggs, who is the “quintessential exemplar” of “young college-educated Americans” (548). Nowhere, however, is that more evident than in the novel’s sustained binary of English and Greek identities and the godgame’s enactment of that dualism.

²⁷ Conchis bears a striking resemblance to an important figure from Durrell’s *Prospero’s Cell*, “Count D.,” who is a

celebrated recluse into whom the philosophic skepticism of a classical education had bitten so deeply. [...] [H]e possessed a pair of remarkable eyes set in a head which was a little too big for his body. But the small hands and feet gave a distinctly Byronic cast to one’s first impressions. [...] Unlike the majority of recluses he is a hospitable man. Comfortably off, fond of his cellar and his immense library [...] the whole place retains some of the formal humanist charm of the Italian country house. Here we spend our time in endless conversations. [...] The Count is a philosopher. [...] He speaks always with the most casual frankness about his own life and interests, his rather fine dark eyes fixed calmly upon his audience. He is filled with [...] ‘a speculative calm.’ (75-76)

Although I know of no direct link between Fowles’s creation of Conchis (critics conjecture that he is modeled after a man Fowles met while in Greece), the parallels here are remarkable.

Conchis frames his biography and the stories he tells in terms of an English/Greek duality which mirrors back to Nicholas his own dualistic notions of Greek and English character. The godgame's reification of national identity plays out in a sustained manner in the character of "Conchis" himself. From the very beginning of the godgame, Conchis presents himself to Nicholas as a refracted version of Nicholas himself, as someone yearning for a better life and grappling with the meaning and limitations of his national identity. This can be witnessed when Conchis first sits Nicholas down for one of his sustained storytelling sessions, during which Conchis relates the story of his past, from his childhood through to his young adulthood (or at least purports to since all in the godgame is never clearly real nor fiction). In this first version of himself, Conchis claims to have an English father and a Greek mother; in claiming this, he also extends and reinforces the many ways that the novel aligns the English with masculinity, the Greek with femininity.

Feeling like something of an outcast as a result of his mixed blood, the young Maurice Conchis was consumed by his shame at not being fully English. He confesses to Nicholas, "I used to think of my Greek blood as 'dark' blood. Almost Negro blood" (100). "I was bitterly ashamed [...] of my Greek blood. Yet possessed by it" (101). Speaking of the great love he felt as a young man for his neighbor, Lily, he describes how back then he "wanted to be purely English so as to be able to offer myself untainted to Lily" (101). To further complicate matters, as his relationship with Lily was developing, the war in Europe loomed just over the horizon (the year was 1914). Conchis denounces the war to Lily, to which she responds by declaring her admiration for the soldiers who were heading off to fight. Conchis again is shamed, blaming his cowardice on his

“miserable Greek blood” (102). So, he decides to enlist as a way to win over Lily. In doing so, he “also thought that I had conquered that Greek half of me. I was fully English at last” (103). Within this version of his past, Conchis’s attitude about Englishness is clearly coterminous with official national rhetoric; Englishness is equated with courage, civic mindedness, and moral certainty. By suppressing the “natural inclinations” of his Greek nature, he has seemingly mastered his “dark blood.”²⁸ This self-mastery and self-making render his decision and entry into Englishness complete in that these are virtues which are at the very heart of what it has traditionally meant to be English.

A pivotal example of this contrast between Englishness and Greekness happens late into the godgame, when, in response to Nicholas’s claim that “perhaps [he had] no choice” about the direction of the godgame, Conchis “looked at me, but said nothing. I felt all his energy then, his fierceness, his heartlessness, his impatience with my stupidity, my melancholy, my selfishness. *His hatred not only of me, but of all he had decided I stood for; something passive, abdicating, English, in life*” (my italics, 382). Conchis, as Nicholas understands it, has chosen Nicholas for this experience not for him as an individual but for what he represents – for the “English” approach to life. During this scene, Conchis has been relating to Nicholas a pivotal story about Greek freedom fighters rebelling against the Nazi occupation. This story establishes the essential Greek

²⁸ The darkness here is racial, but it also suggests sexual “depravity.” This link between Greekness and homosexuality is rarely made explicit in the novel, but it is addressed directly by Nicholas when he first starts teaching at the Lord Byron School. There, he confesses to how “[m]uch more tempting were some of the boys, possessors of an olive grace and a sharp individuality [...]. I had Gide-like moments, but they were not reciprocated, because nowhere is pederasty more abominated than in bourgeois Greece” (43). This is a remarkable moment for a character who is otherwise portrayed as obsessed with women. Towards the end of the godgame, Lily/Julie suggests Nicholas may have “homosexual tendencies” (522). Also worth noting here is the fact that Fowles admitted to a similar experience during his teaching tenure in Greece. In his journals, he confesses to “the dormant homosexual in me” (qtd. in Warburton 101)

character against which Nicholas's passivity is set. One freedom fighter in particular, when caught by the Nazis, speaks "eleutheria," or freedom, "in his eyes, in his being, totally in his being" (377). Conchis goes on:

He was the immalleable, the essence, the beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond civilization, beyond history [...]. He was every freedom, from the very worst to the very best [...]. He was something that passed beyond morality but sprang out of the very essence of things – that comprehended all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing – the prohibition not to do all" (377)

And what the resistance fighter represents, as Conchis puts it, was his "refusal to cohere" which in and of itself "was essentially Greek" (377). In this way, English apathy and passivity, traits which describe the typical English attitude to empire and its dissolution, is set against Greek action and noble commitment to freedom. As David Roessel writes, "The Greek resistance to the Nazi occupation was viewed [by Western lovers of Greece] as a kind of heroic age, a return to the Greece of Byron" (272). This Greek freedom and heroism perfectly illustrates the "mirror"-like quality of Greece. The story of the freedom fighter reflects back to Nicholas what the novel wishes to see as a core dimension of Englishness: a dedication to liberty and justice. This "purging and often puritanical obsession with justice," writes Fowles in "On Being English but Not British," "is to me the quintessence of Englishness" and is represented for him by the archetype of the "Just Outlaw," Robin Hood (80). The Greek freedom fighter in *The Magus* is a Robin Hood figure in this sense and represents the stereotype of the English racial character as essentially freedom loving. Conchis's story about him is a major step in the process of returning to an effete and overcivilized Nicholas his true inheritance as an Englishman. The Greek identity that Nicholas comes to embrace is really his Englishness in disguise, returned to its pre-imperial roots and reinvigorated.

In addition to all the ways that Conchis's statements about essentialized English and Greek identities conform to imperial rhetoric, a number of other features of the godgame allude more overtly to the continued hold of imperial thinking even after the end of empire. For instance, the moment early in the novel when Conchis draws Nicholas's attention to T.S. Eliot's poem "Little Gidding," particularly the lines, "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (55) resonates not just with the clarion call of self-discovery and aesthetic innovation but also of the rhetoric of empire-building. The repeated allusions to *The Tempest* scattered throughout *The Magus* likewise serve as coded references to the colonial past.²⁹ The mysterious source of Conchis's wealth and power, their divorce from any obvious effort or enterprise, coupled with the revelation that Alphonse de Deukens, the mentor and benefactor to Conchis who himself is a Conchis-esque figure, "built" his vast fortunes "on a heart of darkness" from "various enterprises in the Congo" (170) further emphasize the link made in the novel between Conchis and colonial power.

Nicholas's wish to keep Bourani, Conchis's property, for himself, to keep all outsiders away, and the pleasure he always gets from surveying the area from heights makes him also a would-be-ruler, lord over all he sees (at least as he would have it). One of the major reasons for Conchis's infamy on the island is that, in addition to the belief that he acted as a traitor during the Nazi occupation of Phraxos, he owns large portions of the

²⁹ Conchis, in comparison to Prospero, is not just the magician; he is also the figure of authority, with Joe, an African-American who plays a major role in the godgame, often cast in the role of Caliban and Lily/Julie, Nicholas's love interest, as Ariel. In one scene, Nicholas looks up at Conchis from the beach set below Conchis's house and sees a vision of a "dark figure on the raised white terrace; legate of the sun facing the sun; the most ancient royal power. He appeared, wished to appear, to survey, to bless, to command; *dominus* and *domaine*. And once again I thought of Prospero" (119).

island but refuses to sell any of it, thus “depriv[ing] the island of badly needed wealth” (334). Furthermore, Conchis “confesses” that ““I have always craved for territory. In the technical ornithological sense. A fixed domaine on which no others of my species may trespass”” (354). Since the godgame is a mirror of Nicholas’s own psyche, we can better understand Conchis, not as a colonizer himself, but as acting out Nicholas’s own need for territory and dominance.

By the climax of the godgame, in which Nicholas is put “on trial” by a panel of psychologists who were also actors in the godgame, Nicholas is thoroughly deranged by his entire experience. This trial’s purpose is to assess him as the subject of their experiment, explain the “real” purpose of the godgame to him, and offer him the freedom to physically punish Lily/Julie for betraying and manipulating him. Nicholas views this choice as a test of his character, and of specifically the Englishness he thought he had abandoned: “I knew they must be absolutely certain of my decency, my stupid English decency” (446). Great irony is at work here, and it serves to demonstrate that in spite of Nicholas’s deep desire to escape England and his Englishness, what he encounters through his exile is not rootlessness or freedom from the nation but the return of his Englishness with a vengeance. This is not the liberatory Green Englishness to which he aspires but the contemporary Englishness that constrains him. Nicholas is then forcibly removed from Phraxos – the godgame ended.

As this scene demonstrates, in staging an intervention whereby Greekness could enable *The Magus* to present to the reader a reimagining of English identity, Nicholas is thrust forcefully back on the safe shores of an unchanging postwar Englishness defined by its limitations. In this double bind, caught between his longing for a home and his

alienation from the two poles of his travel – Nicholas, and the novel, resort to a reverse journey, a newly imposed exile, as a false resolution. *The Magus* confronts the crumbling of Englishness in the decline of empire – both the tenacity with which people hold onto to national identity and the impossibility of maintaining it – by trying to imagine a Green English identity forged through its Greek other. In the end, though, Nicholas – and the novel – is unable to create a reinvigorated English identity. Nicholas proves too incalcitrant to change, too steeped in imperial ideology, too stuck being his English self. The final chapters of the novel depict a Nicholas who has returned to England where he wishes to view himself as totally alienated from his home country but who in the end has failed to imagine an English identity outside of the powerfully shaping influence of England’s imperial history.

6. Inescapable England

“In stinkin’ auld England” (*The Magus* 568)

The Magus goes to great lengths to transform Nicholas into a fully alienated subject – and, indeed, Nicholas glories in his imagined status as a permanent exile once he returns to England, someone who he wants to believe has been so changed by his time in Greece that it is as if his Britishness has been erased. But the final section demonstrates that no such change has ever really occurred. The narrative arc of Mediterranean has failed. But why? The myth of alienation is founded for Nicholas on two factors. One is his sense of entitlement born out of his identity as a white, educated Englishman. The other is the illusion that a reimagined Englishness remade through a life-altering Mediterranean travel experience can indeed mystically undo the British entanglement with empire. Fowles in “On Being English but Not British” wrote of an essential English identity that

existed long before and would continue long after an imperial Britishness. But in *The Magus*, Fowles staged a grand experiment in unmaking that past, in escaping from it and returning one of its subjects totally alienated from the history and fallout of the British Empire. In the long dénouement of the novel, Nicholas's so-called alienation is revealed to be illusory, his grand, existentialist epiphany founded on the unshakeable history of empire. His freedom at the end is made possible only by the freedoms curtailed by empire, his awakening an extension of the same thinking that allowed the empire to flourish. *The Magus* demonstrates the lengths to which many of the English had gone in suppressing the past rather than confronting the ramifications of England's empire. Fowles, in writing this novel, tried to imagine travel to Greece as a salve to the stultifying form of British identity which had made the empire possible, but what he ended up narrating was the failure of Nicholas's travel to escape England.

Nicholas's departure from Phraxos and return to England is narrated as another form of exile, but this time, unlike his "exile" from England, the exile is not of his choosing. After he is expelled from Bourani and the godgame appears to end, Nicholas feels like a mere "tourist" (464) again when travelling through Greece, no better or different than any of the visitors he rubs shoulders with. And on leaving the Lord Byron School and Phraxos, he claims "I wanted to get away, to Athens, anywhere, to nonidentity and noninvolvement" (472). This is the process we witnessed at the start of the novel happening now in reverse: Nicholas is emerging from his time in Greece as much the outsider as ever, seeking to escape Phraxos and disconnect from the world around him. Again, he'll be in exile, but this time from his paradise. Conchis has ended the godgame and removed all the players, and in doing so has withdrawn the experience which had

stood in for authentic, mythic, essential Greekness. Nicholas longingly thinks about his banishment from a space he had called his own: "I did not mind leaving the school [...]. But leaving the island, the light, the sea. [...] Whatever happened, I was banned from ever living again on Phraxos" (473). He is again a kind of Robinson Crusoe, but this time with a far greater sense of abandonment: "I was marooned; wingless and leaden" (482). Nicholas doesn't consider any alternatives: it is as if his punishment is to return to England, the traveler kicked out of exotic utopia he had tried to conquer but which had conquered him. In a powerfully ironic reversal, Nicholas's has become a failed neo-imperial narrative. His expulsion thus recasts, in miniature, the sense of defeat and withdrawal associated with the British Empire's end. Like the imperial nation, Nicholas is flung back on himself, cast back to his native shores. And, like England, he appears to be changed forever by this experience, but not in ways he might have anticipated.

His first real immersion back in British society occurs before he returns to England. He is invited by the British Council representative in Greece to join him and some fellow Brits for dinner one night shortly before Nicholas's departure. That day, when Nicholas had visited the Council to inform them that he had "resigned" his post at the school and would be returning to England, he is immediately repulsed by his time there:

The stiflingly English atmosphere of the place had never seemed more alien; and yet to my horror I had detected myself trying to fit in acceptably, to conform, to get their approval. [...] The people in the Council were the total foreigners; and the anonymous Greeks around me in the streets the familiar compatriots. (483-84).

The contrast that the novel has drawn from the beginning is expressed here with full force. What is especially striking about this passage is that despite Nicholas's belief that he had rid himself of his Englishness, like expunging oneself of a disease, or a bad habit,

he was still *tainted*, still all too English. Nicholas struggles in this passage to distance himself from his countrymen and stress his connection the Greek people, a connection he believes in but which was never really demonstrated in all of his time on Greece. As the night progresses, Nicholas expresses just how horribly alien the English seem to him now:

Nobody said what they really wanted, what they really thought. Nobody behaved with breadth, with warmth, with naturalness; and finally it became pathetic [...]. We were all the same [...]. The solemn figures of the Old Country, the Queen, the Public School, Oxbridge, the Right Accent, People Like Us, stood around the table like secret police, ready to crush down in an instant on any attempt at an intelligent European humanity (487-88).

The weight of being English is so oppressive at this moment that the scene takes on an eerily claustrophobic cast, as if national identity were a straight jacket denying people their true selves. Later, he insists that he has experienced the “loss of [his] Englishness” (502). Going forward, especially for the rest of Nicholas’s time in Greece and his return to England, he is hyperaware of his nationality. Even though he keeps insisting he is estranged from his national identity and views himself as someone unmoored from national belonging, his obsession with these issues and his perpetuation of his old habits of thought proves the opposite.

When he does return to London, his sense of alienation from England and his disgust with the English reaches a crescendo:

If Rome, a city of vulgar living, had been depressing after Greece, London, a city of the drab dead, was fifty times worse. I had forgotten the innumerability of the place, its ugliness, its termite density after the sparsities of the Aegean. It was like mud after diamonds, dank undergrowth after sunlit marble; and as the airline bus crawled on its way through that endless suburb that lies between Northolt Kensington I wondered why anyone should, or could, ever return of his own free will to such a landscape, such a society, such a climate. [...] No Greek is like any other Greek; and every English face seemed, that day, like every other English face. (501)

Nicholas insists in this passage that he not only is completely outside of and superior to London culture, but that he has been truly exiled here, forced out of the godgame and returned to the hell that is England. If his reaction here perfectly mirrors his attitude towards England in the opening section of the novel, in what sense has he changed? If the purpose of his journey was to rediscover a more rudimentary English nature that supersedes Britishness, a more capacious, vital, just way of being in the world, has he at all succeeded? The Nicholas of this scene certainly seems unchanged, the ugliness in his mood and his judgment merely matched in the people and the city that surround him. In this scene, he perpetuates the same English-Greek binary that ran its course through the entire novel.

Although I argue in this chapter against the grain of *The Magus* and its desire to imagine that Nicholas has indeed been transformed by his experience, one key moment does occur towards the novel's ends that suggests Nicholas has gained some insight into the meaning of his travels. Back in England, Nicholas runs into Mitford again, and once again Mitford represents the apotheosis of blustery British patriotism, xenophobia, and blind belief in the perpetual dominance of the British Empire. But this time Nicholas recognizes, rather than rejects, his affinity with Mitford despite their differences. For Mitford, the solution to England's loss of power and prestige is a simple return to keystone virtues. "If you ask me," he tells Nicholas, "this country *has* got bloody sloppy. [...] Bit more discipline. National pride..." (540). Mitford here is explicitly expressing his agreement with Oswald Mosley, founder of the British Union of Fascists who ran for political office on an anti-immigration platform. Despite Mitford's outrageous rhetoric, Nicholas finally recognizes in Mitford some of the same qualities he possesses. "I

disliked Mitford,” he confesses, “because he was crass and mean, but even more because he was a caricature, an extension of certain qualities in myself; he had on his skin, visible, the carcinoma I nursed inside me” (543). Mitford was “eternally the victor in a war where the losers win,” (543), a perpetual fantasy where the sun never has and never will set on the empire. But Nicholas has come to recognize as the result of his journey to Greece and his experience in the godgame that he too is guilty of the very same jingoism, arrogance, and cultural egotism that he observes in Mitford. He too is a product of England and a child of empire.

This moment of self-recognition is essential to answering the question of whether or not Nicholas is indeed changed in any way by his travels. After the end of empire, as Nicholas’s journey reveals, outward travel no longer has the effect of rejuvenating a moribund home country, if it ever did. So his travel can not work in the service of empire nor can it allow the disillusioned ex-patriot to lose his national identity. The best it can do is enable him to recognize his place in British society and see that he really is not that different than Mitford. His travel can allow him to at least acknowledge that separating Englishness from Britishness is itself a quixotic undertaking founded in a myth of a Green Englishness that could be distinguished from the empire that national identity gave rise to. Nicholas may have the freedom to travel from England to Greece and imagine that he can reject his English background and choose the Greek approach to life, but no matter where he travels, as this novel reveals, England remains his lodestar, his home. He may travel to Greece, but he never leaves England – and all that England represents to him – behind. England’s history of colonial enterprise and national formation are the

texts that Nicholas may wish to forget, but these histories prove inescapable because they form the foundation upon which Nicholas's Greek experience is built.

The novel's final scene, in which Nicholas is reunited with Alison after believing she had committed suicide is presented as a climactic moment in which Nicholas is forced to apply the lessons of the godgame to how he will respond to her in the future. During this tensely dramatic moment, a moment that gauges whether or not Nicholas has changed at all because of his Greek travels, an unnamed Indian man sits nearby in the park, observing their conversation: "[a]n Indian came and sat on the far end of the bench. A threadbare black overcoat, a white scarf; a thin face. He looked small and unhappy, timidly alien; a waiter perhaps, the slave of some cheap curryhouse kitchen" (575). His presence, subtle, barely relevant to the crisis at hand, nonetheless speaks as a final testimony to the inescapability of empire's influence. As Syed Manzurul Islam claims in *The Ethics of Travel* (1996), "[f]or travel to take place, one has to forget the memories of the *same*, and encounter the other" (37). Just as Nicholas comes to at least recognize the Mitford in himself, to acknowledge his own entanglement in imperial ideology, Fowles concedes in *The Magus* to his own indebtedness to empire and his inability to ignore that past. As much as Fowles would like to rescue an English identity that exists somehow independent of the history of the British Empire – Englishness and not Britishness – in this novel, at least, he fails.

The Indian represents that recognition and Nicholas's final encounter with the other. In this scene, Nicholas shares a strange moment of sympathy with this assumed immigrant. During the midst of his fight with Alison, she gets up, threatening to leave, and Nicholas "looked at the Indian. He too was staring at Alison; then at me. Even if he

had overheard he wouldn't have understood what we were saying; and yet he knew what had happened. I could see it in his mild brown eyes. Dark men, pale men; but only one sort of woman. A ghost of sympathy passed between us" (579). At this instant, Nicholas forms a bond with this outsider, this stranger who represents both a passive racial difference – those "mild brown eyes" who knows "what had happened" – and represents what Nicholas imagines as the universality of male chauvinism. Nicholas sees him, but he sees him for what he needs at that moment: a dark-skinned compatriot who proves Nicholas's humanity by his sympathy across racial difference. Nicholas, after this instant of connection, is fortified to go after Alison and have his say. The Indian remains a silent witness to the rest of the scene, ignored and forgotten, but present nonetheless.

CHAPTER THREE

ENDLESS TRAVELER: THE FAILED SEARCH FOR NATIONAL BELONGING IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*

1. Introduction

V. S. Naipaul's 1967 novel *The Mimic Men* represents a sustained reflection on the relationship between the identity of the novel's protagonist, Ralph Singh, a Caribbean native with Indian ancestry, and his travel experiences as he shuffles back and forth throughout his life between England and the fictional tropical island of Isabella. Borrowing elements from the genres of travel writing and memoir to make sense of the peripatetic story of Ralph's life, the novel moves forwards and backwards in time as Ralph himself authors this book to create a sense of "order" out of his life. By foregrounding Ralph's travels and his identity as a traveler, Naipaul explores the potential of travel as a meaningful source of identity for a relatively wealthy and privileged colonial subject, one who is drawn towards England and all that it represents but who is also tied to a rapidly changing Caribbean homeland he can't fully escape. This ambiguity defines the novel's attitude towards travel: travel is its controlling metaphor for an emerging identity caught between the colonial past and the postcolonial future, between place as natural geography and place as touristic commodity, between competing models of nationhood, and between the desire to be forever on the move and the desire to call some country home. In this novel, Naipaul explores through a structure of ambiguity both the possibilities and the pitfalls of travel as a metaphor for postcolonial

identity. Unlike *The Magus*, in which Nicholas Urfe unproblematically assumes the role of the traveler, Ralph is constantly aware of his performance as a traveler and of the legacy of empire that shapes his travels.

In this chapter, I reread *The Mimic Men* as a novel that articulates traditional, English notions of travel and identity and, by doing so, tests whether those notions are the true inheritance of a postcolonial subject seeking to define himself as a traveler who is living out fantasies of Victorian travel. All too often, the critical commonplace on Naipaul sees him as a failed postcolonial writer – especially in contrast to Salman Rushdie – because of his conservatism and his desire to claim his place in the British literary tradition.¹ By turning to Naipaul’s 1960s writing, which reflects his opinions regarding the Caribbean and travel before they became more unrepentantly cynical, I demonstrate here that Naipaul as a young writer was intent on both criticizing and celebrating the possibilities of travel as empire contracted in the postwar decades. In making that claim, I assert that *The Mimic Men*’s greatest act of mimicry is its deployment of Western motifs of travel as a means to ultimately challenge the universality of the traveler and the potential that role offers for the emerging postcolonial, Caribbean subject. Although Sara Suleri, voicing a widely held view, characterizes Naipaul’s use of Western forms as defined by a debilitating “anguish of affiliation” (149), I argue that in *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul mimics these forms for a dual, paradoxical purpose: to claim them as his own and to

¹ Rob Nixon, as one of Naipaul’s harshest critics, sees Naipaul’s authorial identity as a dangerous erasure of the facts of his life; he claims that Naipaul views writing as a pure, individual state of being and a rejection of the communities which hampered him growing up. Nixon claims that Naipaul believes “in a conception of himself as a figure existing in a free state, untrammelled by ideologies and beholden to nobody” (10). Although I argue that vilifying Naipaul leads to reductive analyses of his work, it is absolutely necessary to keep Nixon’s perspective in mind as it guards against naïve celebrations of Naipaul as an exiled figure, as for instance Timothy F. Weiss argues in *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul* (1992) or Dolly Zulakha Hassan claims in *V. S. Naipaul in the West Indies* (1989) where Hassan describes Naipaul as a “citizen of the world” who is a “lonely exiled artist” (69).

reject them for their inadequacies. Naipaul's reliance on the Caribbean travel narratives of 19th century writers like James Anthony Froude, Anthony Trollope, and Stendhal – all of whom he cites as important precursors – reveals his genuine desire to master that literary genre and assert his own authority as a writer in the European tradition. However, in *The Mimic Men* he ultimately demonstrates the limitations of these traditional narratives in an emerging postimperial and late capitalist context. Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry – developed using Naipaul's image of the mimic man – clarifies Naipaul's deployment of travel narratives: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha's italics, 122). Although Bhabha criticizes the mimicry of Naipaul's characters, his criticism fails to consider Naipaul's use of mimicry on the level of narrative form. *The Mimic Men*, as a travel fiction, is, in Bhabha's sense, “almost the same, but not quite” as the prior travelogues it echoes, a point Bhabha does not acknowledge.

The “not quite” is what I chart in this chapter. For Ralph, as the “author” of this book, the act of writing represents a creative act, an act of mimicry whereby he masters the art of the travel narrative, and at the same time writes into that form the anti-travel narrative which debunks myths of travel: *The Mimic Men* is “not quite” an imperial European travelogue. Through Ralph, Naipaul debunks many cornerstone traveling myths: myths of the utopian city, of the island paradise, of the idealized touristic destination; of travel as redemption, of travel as search for self, and of travel as universally experienced. He scrambles the form of the travel narrative through the novel's fluid, achronological form, to leave the reader in a kind of suspended, befuddled state. When *The Mimic Men* is

understood as the product of Ralph's imagination, we are left with the insight that Ralph himself is meant to be the source of the novel's critique of travel. In other words, Ralph is the author of his own self-critique, the spokesman for both the novel's romance of travel and its disillusionment with it. Reading *The Mimic Men* as a narrative about travel during the postimperial turn thus allows us to witness the emergence of "the traveler" as a metaphor for certain forms of postmodern and postcolonial subjectivity and the dangerous limitations of that metaphor. In contradistinction to some of the most important thinkers who wrote about the postcolonial condition in the 1960s – such as Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James – Naipaul turned to travel rather than rootedness and national culture as his primary source of identity during decolonization.

In constructing Ralph as a West Indian colonial traveler, Naipaul relies on a series of paradoxes inherent in the emerging concept of the *postcolonial* subject. What does it mean to witness the emergence of the postcolonial traveler as a subject position? What uneasy alliances must such an identity forge – between British ideals of travel and colonial experiences of empire? Naipaul is one of the first postcolonial writers to envision a protagonist who is a traveler and not an immigrant; the novel explores Ralph's travel as motivated by his search for national meaning. This search in turn renders him a fraught cosmopolitan subject unable to rewrite the colonial narratives of travel he has inherited as both a writer and a traveler. As Naipaul demonstrates, because travel as Ralph understands it is embedded in the history of empire, and because it relies on a reification of national identities and a glorification of Englishness, there is no form of travel available to Ralph that allows for complete freedom from colonial ideology.

It is for this reason that the scenes where Ralph Singh embraces liminal states offer *The Mimic Men*'s only alternative to the never-ending journey that defines Ralph's search for a home. Ralph himself is an in-between figure, a child of colonialism but also a traveler during the period of decolonization. Even though much of Ralph's journeying revolves around his search for a home where he can be his most true self, it is when he is most at ease in being in-between that the novel asserts its boldest claims about a solution to Ralph's seemingly endless searching. As I discuss in this chapter's conclusion, the liminal states which represent this space are presented in two forms: the layover of a flight during which time Ralph is able to momentarily exist in a suspended state where travel loses its meaning, and in the psychic and physical space he inhabits in order to write his memoirs. In shaping a place for himself from which he can write that is both solidly, sordidly real (a hotel room in London) and a portal to imagination which temporarily escapes his relentless desire to travel, Ralph is able to craft a middle space for himself which is neither here nor there, neither purely English nor Caribbean. He is, in this space, able to imagine beyond the threshold of the nation and the cycle of travel which has driven him for most of his life.

Travel was very much on Naipaul's mind as he wrote *The Mimic Men*. Naipaul himself had recently traveled to India and had already published a travelogue about that trip entitled *An Area of Darkness* (1964) as well as one about his travels around the Caribbean, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – British, French, and Dutch in the West Indies and South America* (1962).² The period during which the novel is set (primarily the 1930s-1960s) saw both a rise in tourism to the Caribbean and a huge

² In total, Naipaul has published over a dozen travelogues and travel plays a central role in most of his fiction. See especially *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) for an illuminating look at a Caribbean émigré's travels to and around the English countryside.

upswing in migration from the Caribbean outward, a phenomenon which Naipaul was fully aware of and wrote about. New opportunities and reasons for travel spurred many West Indians (men especially) to leave their island homes for European or American climes, Naipaul included. Although Ralph's journeying is of a very different order than the migration of poor West Indians seeking economic opportunity, both forms of travel are manifestations of the global movement of peoples which was accelerating in the 1950s and 60s. The fact that Ralph's travel is privileged by Naipaul is precisely the issue that I want to examine in this chapter since positioning himself as a traveler – as, at times, a tourist both in the greater London metropolis and on the Caribbean island where he was born – meant both aligning himself with British notions of travel and rejecting forms of movement like economically-motivated migration. Travel was the major theme emerging in his writing during this period, and it is at the forefront of *The Mimic Men* as a plot device, a theme, and a central metaphor for the narrator's confused and changing sense of his racial and national identity.

How Naipaul depicts the bewildering miasma of identities in the emerging postimperial world has been the subject of heated critical conversations regarding his work. Naipaul is a Nobel Prize winner and an internationally celebrated author of both fiction and non-fiction, but his detractors are legion. Edward Said, for one, has famously criticized Naipaul's position as "immoral" and written that Naipaul has "allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution" ("Intellectuals" 437). Anthony Appiah identifies what he terms the "Naipaul fallacy" whereby postcolonial countries are always made sense of by "embedding them in European culture" (146). Although such accusations have defined much of the discussion

surrounding Naipaul, Robert Greenberg, for one, describes Naipaul's position in slightly less strident terms: "Naipaul's fiction and nonfiction since the 1960s have reflected an unenthusiastic view of postcolonial nationalism and nation building" (214). Baidik Bhattacharya also offers a more balanced perspective by acknowledging that Naipaul's writing is "often informed with a regressive, even reactionary, vision of the New World" before he goes on to argue that his novels "present a unique opportunity to explore a buried history of British imperialism" (245).

A notable dimension of the attacks against Naipaul ties the notion that he has somehow betrayed his own people to his globe-trotting: "Naipaul now possesses the power of coloniser to travel, to observe, [...] to the point that many identify him as a sort of coloniser himself" (Tsao 15). Regarding Naipaul's travel writing, Rob Nixon writes that Naipaul's "response to questions of race and empire is congruent with his affection for and simulation of British travel writers from the Victorian era" (14-15). My chapter confronts these issues regarding Naipaul's attitude toward the history of the British Empire, the contemporary transition from colonial to postcolonial status, and race relations in the Caribbean. In so doing, I agree with those recent critics who, in trying to move the discussion into more fertile territory, have argued that dismissing Naipaul's work out of hand misses an opportunity to explore both the nuance of his ideas and the contradictions in his attitudes.³ The tendency in Naipaul scholarship is to view his fiction as thinly veiled autobiography or political statement. However, examining Naipaul's novels without immediately reading them as the fictionalized expression of ideas he has

³ As does Greenberg in "Anger and the Alchemy of Literary Method in V. S. Naipaul's Political Fiction: The Case of *The Mimic Men*" (2000), Tsao in "Trapped in Fiction: London and the Impossibility of Original Identity in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*" (2005), Bhattacharya in "Naipaul's New World: Postcolonial Modernity and the Enigma of Belated Space" (2006), and Thomas Halloran in "Postcolonial Mimic or Postmodern Portrait? Politics and Identity in V.S. Naipaul's Third World" (2007).

articulated in his non-fiction allows for a more interesting Naipaul to emerge. Reading Naipaul as a writer of fictions enables us to understand *The Mimic Men* as a highly ambiguous and contradictory text that does not merely mirror ideas he has expressed with confidence elsewhere. I agree with Michael Gorra when he writes in *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* that Naipaul's "politically controversial material has meant that too little attention has been paid to him as a maker, an artificer" (99).

By thinking of Naipaul as a writer of fictions, we can best understand what critics have tended to ignore: *The Mimic Men*'s investigation into the role of the traveler as a form of postcolonial identity offers a nuanced analysis of the uses and abuses of travel metaphors during the postimperial turn. There is no doubt that as a fiction writer, Naipaul is obsessed with the interrelated theme of homelessness, national belonging, and travel. Critics writing about Naipaul's fiction often comment on the rootlessness of his characters, but in so doing do not fully attend to the meaning of their travel. For instance, Gorra writes about "the placelessness that all his characters [...] so acutely feel: a vision of defeated soldiers, lost in the desert, 'trying to walk back home,' to a home, a pure time, that has perhaps never existed and certainly doesn't now." Writing specifically about Ralph Singh, Fawzia Mustafa comments that Ralph's "transience" is "thrust upon [him] by the absence of tradition in the wake of historical and political change. [He is] forced to be mobile without necessarily having any place to go" (17). In neither of these cases, though, does either critic clarify the particularity of Ralph's "placelessness" and "transience" in terms of the end of empire and the rise of tourism. Although much of the criticism on *The Mimic Men* does refer to Ralph's travels,⁴ no one has focused

⁴ See for instance, in addition to Gorra's essay, Tiffany Aimee Tsao's analysis of how London is represented in the novel in "Trapped in Fiction: London and the Impossibility of Original Identity in

exclusively on the novel's representation of travel nor considered how that travel is at the very core of Ralph's identity.

2. Caribbean Voices

“The changing of the seasons, the cold slicing winds, the falling leaves, sunlight on green grass, snow on the land, London particular. Oh what it is and where it is and why it is, no one knows, but to have said: “I walked on Waterloo Bridge,” “I rendezvoused at Charing Cross,” “Piccadilly Circus is my playground,” to say these things, to have lived these things, to have lived in the great city of London, centre of the world. To one day lean against the wind walking up the Bayswater Road (destination unknown), to see the leaves swirl and dance and spin on the pavement (sight unseeing), to write a casual letter home beginning: “Last night, in Trafalgar Square...” (Selvon 164)

Of all the Caribbean literary output of the 50s and 60s, I argue that *The Mimic Men* in particular is worth close examination because it reframes the postimperial novel of immigration to England as a travelogue where neither immigration nor a return to the colonies offers a solution to the narrator's search for identity. The postwar years were a fertile time for Caribbean narratives reaching British audiences. Writers like Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite were all publishing during this time. In addition, the BBC radio series “Caribbean Voices” was one of the first and most influential platforms for these writers, broadcasting everywhere that BBC radio was heard.⁵ Louise Bennett contributed to the program, one of several women who did so. In her 1957 poem “Colonization in Reverse” she wrote about one of the most popular subjects for Caribbean writers of the time: the initial flood of West Indian immigration to England. In it, she depicts that movement as one of hope, rebirth, and retribution against the former empire:

Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*” or Baidik Bhattacharya's discussion of the “belated space” of the Caribbean as it is presented by Naipaul in “Naipaul's New World: Postcolonial Modernity and the Enigma of Belated Space.”

⁵ For more on “Caribbean Voices” and Naipaul's part in the series, see Darrell Newton's “Calling the West Indies: The BBC World Service and *Caribbean Voices*” and John Clement Ball's *Imagining London* (102-109). Naipaul was both a contributor to the show and one of its editors.

Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse.

By de hundred, by de tousan,
From country an from town,
By de ship-load, by de plane-load,
Jamaica is Englan boun.

Dem a pour out a Jamaica;
Everybody future plan
Is fi get a big-time job
An settle in de motherlan

What a islan! What a people!
(2472)

As the speaker here testifies, a common West Indian fantasy of the time was to “settle in de motherlan,” an exciting island of economic opportunity that would become, in this vision, overrun by Jamaicans as they claimed their natural inheritance. Despite the poem’s moments of sarcasm regarding its enthusiasm towards the English, the speaking voice still evinces a genuine desire to reimagine England through the process of mass migration. The exuberance of the poem’s speaker personifies the excitement that many felt at the time for the notion that the process of colonization would “reverse” itself in a flood of migration to the former center of empire.

One of the first and most influential of such immigrant narratives is Samuel Selvon’s novel *The Lonely Londoners*, published a decade earlier than *The Mimic Men* in 1956. Selvon’s novel presents the disappointments awaiting Caribbean immigrants even as it offers hope that new West Indian communities will ultimately thrive in London.⁶ In it, Moses Aloetta moves from the Caribbean to “the great city of London, centre of the world” but finds the city is a lonely place, filled with prejudice and meanness.

⁶ Selvon’s is a representative immigrant narrative of the time. See also George Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, published in 1954.

Borrowing a phrase from Langston Hughes, Moses and the loose confederation of young West Indian men with whom he has traveled find their best solace in “laughing, but they only laughing because they afraid to cry” (170). As fraught as the immigrant’s experience of moving to London from the Caribbean turned out to be in Selvon’s telling, there was never any doubt in the novel that his loneliness and the resultant confusion about his own identity was the inevitable price to be paid for his journey. Like Bennett’s celebratory poem about Jamaican immigration to England, Selvon viewed coming to England as a one-way journey toward opportunity even as he also discovered the necessary suffering that was part of claiming his English inheritance.

Naipaul extends the cautiousness of such ultimately hopeful texts by rendering his protagonist’s journey to England much more ambiguous. In contradistinction to such texts of migration, *The Mimic Men* features a narrative of restless movement in which England is never an endpoint. This fact is underscored by Ralph Singh’s travel back and forth between England and the Caribbean and by his travel beyond that binary as well to a number of vaguely alluded to European locations. Whereas Moses Aloetta of *The Lonely Londoners* is an immigrant, Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men* is a traveler. Naipaul wrote about that distinction elsewhere as well. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul’s travel book on the Caribbean published in 1962, he makes a clear distinction between, on the one hand, himself and his fellow travelers on board the ocean liner and, on the other, those immigrants disembarking in England for the first time. He writes, “we could see the immigrants who had arrived that morning on the *Francisco Bobadilla*: a thick, multi-coloured mass herded behind wooden rails, and as silent as though they were behind glass. [...] No one stepped out of the travellers’ waiting room into the immigrants’ shed.

There was interest, disapproval, pity and mockery in the gazes [of the travelers]” (14). Later, when their ship has taken on board some West Indian immigrants, Naipaul describes the differences between the immigrants and the “tourists,” reflecting on how the division between them is centuries old, constructed by the history of empire. *The Middle Passage*, like *The Mimic Men*, plainly demarcates the middle-upper class travelers from the lower class (and uniformly dark-skinned) immigrants. Moses Aloetta would have been one of the latter, Ralph Singh one of the former.

In portraying Ralph as a colonial subject who is self-consciously performing the role of the traveler, *The Mimic Men* charts new territory by reconfiguring travel as emblematic of a new kind of subjectivity: that of the male, privileged and educated Indo-Caribbean who is increasingly drawn to seeing himself as a world citizen. In doing so, it wrestles with important questions about the relationship between nationality, selfhood, and geography as those terms were being reconceptualized during the twilight of the colonial period and the emergence of the postcolonial one. Although it is tempting to see Ralph’s journey as a parable for the colonial/postcolonial condition, the novel repeatedly emphasizes, in spite of its desire to achieve everyman status for its protagonist, that his is a particular kind of subjectivity that we are exploring. His restlessness – he is a traveler who is never satisfied, moving around the world but without any real sense of freedom or possibility – is endemic of a very specific kind of emerging subject. Ralph Singh is a privileged traveler – he is one of the heirs of the Bella Bella Bottling Works company (which bottles Coca-Cola, among other things), he first journeys to England for a college education, and later he becomes a politician on Isabella – but he is also a Caribbean native with an Indian background, a racial minority trying to get by in England. If

Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus* leaves England to infuse his Englishness with the vitality of the other, to try and transform all that it means to be English, then Ralph Singh is on a much more contradictory journey than either Nicholas or the protagonists of earlier West Indian immigrant narratives. Ralph seeks a home, but at the same time, he yearns to travel in perpetuity, always in the process of rejecting any single nation as the end of his journey. As a traveler, he seeks connection – to a community, to a nation, to a language, to a literary tradition – but he is drawn to isolation. As a colonial subject, he seeks to claim the Englishness which he sees as rightfully his own, but he cannot locate it.

3. Departure

“It has happened in twenty places, twenty countries, islands, colonies, territories – these words with which we play, thinking they are interchangeable and that the use of a particular one alters the truth. I cannot see our predicament as unique. The newspapers even today spell out situations which, changing faces and landscapes, I can think myself into. They talk of the pace of postwar political change. It is not the pace of creation. Nor is it the pace of destruction, as some think. [...] The pace of events, as I see it, is no more than the pace of a chaos on which strict limits have been imposed. I speak of course of territories like Isabella, set adrift yet not altogether abandoned, where this controlled chaos approximates in the end, after the heady speeches and token deportations, to a continuing order. The chaos lies all within.” (*The Mimic Men* 230)

At the start of *The Mimic Men*, Ralph has left the Caribbean and is already in London, reflecting back on his first journey there. From the outset, then, Ralph is already a displaced figure. By opening the novel in London and then flashing back to Ralph’s past on Isabella, Naipaul stresses the question of why Ralph has left Isabella in the first place. *The Mimic Men* is divided into three sections, and it is the long middle section, set on Isabella, which focuses largely on Ralph’s childhood and attempts to offer retroactive justification for Ralph’s dismissal of the Caribbean and his unquenchable need to travel. The motivation for Ralph’s travels, as this section illustrates in great detail, is to escape not just this island but the very condition of postcoloniality itself. The postcolonial

world, as presented not just in *The Mimic Men* but in Naipaul's body of work as a whole, has been forever wounded by the colonial period. And the Caribbean in particular represents this wound.⁷

The historical context of Ralph's life is critically important to understanding why he is so driven to travel. Isabella, based on Naipaul's native island of Trinidad, has not yet gained full independence from England during the time frame of the novel, and so the framework of Ralph's journeying is neither clearly colonial nor postcolonial.⁸ Isabella, in his depiction, appears to be stumbling clumsily toward political independence even as the aftereffects of the colonial period continue to resonate. Ralph describes Isabella's political situation as "a colony, a benevolently administered dependency" which was "granted" a "limited constitution" "just before the end of the war" (227). During Ralph's adulthood, Isabella appears to be sporadically moving towards independence, though the island politicians seem to be more motivated by their need for respect and self-justification in their endeavors than out of any strong sense of nationalism. In addition, as Naipaul depicts it, Isabella is in the nascent stages of developing a full-blown tourist industry, and so the relationship between the island, its commodification, and the people who live and visit there is being radically reordered right under Ralph's feet. As the British Empire came to a close and the tourist industry blossomed in its wake, travel meant new things to new people even as it was still encircled by its associations with empire. What those new meanings could be, in the case of *The Mimic Men*, offered tantalizing hope for the colonial subject even as those new possibilities for selfhood were

⁷ Like the never-healing wound on Philoctete's leg, symbol of the wound afflicting the Caribbean, in Derek Walcott's 1990 epic poem of St. Lucia, *Omeros*.

⁸ Trinidad gained independence in 1962 and became a republic in 1976.

often riven by internal contradictions – about nationality, about race, about gender – born out of empire’s legacy.

As a result of its history, particularly the history of Indian indentured workers brought to the West Indies to replace the enslaved population, Ralph believes the Caribbean islands are incapable of nationhood because there is no authentic connection between geography and the peoples who live there. The “bigger truth” he discovers is “that in a society like ours, fragmented and inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power” (246). When writing about Trinidad in *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul makes a similar case about why the islands of the West Indies are incapable of becoming true nations. “[T]here was no community,” he insists. “We were of various races, religions, sets and cliques; we had somehow found ourselves on the same small island. [...] [I]t was only our Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us any identity” (43). Later, his diagnosis is even more brutal: “[t]he West Indian colonial situation is unique because the West Indies, in all their racial and social complexity, are so completely a creation of Empire that the withdrawal of Empire is almost without meaning” (140). In this case, Naipaul’s attitude in *The Middle Passage* is Ralph’s: the shared experience of living on the same land mass was the result of the whims and accidents of history, of empire.

Worst of all for Ralph is that the accident of his birthplace resigns him to chaos, the lack of civilization, the very condition of post/colonialism itself. This is the opposite of the chaos that Antonio Benítez-Rojo writes about in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1996), a chaos endemic to the Caribbean

which creates new possibilities and is a cultural and geographic correlative to chaos theory. Unlike Benítez-Rojo, for Ralph that chaos is a loss and not a source of creation. He sees the chaos of the Caribbean as a product of empire's history which has decimated any possibility of an authentic culture. "[T]he first requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city," he intones, but "[t]o be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" (141). In a similar and oft-quoted passage from the novel, Ralph reflects on the descriptions he has heard of life beyond the Caribbean:

There, in Liège in a traffic jam, on the snow slopes of the Laurentians, was the true, pure world. We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. (175)

In this formulation, the former colonies belong to a separate world, a separate order, than the Platonic ideal that is the Western World, the conquering, colonizing nations; hence, his stated desire to travel to the "real world" he had been "cut off" from. As Vivek Dharashwar puts it, Ralph's thinking is "the product of the internalization of the colonial island as degraded, corrupted, disordered, on the one hand, and the (frustrated) phantasy and romance of the metropolis as ordered, secure, three-dimensional, miraculous, on the other" (85). Evidence for Ralph's disgust and frustration over the state of the Caribbean after the end of empire abounds in the novel and is indeed the center of much of criticism on and criticism of Naipaul.⁹

⁹ *The Middle Passage* is the most striking example of this strain in his travel writing, but many of his accounts of the so-called Third World are equally pessimistic about the political and cultural realities of postcoloniality. See also *An Area of Darkness* (India, 1964), *A Congo Diary* (1980), and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981), among other works.

Furthermore, Ralph's foreignness to Isabella explains this attitude; he is a double outsider in that his background is Indian and in that as someone who has left and returned to Isabella, he no longer feels like he fully belongs. Ruminating on this connection between identity, power, and geography, Ralph writes

A man, I suppose, fights only when he hopes, when he has a vision of order, when he feels strongly there is some connection between the earth on which he walks and himself. [But] [t]here was my sense of wrongness, beginning with the stillness of that morning of return when I looked out on the slave island and tried to pretend it was mine. [...] So defiantly, in my mind, I asserted my character as intruder, the picturesque Asiatic born for other landscapes.

And then there was the madman's lure: my belief in my star [...] [which] if only I did what I had been called upon to do, would take me to my appointed place.

This scene renders Ralph as someone further ostracized from his Caribbean "homeland." Not only does the Caribbean – because of colonial history – lack an authentic identity and culture, but because he is a "picturesque Asiatic born for other landscapes" he can only "pretend" to belong. What is also revealed here is, contrary to his many references to the disjunction between self and geography, a powerful vision of utopia lost. In this passage, place is linked so tightly with identity and purpose that they become inseparable. Being oneself means an intimate tie to place, and this sense of being home is only possible when one is one's true self.¹⁰

References to Ralph's Indian background surface in the novel as a form of racial longing located forever in a mythical past. This longing, in John Thieme's words, is created by Ralph's "displacement brought about by the loss of ancestral landscapes" and

¹⁰ As Madan Sarup writes about the condition of the migrant in the 20th century, "the concept of home seems to be tied in some ways with the notion of identity [...]. But identities are not free-floating, they are limited by borders and boundaries" (95).

his desire for the “racially pure world of his fantasies about the Aryan past” (513).¹¹ For instance, Ralph often fantasizes about escaping to a pre-modern India, riding by horseback across the Indian landscape. As a young man, he read about life in ancient India and

lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback [...]. I was a singh. And I would dream that all over the Central Asian plains the horsemen looked for their leader. Then a wise man came to them and said, ‘You are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the likes of which you cannot visualize.’ Beaches and coconut trees, mountains and snow: I set the pictures next to one another

It was at these moments that I found the island most unbearable.

The Central Asian plains of Ralph’s imagination – with their “endless plains” and “tall bare mountains” do not match India’s geographic reality; his vision of India is thus a confused pastiche which ultimately renders that imagined homeland unplaceable, an India of the mind and not reality. This fantasy fuses his desire for an ideal homeland – a sense of national belonging in which his best self can be realized as a “true leader” – with his identity as a traveler, a “nomad.” The double displacement here – in time and space – romanticizes his racial homeland and locates it forever in the misty realm of a past where Ralph’s nomadism is at one with geography, joined through the image of the horse. Throughout the novel, Ralph makes these kinds of occasional references to his Indian ancestry as a kind of lost, mythic paradise from which he is forever sundered. This sense

¹¹ Vijay Mishra clarifies in *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007) the meaning of homeland for the diaspora: “the fantasy structures of homelands for diasporas very often become racist fictions of purity as a kind of jouissance, a joy, a pleasure around which anti-miscegenation narratives of homelands are constructed [...]. Racist narratives of homelands are therefore part of the dynamics of diasporas; they are distorted mirror images of the nature of enjoyment itself” (16).

of being cast out from a true, racially-bound homeland is one of the major factors underlying his inability to find a home in the world.¹²

The tension between Ralph's idealization of home and his sense of exile from that home forms the crucible out of which his desire to travel is born.¹³ Even though he dreams about a place in the world where he belongs in a deep, racial sense, Ralph also rejects the notion that one's birthplace defines one's identity. Thus, his attempts to leave Isabella reflect two contradictory ideas about the relationship between self and nation: one which sees that one's birth nation retains a kind of magical, intrinsic hold on its citizens; another which sees nationality as purely meaningless and random. As Ralph himself puts it, "Now, I was to discover that disorder has its own logic and permanence [...]. Even as I was formulating my resolve to escape, there began that series of events which, while sharpening my desire to get away, yet rooted me more firmly to locality where accident had placed me" (141-42). In ascribing nationality to "accident," Ralph is able to imagine that he may just have easily been born British. But, as this passage reveals, in describing the island's hold over him, he also affirms a naturally imbued relationship between self and nation. This apparent paradox whereby nationality is both meaningful and meaningless can be explained in terms of Ralph's desire for a mystical,

¹² Mr. Deschampsneufs, a white descendant of plantation owners who lives on Isabella, best articulates the idea that where one is born is where one belongs:

"Oh, yes, we all want to get away and so on. But where you are born is a funny thing. My great-grandfather and even my grandfather, they always talked about going back for good. They went. But they came back. You know, you are born in a place and you grow up there. You get to know the trees and the plants. You will never know any other trees and plants like that. [...] All right, you go away. But you will come back. Where you born, man, you born. And this island is a paradise, you will discover." (204-205)

He then continues on, espousing a race-driven rant, dividing the world's nations into categories based on their abilities to plan beyond their basic animalistic needs.

¹³ See Simon Gikandi's *Born in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992) for more on exile as "the first major attempt by Caribbean writers to engage the colonial condition on their own terms" (26), especially Chapter Two, "From Exile to Nationalism."

transcendent feeling of home-in-the-world. The true state of things, for Ralph, is when self and place are joined, but this natural relationship has been sundered through the forced displacement of native peoples. Therefore, his persistent pessimism about the randomness of nationality is really his angry cry at the hard realities of imperialism. The great sin of the British Empire, then, is that it has shattered the connection between people and place in the (formerly) colonized world. Ralph's bitterness over the "chaos" and "inauthenticity" of the Caribbean is in direct proportion to his deep-seated desire for a homeland before the fall, before the history of empire, indenture, migration.

The history of colonialism in the West Indies fundamentally transforms the nature of identity for colonial subjects and creates the conditions for Ralph's hunger to travel. The first time he contemplates departure from the island of his birth, he complains about his feeling that he performs for crowds and is forced to keep secrets to maintain his image. This is a constant complaint of his: that on the island, one must constantly perform for others due to the island's small size and its complex racial dynamics, and due to colonialism's denaturalizing effect on colonial subjects. James R. Lindroth, for one, sees Ralph's story as principally about performance, arguing that the entire novel is about the theatricality of identity within the colonial context, including the "disguise of Englishness" (523). Vivek Dhareshwar, borrowing from Stephen Greenblatt, describes this disguising as the process by which Ralph is always "fashioning [himself]" (76) and thus repeating "the phantasy of pure origins, fresh beginnings" (82). This desire for a clean slate is largely what motivates his self-exile and, in Dhareshwar's words, "must be understood as a direct response to the exercise of colonial power" (92). But of course travel does not serve for Ralph as a means towards rebirth since what he seeks is a kind

of reclamation: to replicate Englishness in all its historical, cultural, and literary richness. By foregrounding the performative dimension of identity and the way that colonialism exacerbates the necessity of performance, the novel lays the groundwork for Ralph's travels. Travel therefore offers the savvy traveler the chance to actively refashion himself, to become the agent of his own self-fashioning rather than the passive object of colonial history.

Ralph's pronouncement of his desire to leave the Caribbean illustrates this dynamic between travel as power and national affiliation as disabling; frustrated and self-pitying, Ralph "wished to make a fresh, clean start. And it was now that I resolved to abandon the shipwrecked island and all on it, and to seek my chieftainship in that real world from which [...] I had been cut off" (141). For Ralph, escape would mean redemption and self-actualization, as signaled by the word "chieftainship," a word which suggests a kind of naturally imbued power – and signaled also by the notion that this journey would be a return to the "real world" which was his natural inheritance. As contrasted to the illusory power he holds as an Isabellan politician in the modern world, a position without any real teeth, he constantly fantasizes about a past when authority was tied to local and communal realities. Travel, he keeps hoping, could somehow return that authority to him. It is as if by turning himself into a contemporary nomad he is trying to enact the horseback nomadism of his ancestral roots. For him, then, travel is a form of racial and personal rebirth, a "fresh, clean start."

In addition to revealing how his subjectivity has been shaped by "the exercise of colonial power," this wish also inserts his story firmly into the lexicon of the gentleman traveler, like Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus*, someone capable, due to his social status and

gender, to elect to travel in order to remake himself. In staking this territory for himself – that of the gentleman traveler – he aligns himself with the Englishness which for him represents everything that the colonies are not, and attempts to secure a sense of entitlement that has traditionally been marked as white and middle-upper class. To find his place in the world, to secure his racial heritage, he must find a way to fuse what he sees as his Indian, racial heritage with his English, cultural one.

4. Exiled in England

"Isn't London itself, the life of its streets, a mirage?" (Naipaul, "Conrad's Darkness" 209)

The Mimic Men begins with Ralph in London, shortly after the end of WWII, and paints a tableau of a post-war city facing economic scarcity and increasing ethnic diversity. This is not a fully self-possessed city brimming with opportunity and signs of modernity; rather, the London Ralph Singh discovers is crippled from the war and undergoing a major demographic shift. Ralph is both a stranger in this new world, constantly describing himself as "shipwrecked" in this urban landscape, and yet someone for whom England is well-known. He has actually already spent a substantial amount of time in England twice before: the first time as a student, the second as a visiting politician advocating for Isabella's nationalization. Not only has he been living in England on and off for a number of years, but even prior to his arrival, he already "knew" England: through books, images, gossip, documents, etc. As an outsider seeking to insinuate himself into British culture he is always removed from that culture, always performing it – always a "mimic man" – and yet also representative of an increasingly common, emerging form of Englishness. This Englishness is characterized by an intimate knowledge of British cultural production (especially literary) and an internalization of

English self-identification coupled with an ever-present anxiety about that identity's authenticity. It is an Englishness which is at once more "authentic" because all the more "earned" since as a racial other Ralph has had to assert his Englishness more forcefully through his education, his writing, and his voice. It is also an Englishness which is always partly alien to itself, always aware of differences, gaps, and failings because of the anxiety surrounding his claim and his inability to ever pass as white and thus as fully English.¹⁴ The novel's opening is a vivid illustration of Ralph's fraught claims on English identity: he is in London, trying to make sense of the chasm between the London he had imagined and the war-torn London he has encountered. He is in the process of looking back and assessing his life as he completes his autobiography, the very book we hold in our hands.

The England Ralph first dreamed of escaping to is just that: a dream. As he nears his initial departure from Isabella, he "felt the need only to get away, to a place unknown, among people whose lives and even language I need never enter" (174). What he seeks in this "place unknown" is crystallized in the England he imagines he will encounter, an illusory England he actually knows all too well. The England he seeks is one of pure fantasy, an England concocted out of the colonial ideology whereby the Mother Country is the center of culture, civility, art, learning, and order, and the colonies are always second-order worlds, derivative and disordered.¹⁵ The England Ralph had imagined as a

¹⁴ Whereas Dimple Godiwala claims that Naipaul's mimicking characters "[buttress] that very ideology of the superiority of colonial and patriarchal power" they might have threatened, I argue that there is both an intensification and self-awareness of Ralph's claims on Englishness which reveals the historically racial association of Englishness with whiteness and thus does conform to Homi Bhabha's claim that mimicry can work to unsettle colonial ideology.

¹⁵ As Thomas Halloran puts it, "[t]he pastorals of the centre [...] exemplify the power of Western writing to influence the imagination of the colony and create a hierarchy of culture, whereby the colony defines itself on the colonizer's terms" (124).

child living in Isabella was a bucolic one. In one memorable scene, he discusses how he used to fuse the image of an idealized English landscape with that of his grandmother leading a cow to market when she herself was a child. “In my imagination,” he remembers, “I saw my mother’s mother leading her cow through a scene of pure pastoral: calendar pictures of English gardens superimposed on our Isabellan villages of mud and grass” (108). Much later in the novel, as an adult, Ralph is introduced to a copy of *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* which contains similar images of a utopian, childlike England, one that envisions “village greens and riders on horseback and milkmaids and fairs and eggs in baskets and journeys by country folk to London town” (275). Even though Ralph had not read these nursery rhymes as a child, this “fantasy” is already known to him since as a child his head was filled with such idyllic countryside images through the multifarious discourses of empire. As Ralph grows older and learns more about London, a new construction of Englishness is spun for him that is connected to but distinct from the world of the childhood pastoral: London as the world’s metropolis.

It is to London he first travels when he finally departs the “chaos” of Isabella in an attempt to remake himself on an island he truly belongs on. Traveling there, his head is filled with images of London as the epicenter of the modern, civilized world. The famous metropolis is “[t]he great city, centre of the world, in which fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order” (22). The London he had imagined was the London created and perpetuated by the imagery and rhetoric espoused in any number of books, films, songs, advertisements, and government documents. For example, at one point, Ralph describes the London-based radio programs that broadcast across the globe, “which when picked up in remote countries, was the very voice of metropolitan authority

and romance, bringing to mind images from the cinema and magazines, of canyons of concrete, brick and glass, motorcars in streams, lines of lights, busyness, crowded theatre foyers, the world where everything was possible” (55). The portrait of London presented here is exactly the kind of fantasy city that would be so appealing to colonial and postcolonial subjects seeking a new opportunity. It is a city of culture, of technology, of urbanization, of activity, of endless possibility.

As Ralph discovers, however, the London broadcast over the radio is not the same London he lives in. Rather, Ralph experiences London as a utopian dream perpetually deferred, a private nightmare of alienation. In one of the novel’s most compelling passages, Ralph elaborates on London as a city which has utterly failed to match the excitement of the imagery and discourse which surrounds it:

Excitement! Its heart must have lain somewhere. But the god of the city was elusive. The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell. The factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river, were empty and fraudulent. I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. Here was the river, here the bridge, there that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered. In the great city, so solid in its light, which gave colour even to unrendered concrete – to me as colourless as rotting wooden fences and new corrugated-iron roofs – in this solid city life was two-dimensional. (23)

As the above excerpt emphasizes, there are two Londons. One is the London of expectation, imagination, and language. The “god of the city” – an imagined distillation of all that “London” has come to represent through the rhetoric of colonial and neo-colonial discourses – is ineffable, longed for but, like the ghost in the machine, unreachable. Everywhere he turns he encounters surfaces: the “famous name” but not the magic of the place itself, the mysterious populace but not their real selves, the exteriors of buildings, but not their rich three-dimensionality. Between his image of the country and

his image of the city, Ralph carries a fused fantasy of the two in which they exist side-by-side, parallel but never meeting. And like all traveler's fantasies, this one disappoints.

Very early in the novel, Ralph reflects on the contrast between the magical vision of England he had once held and the much more grim reality that he has had to come to terms with. Staring out of his window at the snow-covered urbanscape, he observes how

The bombsite was wholly white [...]. [L]ooking out from [my] room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimneypots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it. (9)

London, he has discovered, is not a fantasy, is not magical; instead it is the product of history, mired in the past – as symbolized by the physical reminders of the German bombing of London during WWII – and beset by its limitations – its grubbiness, its makeshift architecture, its bleakness, above all its atmosphere of melancholy loneliness.¹⁶ Even the snow, figured here as a possible symbol of hope and renewal, is stultifying, whitewashing the city of warmth, cheer, and life.

This unbreachable schism between the London hoped for and the London encountered means that his purposes for travel remain unrealized. Because Ralph cannot reconcile the difference between these two Londons, he is thwarted in his ability to remake his identity and divine a natural affinity between identity and nation. The desire to recreate himself is indeed one of the major motives for Ralph's travels in the first place. "There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies," Ralph confesses. "It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that

¹⁶ Tsao situates Naipaul's depiction of London within a modernist lineage whereby Naipaul is treading the same ground as writers like T.S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad and makes an interesting case for the "belatedness" of his journey there.

was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship” (24). The identity he takes on, in other words, is a role proscribed for him through the ideology of otherness whereby he embraces the sexualized, effeminate role of the exotic, racial other. Because Indian men during this period often faced a “consistent inability [...] to maintain a strong hegemonic sense of masculinity,” Steph Ceraso and Patricia Connolly argue that “Ralph’s performance of upper-class British masculinity is blatantly strategic” because for Indo-Trinidadian men “masculinity [was] a battleground for achieving respectability for oneself and one’s culture.”¹⁷ In trying to perform British masculinity, he allows himself to be type-cast in the role of the dark-skinned dandy.¹⁸

His initial move to London, rather than engendering a new sense of self, reborn to a world of possibility, has ended in further proscription of who he can be. “London,” writes Tsao, “functions as a site of lingering terminus,” a destination that closes off possibilities but that tempts Ralph to remain in the hopes of being reborn into his new British self (3). However, travel for Ralph has not offered endless opportunities for personal transformation; rather, it has forced him into a role circumscribed by the clichés of the sexualized, dark-skinned other staging himself as a British dandy. The dandy is a complicated figure with roots in the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde; as a highly self-conscious and feminized persona, it offered immigrants like Ralph a convenient role through which they could claim their Englishness in a manner that would be perceived as

¹⁷ See their article, “The Destabilization of Masculinity in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mimic Men*,” for a fascinating discussion of how Ralph negotiates different models of masculinity in the private and public spheres as a kind of survival technique.

¹⁸ Halloran explains this double-bind: “The colonized is forced into accepting the role of the stereotypical native that is accepted by the centre, or mimicking the colonizer, to gain power but exist as a second rate in relation to the colonizer. For Ralph this movement between nations and identities leads to a detachment from fixed identity markers” (129).

non-threatening.¹⁹ By coming to London, Ralph had “tried to hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried to give myself a personality” (32). But the opposite has happened; he has been forced into performing a role that makes him feel all the more alienated from himself and those around him. In London, he claims, “I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid” (61).

The narrative of travel to the imperial center has absolutely foundered here. Coming to London, Ralph had “longed for largeness. How, in the city, could largeness come to me? How could I fashion order out of all these unrelated adventures and encounters, myself never the same, never even the thread on which these things were hung? They came endlessly out of the darkness, and they couldn’t be placed or fixed” (33). He has failed to create an identity for himself which could be “placed or fixed,” and thus failed to make meaning out of the threatening confusion of the city, its “unrelated adventures and encounters.” As he prepares to return to Isabella, Ralph here reflects on his inability to create a single narrative out of his experience, to forge a singular identity which would serve as the hub of his story. London resists cohesion, order, and meaning not just because of its size and scale but because its very complexity as a major city and a center of diversity renders it incomprehensible. Furthermore, Ralph cannot synthesize the London of his dreams with the London he lives in, and that cognitive dissonance ruptures his sense of place. And because he still equates place and identity, he also cannot forge a sense of self which feels authentic. As a result of the vast gap between his fantasy and the reality, Ralph is forced into a return journey.

Of critical importance for my argument is that Ralph’s immediate response to this unforgiving, unknowable London is to travel rather than to stick it out as legions of his

¹⁹ Gandhi, for instance, styled himself as a dandy when he studied law in London.

fellow migrants did, often because they simply couldn't afford the return trip. His instinct is always to move, to travel, and never to settle down. As Leela Gandhi writes, "[t]he paradox which informs Naipaul's writing, is this: that if England is troped, consistently, as the land of opportunity, the place in which to arrive decisively as a writer, it is also the scene of a terrible incarceration. The longing for England, thus, folds seamlessly into its antithesis, the desire for departure" (130). This is precisely the drama that unfolds in *The Mimic Men*. At first, before Ralph returns to the Caribbean, he moves from district to district within London itself, and then, he increasingly ventures out to areas beyond the city's borders, tourist locations in England, in continental Europe. "I was restless," he confesses, "I travelled to the provinces, taking trains for no reason except that of movement. I travelled the Continent. [...] Everything of note or beauty reminded me of my own disturbance, spoiling both the moment and the object. [...] I didn't wish to see. But the restlessness remained" (36). The great conundrum for Ralph is that he seeks both the foreign and the known, home and away: "I abolished all landscapes to which I could not attach myself and longed only for those I had known. I thought of escape, and it was escape to what I had so recently sought to escape" (36). He describes these travels as taken "with no purpose, not even pleasure. After each of these journeys I came back more exhausted than before, more oppressed by a feeling of waste and helplessness" (49). The details of the journeys themselves – airplanes, airports, departing, arriving – are barely mentioned; thus the material conditions of air travel are sublimated to the idea of travel itself. What this reveals is just how much his traveling has become an unsuccessful form of endless circling, a search for the source of national belonging which could give his identity cohesion – without success. To keep searching

for a home requires that one believe in the bond of identity and geography. To keep being disappointed in what one finds means that one persists in hoping for the ideal.

Ralph constructs his identity around his travel in the hopes of conforming to the idealized model of the English gentleman traveler depicted in Victorian and modernist travel narratives. But, as I have argued, his racial identity, his class aspirations, and his conflicted relationship to Englishness confound his ability to don that mantle. By the time of his writing of this book, Ralph has embraced his identity as a rootless traveler; for him, it is a badge of honor and a sign of his authenticity. He writes,

All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality. I could not, like so many of my fellow exiles, live in a suburban semi-detached house; I could not pretend even to myself to be part of a community or to be putting down roots. I prefer the freedom of my far-out suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility; I like the feeling of impermanence. (13-14)

This moment reveals the degree to which Ralph fashions himself as an exile and indeed seems to revel in that status, disdainful of the other immigrants' lazy acceptance of their impoverished and uniform English existence. As Timothy F. Weiss observes, Naipaul views exile as a "recurring, reinforcing division between self and others that separate him from his Hindu Indian community in Trinidad, from other Trinidadians, from the English in London, from Indians in India, and from the peoples in the developing countries to which he travels and lives as an observer" (16). For Ralph, the life of the permanent exile is far superior to that of the immigrant who has fooled himself into believing he has found a new home, and thus the novel establishes a clear distinction between, on the one hand, what it sees as the authenticity of rootlessness, and, on the other, the falseness of forced adaptation.²⁰ Ralph is a forever traveler; everyone else, mimic men stuck to their

²⁰ Dhareshwar addresses Ralph's superior sense of self as resulting from his inability to extend the legitimacy of his self-fashioning to others: "though the narrative reveals the stereotypical construction of

hard-won square of space they call home. The novel presents no concrete examples of the “false” conformity of his peers. It is as if they are too faceless to warrant individual characterization. In scapegoating these others, these inauthentic exiles, he is of course giving voice to one of his great fears: that he too is one of these mimic men. Even though he is arguing for the authenticity of rootlessness, he still frets over the roots that England has planted in his psyche and longs to belong there. In another turn of the screw, it is his power as a mimic which often grants him what he desires: political power; economic autonomy; the freedom to travel; the urbane, learned, and poised voice with which to write this book.

For Ralph, travel takes on meaning because it allows him the opportunity to play with his identity, to try and sort out who he is within the confusing limbo of the colonial/postcolonial penumbra. Location, geography, and nation make that search possible – they are the horizons of who he imagines he can be/come. Indeed, Ralph repeatedly conceptualizes himself as a traveler by nature – but it is an identity also always marked by anxiety. At one point he notes how “[t]he overcoat [...] which it had always given me pleasure to hold over my arm in all the light and heat of [Isabella’s] airport lounge [is] the mark of the man required to travel” (265). He knows the code of the traveler, but he also knows that this too is a kind of performance, the pleasure he receives that of signaling to others the urgency of his travels and the fact of his status as a worldly traveler. His love of hotels similarly signals his passion for travel; as he writes about the hotel he is staying at in London, “I have fitted into the hotel; the fact has been remarked upon” (294). He further describes hotels as “part of the fairyland” where [o]ne

one subjectivity it never frees other voices and relationships in the novel from the stereotypical interpretation of this subjectivity” (91).

is luxuriously housed,” surrounded by “glamour” and the “urgent hum of activity” (266). The magic holds, but not forever; once he catches glimpses of the employees of the hotel straining to do their jobs behind the scenes, “the structure of the fairyland becomes plain, and the hotel becomes a place of work, linked not to the glamour of airline timetables in racks but to houses such as those seen on the drive from the airport” (266). By embracing his identity as a traveler, Ralph must maintain his belief in the travel myth whereby places traveled to must retain their romantic aura in order to remain desirable. As Ralph journeys back and forth between England and the Caribbean, he discovers just how threadbare that myth has become.

5. Tourism’s Arrival

“Every poor country accepts tourism as an unavoidable degradation. None has gone as far as some of these West Indian islands, which, in the name of tourism, are selling themselves into a new slavery.” (*The Middle Passage* 191)

The crux of Ralph Singh’s conflict, the one which energizes all of his restless journeying, is that he craves some kind of authentic immersion in a place that will feel like home, but discovers that no such home exists. Clearly, Ralph has trouble finding that home in England. What has been recognized by critics is that Ralph also feels alienated from Isabella, and that he feels this way because he has internalized the colonial logic whereby the colony represents all that is backward and derivative, the imperial nation all that is desirable.²¹ This, as we have seen, is one of the motives for his original journey to England. Baidik Bhattacharya, for instance, writes about the “belated space” of the Caribbean, a space that is defined by the notion that “modernity” has occurred elsewhere and only after the fact experiences its own emergence into the modern world.

²¹ Such as in Dhareshwar’s “Self-fashioning, Colonial Habitus, and Double Exclusion: V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* and Bhattacharya’s “Naipaul’s New World: Postcolonial Modernity and the Enigma of Belated Space.”

“Modernity, in other words, is not simply a stage in history,” explains Bhattacharya, “but an enactment of History that always happens elsewhere, in some other spatial location, and outside the pale of the colonial and postcolonial *Bildung*” (248). However, what has not been commented on sufficiently is that a major dimension of this alienation and of Ralph’s self-conception as a traveler is a result of the growing tourist economy: the commodification of exotic Caribbean space.²²

Ralph’s travels and his identity as a traveler are all made possible by the history of empire and the emergence of the modern travel industry. The emergence of the tourist industry could be read as a consequence of the Caribbean’s “belatedness,” its own, after-the-fact modernization. I agree with J. Michael Dash when he writes that the Caribbean must be understood “in terms of multiple identities and cultural indeterminacy” (5). He characterizes the Caribbean in terms of differences that refuse to cohere into what he sees as simplified concepts like “creolization” or “metissage,” static states that ignore the fluid and ever-changing “heterogeneity and interrelating” nature of that region. But as Naipaul chronicles in *The Mimic Men*, the advent of late-capitalist tourism deforms these differences and flattens out the distinctions amongst island cultures.²³ The differences between various Caribbean nations are never made to feel more important in the novel than their shared lot as future tourist locales. During the postwar years, travel was

²² In *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1996), Antonio Benítez-Rojo argues that the Caribbean, reified by consumer capitalism, has become by the mid-90s a “meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly” (9). The “repeating island” of Benítez-Rojo’s book title is the island reified into pure spectacle, the island as commodity, not a “thing,” not even an “image,” but a copy without origin. In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul charts the initial acceleration of that process in the emerging late-capitalist order of the 50s and 60s.

²³ The effect of tourism on the Caribbean is a constant theme in much postimperial writing by writers from that region. Derek Walcott, for one, is prescient on this issue in much of his poetry. See also his Nobel Laureate speech, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory” (1993). For more on the tourist industry see Jonathan Culler’s “The Semiotics of Tourism” (1988), John Urry’s *The Tourist’s Gaze* (2002), and the edited collection *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), in addition to the sources on travel and tourism I cite elsewhere.

becoming easier and more affordable and tourism was beginning to flourish in its contemporary, postmodern form. Ralph's constant traveling, and the structure by which he interacts with his destinations, are shaped by the emergence of late-capital tourism. The failure of his travel to provide him with a productive, enabling identity and the failure of the places he travels, to provide him with a sense of national belonging are framed by that colonial history. Travel, bound as it is in the imperial past and the emergence of the postimperial, postmodern moment, represents both the possibilities and the limitations for who Ralph can be/come and what he can imagine. This conundrum is manifested in the fact that Ralph positions himself as both an insider within Isabellan culture *and* a gentleman traveler viewing the Caribbean as what amounts to a port of call.

Upon his return to Isabella, Ralph encounters an island that is as mediated by his fantasies of the Caribbean as London was by the London of his imagination. After sailing south for several weeks, he espies his native home. "Each porthole framed a picture" of the island: "pale blue sky, green hills, brightly-coloured houses, coconut trees, and green seas" (37). This description emphasizes the degree to which Ralph is aligned with the tourists, being presented with postcard-like images of the island, unable to view the island as anything but a series of idyllic snapshots. His return is depressingly familiar in this way, and not just because he has lived here before. What he has returned to in "[t]he island before me now" is "the Technicolor island of *The Black Swan* [a 1942 pirate movie set in Jamaica], of cinema galleons and mens-o'-war, of rippling sails and morning music by Max Steiner" (37). Even as a child, the island was mediated for him. For instance, after a lengthy description of the wild beauty of the beach near his childhood home, Ralph writes,

Here the island was like a place still awaiting Columbus and discovery.

And what was an unmarked boy doing here, shipwrecked chieftain on an unknown shore, awaiting rescue, awaiting the arrival of ships of curious shape to take him back to his mountains? [...] But I was not unmarked. The camera was in the sky. It followed the boy, tiny from such a height, who walked at the edge of the sea beside the mangrove of a distant island, an island as lost and deserted as those which, in films like *The Black Swan*, to soft rippling music, to the bellying of sails of ancient ships, appeared in the clear morning light to the anxious man on deck. (134)

All of these cinematic images – not just the repeated allusions to *The Black Swan* but also that of the “camera” “in the sky” – further underscore that Ralph’s travels involve not just geographic movement but a negotiation of fantasies.²⁴ These constellations of images and ideas are provided by the tourist industry, by the cinema, by a multitude of other popularized images of the Caribbean which have been disseminated throughout the world. Ralph is not only susceptible to their influence, he is drawn to them because they represent the illusion that the Caribbean has been ordered, given meaning, and framed within narrative and pictorial parameters that render its various threats harmless.

Indeed, in another passage where he describes the experience of returning to Isabella, Ralph again emphasizes the way in which the island has already been shaped by the tourist industry:

I saw through each porthole the blue, green and gold of the tropical island. So pure and fresh! And I knew it to be, horribly, man-made; to be exhausted, fraudulent, cruel, and, above all, not mine. Yet I pretended that it was, and stood against the rail with the camera clicking visitors who threw pennies into the clear water and watched the Negro boys dive for them (60)

Whatever the island nation is, it is not “his”; it belongs to the realm of the spectacle, the touristic, the pre-fabricated and thus unnatural. The image of Ralph, standing by

²⁴ Another romanticized, cinematic moment occurs when Ralph watches his wife leave Isabella for the last time: “For me it was a moment of another type of drama: the aeroplane the cinematic symbol: Bogart in *Casablanca*, macintoshed, alone on the tarmac, the Dakota taking off into the night” (219).

passively, caught amongst the tourists snapping away their pictures, is the image of someone who recognizes the impossibility of a return to home, since both “home” and even the idea of “return” have been corrupted. Ralph’s return is incomplete because, as he learns, return is impossible. “[M]y rejoicing was not complete,” he acknowledges. “It was forced, it was tinged with fear; it was a little like the tourist trying to summon up a response to the desired object which, because it is so well known, leaves him cold” (37).²⁵ Ralph’s touristic expectations are thwarted here, leaving in their wake a lack that he cannot fill. And yet he longs to identify with those tourists, to see with their naiveté and unfeigned enthusiasm.

Despite his partial identification with the tourists, Ralph is highly critical of tourism and how it has deformed Isabella. For instance, he comments on the transformation of Isabella from “untainted” paradise of agricultural industry to tourist destination during his lifetime: “Today of course the beaches of tropical islands have been turned into suburbs and have the same regulated meanness of population and aspect. [As a child], it was still held that beaches were to be wild and uninhabited” (127). Here he reflects on the ways in which Isabella has been transforming itself into the kind of postcard image that tourists visiting there expect, eliding its colonial history, effacing its “natural” self. “I had been able at certain moments to think of Isabella as deserted and awaiting discovery,” he admits. His friend, Browne, however,

showed me that its tropical appearance was contrived; there was history in the vegetation we considered most natural and characteristic. [...] he told me about our flowers, whose colours we saw afresh in the postcards which were beginning to appear in our shops. The war was bringing us visitors, who saw more clearly

²⁵ Even as a child Ralph had seen himself as not belonging on Isabella, at one point describing how he and his schoolmates “walked through the streets of our city like disrespectful tourists” (116). Ralph is both a native here, he who knows the island well enough to be dis-illusioned by it, and an outsider, still a kind of tourist who wants to but can never fully belong.

than we did; we learned to see with them, and we were seeing only like visitors. In the heart of the city he showed me a clump of old fruit trees: the site of a slave provision ground. [...] Our city was as manufactured as that of any great French or English park. (175-76)

Behind the facades Isabella is creating, as this passage reveals, are the traces of the violent history which is quickly but not entirely being erased by the whitewashing effects of tourism. Nature itself – seemingly the diametric opposite of the artificial – bears a “history” and can be made to represent island purity and beauty, recreated, for instance, on that most ubiquitous symbols of tourism, the postcard. Even more devastating is that the islanders themselves are coming to see their home “only like visitors.” Ralph is both critical of this process and one of its victims.

While the specter of tourism disturbs his return, equally problematic are glimpses behind the curtain of the island fantasy. As the boat pulls into port, he frets that his return “so soon to a landscape which I thought I had put out of my life for good was a failure and a humiliation. [...] I should have said, ‘This tainted island is not for me. I decided years ago that this landscape was not mine. Let us move on’” (60). When the touristic palimpsest recedes, Ralph is met with just more disappointment. As the boat draws closer, “the island of the travel post vanished” to be replaced by “the international paraphernalia of a dockside” made up of “tall warehouses [which] bounded and shadowed our view of cranes, asphalt and a small locomotive” (61). Here, postcard images give way to the means of their construction. And the delightful performance of native boys diving for money gives way to the sight of a “near-naked Negro [who] lounged in a parked lorry” and, though “tropically futile he might have seemed to a sight-hungry visitor,” Ralph knows to be “a docker, [who] belonged to a particularly cantankerous trade union” (61-62). This reality only depresses him all the more since

even though he disparages the fantasies, he also is repulsed by the real: hard economic conditions, the working bodies of the black population, the debilitating small mindedness of island politics. Repeatedly throughout the novel, Ralph is repulsed by what he sees as the inherent “corruption” of the Caribbean, signaled in this scene by the race, class, and laziness of the black worker and by the industrial edifices and machinery which betray the island’s image as a tourist’s paradise.²⁶

In spite of the many ways that Isabella disappoints Ralph, what Ralph and his wife Sandra find there, after some time, is a sense of community, but not with the permanent natives. Rather, they bond with others like them who have lived elsewhere and returned to the island, a “haphazard, disordered and mixed society in which there could be nothing like damaging exclusion” made up of men who were “professional, young, mainly Indian, with a couple of local whites and coloured; they had all studied abroad and married abroad; they were linked [...] by their expatriate and fantastically cosmopolitan wives or girl friends” (66). While in Isabella, for the first time, Ralph feels like a cosmopolitan in a way he never had while living in that most cosmopolitan of cities, London. “We celebrated our unexpected freedom;” he proclaims, “we celebrated the island and our knowledge, already growing ambiguous, of the world beyond; we celebrated our cosmopolitanism, which had more meaning here than it ever had in the halls of the British Council” (67).

For a time, Ralph no longer feels that urge to escape, to travel. In place of travel, he gets the stories the various women he meets in his new social circle tell about their lives spent in other parts of the world: the Midwestern United States, Prague, the English

²⁶ For Naipaul’s like-minded critique of Trinidad’s tourist economy, see his “Trinidad” chapter in *The Middle Passage*.

Midlands. “[T]hese becoming pictures of a world totally comprehended,” he tells us, “of which I had ceased to feel I could form part and from which we had all managed to withdraw. I loved to contemplate this fragmented world that we had put together again [...]. I belonged to a small community which in this part of the world was doomed” (68). For a short time, Ralph appears perfectly content to stay put, to satisfy his need to travel through the stories told to him by others of their experiences in other places. Their sense of place and community – a shared fantasy, an assemblage of fragments – is forged through their sense of themselves as elite, as travelers, as touched by the charm and magic of worldliness and Western metropolitan life. For the first time, Ralph claims to feel like his most true self, the self he could never find while in London: “at last my ‘character’ became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained” (68).

But this community, what he calls an “intermediate race” (68), ultimately scatters, falling apart, because it is “doomed.” Within the logic of the novel, this sense of home cannot last precisely because its foundation is anti-foundational, paradoxical. The communal belonging he experienced was never correlated to national borders or national identity. In fact, this community was born specifically out of a shared sense of not entirely belonging, of young men and women who felt the bonds of self and nation dissolving. But as Ralph experiences it, what binds this community is ultimately too weak of a force. The very thing that brings these people together is what pulls them apart: their sense of themselves as worldly, unmoored, as travelers by nature. They are linked by their sense of displacement from their homes and lack of identification with the nation as a category of inherent individual meaning. They are also joined by their belief

in their own sophisticated understanding of the world and of urban life in particular. They have mastered the culture, the attitudes, the styles of the city, and so they have learned to perfectly mimic and recreate in miniature the idealized London life that had driven them to seek their educations in England to begin with. By claiming for their own and then recreating their jet-setting cosmopolitanism back in Isabella, they are attempting to make Englishness transportable. In so doing, they are caught in a conundrum: they appear to be united in their shared sense of disassociation from the nation, and yet they continue to conceptualize cosmopolitanism in a nation-centered way. This is what makes their community so fragile in the end: it is founded on a principle which is itself untenable. Traveling identities, Naipaul seems to be saying, cannot form the basis for new communities, new models of homeliness. Naipaul, unlike a writer such as Salman Rushdie, sees no hope in such a vision.

Furthermore, in the reassertion of Ralph's ennui and his almost biological need to escape again, to be on the move, the novel also suggests that there is something fundamental in Ralph's makeup, and the nature of his fellow "cosmopolitan" travelers, which makes sustained communal involvement impossible, something which will continually push beyond the inertia of "home," of geographic stability. Ralph's incessant need to travel, the novel demonstrates, is just as much a product of empire's legacy as are the "chaos" and "corruption" he wishes to escape: the schism between the real and the touristic that so horrifies him, the racial tensions and small island politics he resents. The very concept of "travel" understood from a Western perspective denotes agency: one chooses where one goes. But Ralph fails this litmus test since his travels are so often depicted as inevitable, beyond his control, forced upon him.

Like a wind-up toy with nowhere to go, Ralph must keep moving. Just as he had when living in England, Ralph starts to travel – this time, around the island. “Where could we go?” he asks. “The beaches? We knew them all; we could take them ‘as read.’ The mountain villages, Negro or mulatto, with their slave history and slave customs? They were more exciting to read about in the Sunday edition of the *Inquirer* than to see [...]. At nights we would go out driving, just for the sake of motion” (83). The thrill of experiencing Isabella as a tourist spot has drained away for Ralph, if indeed it was ever there to begin with; he has “read” all of Isabella. As his relationship with both Isabella and with Sandra deteriorates, both he and his wife realize that Sandra needs to leave since “other relationships awaited her, other countries. I had nowhere to go; I wished to experience no new landscapes” (91). Increasingly, and despite Ralph’s sense that he is indifferent to the “experience” of “new landscapes,” he finds that he too needs to escape. The lack of desire to travel he expresses here suggests that the engine behind his eventual departure has nothing to do with his individual will but is a function of something beyond his control: a compulsion to travel worked into the fabric of his being by the inherent homelessness that the history of empire has bred into him. His travel back and forth from Isabella to England represents movement between two different kinds of spaces altogether: the dying modernity of England and the second-order, defunct modernity of the Caribbean. Stuck between a fading world power and an incompetent backwater, an old, dying nation and a failing, proto-nation, Ralph’s travels prove ineffective, almost meaningless.

6. On Writing / Between Journeys

“To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world. And I suppose that in my fantasy I had seen myself coming to England as to some purely

literary region, where, untrammled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for myself as a writer. But in the new world I felt that ground move below me” (“Conrad’s *Darkness*” 216)

So far, we have seen that Ralph’s travels reflect an emergent, self-contradictory postcolonial identity. He wants to present himself as a representative of the colonial condition, but his is a particular subjectivity: male, economically advantaged, Indo-Caribbean, English-educated, literate and literary. He wants to fashion himself as a traveler, an exiled writer with the freedom and agency to find his own way in the world, but in pursuing a sense of home, he is caught between the poles of the Western metropole and Third World dystopia, subject to the shaping power of colonial history. Ralph wants to imagine himself as a traveler, unbound by the limitations of nationhood, a permanent exile with the world at his feet. That is, he seeks precisely the kind of relationship to the nation as embedded in the idea of Englishness: to be English and white during the period of empire is to be a universal subject whose identity is not bound by race and location.²⁷

But he also keeps returning to the notion that the self is defined by the nation: one is connected to the land, one has a racial home, one can find a home in the world. He wants to locate the idealized English space where he could fully come into his own, most true self, but that space is nowhere to be found: not in the community of exiles he forms on *Isabella*, not even in a London which fails to match his imagined vision of it. He wants to escape, to live forever as a rootless traveler, but he cannot stop longing for a home. He wants to find a home, but all he encounters is alienation, the commodification of place, the dispiriting realities of history. Everywhere Ralph travels, he encounters the limits of his imagination and the limitations imposed by the ideology of nationality, by thinking of the self in terms of nation and location.

²⁷ As, for instance, Robert Young argues in *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (2008).

What Ralph discovers is that larger forces are at work, forces that serve to undermine whatever agency he possesses. He realizes, as he departs for England, that “all my notions of shipwreck were false,” that “I had created my past, that patterns of happiness or unhappiness had already been more or less decided,” a discovery he makes “against his will” (214). But once he arrives in London, despite “praying for a little bit of immortality, a prophylactic against the greater disorder, the greater shipwreck [...] had come to me already” (214). That is, he finds that even though, as he had sailed north to England, he had “thought of the world which, as I was steadily separated from it, became less and less discovered, less and less real” (214), there are realities he cannot escape from because of the contingencies of shipwreck.²⁸ History, in the form of “the greater disorder, the greater shipwreck” still shapes his destiny and thus his travel; he persists in thinking about his movement in colonial terms, as a form of shipwreck. No matter how hard he tries, it seems that travel must proceed on the grooves already carved for it: paths of movement, cycles of colonial metaphor. Contrary to the imperial nostalgia of the 1960s, Naipaul reveals the disabling paradoxes of imperial ideology and the failure of nostalgic notions of travel to function for a post/colonial subject. The urgent question raised by the novel at this stage is whether or not Ralph can, through writing about his travels, push back at those forces and challenge the stultifying imperial logic of travel.

²⁸ Naipaul’s use of the shipwreck metaphor relies on colonial tropes of the shipwreck as a dangerous hazard associated with imperial adventures and also as the opportunity for an ordained experience of intense self-discovery, as in *Robinson Crusoe*. Derek Walcott employs extensive imagery of the shipwreck as well in his poetry; but whereas for Naipaul shipwreck signifies a loss and lack of agency, Walcott sees shipwreck as a possible form of intervention in colonial tropes as in his poems on *Robinson Crusoe*. The metaphor of shipwreck is also fraught with associations to colonial trade and the transport of slaves and indentured laborers from the colonies. Thus Naipaul’s repeated use of shipwreck imagery bears the weight of a doubled reference to both idealized images of imperial adventuring and of the harsh realities of colonial slavery and labor. See Gikandi’s *Writing in Limbo* for more on the trope of “maroonage” in Caribbean writing.

Despite the many ways Ralph's travels fail him, there is one sense in which Ralph at least begins to discover a space for generative possibility that could offer an enabling alternative to the cycle of travel. That is in the act of writing itself – an act literalized in one of the novel's final and most arresting deployments of the travel metaphor: the stopover. *The Mimic Men*, despite the disabling effects of the contradictions I have identified in the novel, is able to create a generative space which temporarily evades the logic of the travel metaphor; this is the space of writing itself, a space aligned with Ralph's current life in London as an exiled writer,²⁹ a space linked in the novel with the trope of the stopover. Both the hotel room from which he writes and the act of writing itself are figured in the novel as locations from which Ralph can supersede the limitations of travel. The vantage point from which Ralph writes becomes a home for him, a space of comfort, stability, and empowerment. Thus, I disagree with the many critics who see the novel as somehow a failure, as for example expressed by Timothy F. Weiss when he writes, "[d]ivided by his attraction to and repulsion from both the colony and the metropolis, and by aestheticism on the one hand and nihilism on the other, Singh is paralyzed. He arrives at a dead end" (103).

The stopover is not a dead end. Rather, Ralph's stopovers represent the novel's suspension of travel and travel-as metaphor; abating Ralph's relentless journeying, they afford him the space in which to momentarily think outside the logic of movement and national identification and the seeming dead end of his travels. Shortly before the novel's

²⁹ Naipaul repeatedly wrote about his belief that London was the place one went to become a writer, as in the following quote, where he also expresses his anxiety that he will not belong in that space: "And yet I like London. For all the reasons I have given it is the best place to write in. The problem for me is that it is not a place I can write about. Not as yet. Unless I am able to refresh myself by travel - to Trinidad, to India - I fear that living here will eventually lead to my own sterility; and I may have to look for another job" ("London" 16).

main stopover scene, in mid-flight, Ralph experiences an epiphany about his travel. “It was time to leave,” he realizes,

But there was no need for me to return to Isabella. That, however, I didn’t see until it was too late, until, in fact, our aeroplane was a few minutes from Isabella and we were fastening safety belts. The city and snow, the island and the sea: one could only be exchanged for the other. So my mind ran; departure implied a destination. [...] [N]ow I easily turned my back on the city which I had last seen to glitter. (278)

For the first time, Ralph realizes that his travel has accomplished nothing, that in trying to find a home he has merely been “exchang[ing]” one landscape for the other. This moment of insight then leads to his desire to put off his return to Isabella. “I wished,” he writes, “to delay it, to make a detour, to have a momentary escape” (278). This moment prefigures the layover itself and its temporary halt to travel.

Once he is laid over in an unidentified city, Ralph finds himself with nowhere to go and nothing to do. He describes this waiting period – neither an arrival, a departure, nor the journey itself:

Stopover: the word from the airline advertisement came to me. Not easy at this stage. [...] And a few hours later I was walking, as in a dream, through the streets of a city, I thought I didn’t know, which yet now revealed little points of familiarity, abrupt half-remembered areas: so that reality was disturbed, sounds curiously muted, and for stretches I had the sensation of witnessing and performing actions for the second, third, fourth time. [...] For the second time that day I was frantic with airline officials. But there were no aeroplanes to Isabella that day. Tomorrow, yes: a fresh sticker was gummed to my ticket. Sixteen intransit hours awaited me. (279)

During this stopover, Ralph is suspended in a kind of nowhere space, briefly outside the ceaseless logic of travel, wandering aimlessly through a dream-like city that he can’t even identify. He panics in this moment, but is forced to remain “intransit,” unable to complete the flight. This scene, as the above quote reveals, is defined by a momentary directionlessness, placelessness, and end of incessant searching. It speaks of an aporia in

travel and the travel narrative in which the Western ideology of travel is disrupted, turned inside out, and made strange to itself, which we can witness in the scene's dream-like quality. The stopover is a moment where, suddenly, a respite from travel is possible. It is an undefined space from which something new can be imagined.

Just as the stopover scene, presented as a kind of climax (or anti-climax) to the novel, works at a cross-current to the forward progress of travel, the scenes where Ralph is writing disrupt the travel narrative. Baidik Bhattacharya explains the focus on writing in *The Mimic Men* as creating a kind of nation-state which the countries Ralph visits and lives in seem incapable themselves of living up to. In Naipaul's early writing, Bhattacharya claims, "[t]he nation-state [...] is presented as a utopian promise of political and cultural modernity, an enclosed space that would contain every other spatial practice. [...] The literary, in his early novels, plays a surrogate role for the nation that is yet to come, a textual presence that would eventually culminate in historical inevitability" (247). The literary, according to Bhattacharya's formulation, serves in *The Mimic Men* as Ralph's stand-in for the best approximation of nationhood that he can muster. If all through the novel Ralph has been searching, in a postcolonial world where the very idea of a home country has been problematized, for a place he belongs, what he seems to discover is that this place must in the end be one that he imagines into being through the act of writing. The finished product – *The Mimic Men* itself – is not merely a collection of fantasies, though. The fact that it is a record of how those fantasies fail suggests that Ralph has reached a point where he can recognize the disjunction between lived and imagined space and grapple with that difference without resort to discourses of empire.

Ralph's explanation for why he was first drawn to writing reveals his initial intention of making sense of the new reality born by colonialism and especially its decline. As a young man living on Isabella, he began to consider writing as a way to create order specifically of the growing diaspora born out of the end of the British Empire. He speaks of this bluntly, in language that suggests a great, universal theme:

It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval brought about. (38)

In writing this memoir in the form of a travelogue, then, Naipaul has fictionalized the struggles of his writer-surrogate, Ralph Singh, to narrate, to make order, out of the chaos of the postcolonial diaspora. In trying to "give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval brought about," Ralph is attempting to create a narrative out of "restlessness," that is, to make sense of all the forms of "disorder" brought about by the "unnatural" upheavals of empire. Buffeted by postcard images and the ideology of empire throughout his life, Ralph ends up seeking to write an anti-tourist narrative in which he challenges both the commodification of the Caribbean as a collection of island paradises and the glorification of a utopian England. He thus contradicts the imperial nostalgia and romanticization of travel predominant in 1960s English culture.

Furthermore, Ralph intended to use his experiences and observations as a stand-in for the experience of all those who have lost their homes. The sense of "restlessness, the deep disorder," which these peoples are experiencing as a result of the loss of their "natural" homes, the gulf that has widened between various postcolonial nations and their national identities, centers on the relationship between place and identity. Writing as

directly about the post-imperial moment as he does in the entire novel, Ralph continues, “The empires of our time were short-lived, but they have altered the world for ever; their passing away is their least significant feature” (38). What he has discovered, though, is that he is incapable of giving voice to the diaspora. “[T]his work will not now be written by me,” he claims. “I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied” (39). Ralph’s constant travelling, when viewed in light of this confession, is motivated not just by his desire to find a home, to find his authentic self, nor to find a nation which could make meaning out of the post-imperial chaos, but also by his search for the site of writing itself, that “calm and order which the act [of writing] would have implied.” What he seeks is a geography beyond history and politics, a kind of pure nation from which one can write not as a “victim” of history but as an observer outside of history. He never finds his way outside of history since such a space cannot exist, but what he does discover is that in casting himself as an exiled artist, he is at least able to begin the project of expressing the “restlessness” of the diaspora by detailing how the forms of travel endemic to postimperial restlessness – migration, exile, travel – are both unavoidable and in and of themselves inadequate responses to the persistence of imperial ideology.

Writing becomes for Ralph the closest thing to “home” the novel affords him. To take one exemplary illustration of this, at the end of the first main section of *The Mimic Men*, Ralph returns to the present moment and his writing of his memoir. Reflecting on why

he is drawn to telling his story, he muses on the vision of himself trying to make sense of the chaos of his life. He writes,

It is the vision that is with me now. This man, this room, this city; this story, this language, this form. It is a moment that dies, but a moment my ideal narrative would extend. It is a moment that comes to me fleetingly when I go out to the centre of this city, this dying mechanized city, and in the windows of a print shop I see a picture of the city of other times: sheep, say, in Soho Square. Just for an instant I long to be transported into that scene, and at the same time I am overwhelmed by the absurdity of the wish and all the loss that it implies; and in the middle of a street so real, in the middle of an assessment of my situation that is so practical and realistic, I am like that child outside a hut at dusk, to whom the world is so big and unknown and time so limitless; and I have visions of Central Asian horsemen, among whom I am one, riding below a sky threatening snow to the very end of an empty world. (97-98)

The image of the writer, here, is one of stillness and solitude, the diametric opposite of the rambling man he paints himself to be for most of the novel. The power of this moment is in Ralph's awareness of himself embedded in space – "[t]his man, this room, this city" – and in the linguistic/literary realm – "this language, this form," but it also lies in his desire to "extend" this "moment that dies." His full sense of himself as shaped by the world and by language and, in turn, able to create that world, to enter into language, is both potent and fleeting. He is a creator in two senses here – as one who could "extend" this scene via his "ideal narrative" but also as one who can wander the city streets and imaginatively transform that space by invoking London's past or by envisioning the idealized ancient India which he views as his ancestral home. Ralph's search for a geographically stable home utterly fails. But in this scene he has created a kind of home, a stillness composed of language, of quiet reflection, of the scene of writing and imagination itself. The movement of the novel, back and forth between the story of Ralph's life and the present moment as he writes that story, can be understood as the tension between ceaseless travelling and the creation of a home. Writing itself becomes

for Ralph the stable center that the novel keeps returning to and where he seems to feel most himself, most in control, most self-aware. In this way, the novel's self-reflexive structure and repeated depictions of Ralph's current life in London as a writer enable Ralph to achieve, to create, a space of hope and meaning. These are the moments of self-awareness, of grace, even, in the novel.

The stopover is like the act of writing in *The Mimic Men* for both afford Ralph a generative way out of the contradictions he is strangled by for most of the novel. In both cases, he is able, at least for a time, to imagine himself outside of the either/or logic of colonial ideology. These spaces point towards the future, a future always inflected by the imperial past but in which the relationship between travel, identity, and nationhood have become far more fluid. But the hopefulness of these moments can only be temporary. It is only a stopover; the journey must continue. Writing can critique and even repurpose the everyday logic of travel, nation, and self, but, as the Naipaul illustrates, one must still return to the workaday world where hard realities are inescapable and the idea of home remains a wish unfulfilled. Even though Ralph by the end of the novel resides in London, the life he leads is not one of someone who has finally found his home but of someone on yet another stopover. Indeed, during the final pages of the novel, Ralph reflects while riding a train to the English countryside on his "imminent homelessness" (298) and his belief that he "had no past" (299). This moment of final reflection leads to his concluding commentary on the writing of his memoir and his feeling that, in a vivid return to the metaphor of travel and wrecked ships, "I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action" (300). This sense of homelessness permeates the stopover scene as well. Rising from a strange fever dream in which he imagined himself

in a “fantasy city, known and unknown” “waiting for the light to come,” Ralph senses immediately that his travels must begin again. “The stopover was at an end,” he writes. “It was necessary to rise and prepare for another departure” (283-84). Another fantasy, another departure; if Ralph could find a way to remain in that space between the “known and unknown,” he might discover a way of being that is not beholden to travel’s endless movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

WIDE SARGASSO SEA'S ROUGH VOYAGES: FORCED MIGRATION AND MYTHS OF IMPERIAL TRAVEL

1. Introduction

Among the traditional British narratives that Jean Rhys challenges by reconceiving *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – about colonialism, about patriarchy, about race, about gender – she remaps the meaning of travel and how travel functions uniquely, in historically-bound ways, for different categories of travelers.¹ Rhys's interest in *Jane Eyre* is rooted in the novel's depiction of Bertha Mason, but, as I argue in this chapter, the trope of travel also became a crucial intertextual connection Rhys wove into her own novel, a connection critics rarely emphasize. In particular, the novel counters the postimperial nostalgia for the psychic, economic, political, and material advantages of empire by illustrating the realities of geographic movement undertaken during the imperial period. The novel's critique of the ideology behind the British travel experience in the Caribbean is informed by what Gayatri Spivak has termed the novel's "allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism" (844). Travel, that is, becomes powerfully reimagined in the novel: Rhys exposes the imperial cast of Rochester's journey and the ends to which he goes in order to convince himself that he is a free English subject, a traveler. Rochester plans to travel to the West Indies in order to

¹ Much has been written about the intertextual relationship between the two novels. For more on an issue germane to this chapter – the dynamic interplay between character and landscape – in both novels, see Thomas Loe's "Landscape and Character in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*" in *A Breathe of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre* (2007).

procure his bride, take his honeymoon, and consolidate his new estate.² However, he is not there of his own free will; rather, he is operating at the behest of his father in order to secure his own station in life as the younger son. As Rhys once wrote in another context, using a phrase that equally applies here, Rochester's trip "mixes business and pleasure in an unholy way" (Wyndham 257). He is a second son, and so he must trade his body and his name to Antoinette in exchange for her inheritance because of the English law of primogeniture, which deems the first-born son as the only heir. In exchange, Antoinette gets the respectability of and intimate contact with his body, a body coded specifically as English.

These plans are unraveled, however, by Rochester's encounter with the radical alterity of Dominica and by the distinctly unsympathetic cultural and economic realities he encounters here. As Rhys once wrote of Dominica, "[s]omeone wrote to me that [...] Dominica, my home [...] was ravishingly lovely. So it is. But it's rock too" (Wyndham 259). While in Dominica, Rochester's English identity is challenged by what he experiences on that rock. His travel is reformed so that its intended purposes – pleasure and the assertion of dominance – are recast and instead Dominica thwarts his travel expectations and unmakes and unmans him. The novel, writes Laura E. Ciolkowski, "puts Englishness itself into crisis," and so Rochester's Englishness – an identity that is masculine, colonizing, and assertive, but also anxious and fearful – becomes tainted because reformed by its intimate contact with the colonial other.³ The entirety of the

² According to her half-brother, Daniel Cosway, she has inherited "half [Mr. Mason's] money when he die [sic]" (58).

³ In making this claim, I argue that the novel presents a not altogether unsympathetic view of his character. Thus I disagree with a tradition in scholarship on *Wide Sargasso Sea* that emphasizes his flat characterization as an arch-Englishman, as for instance Sanford Sternlicht claims by describing the novel as "Rhys's revenge on all Englishmen. This retribution is personified in the character of Edward Rochester"

novel's middle section is the story, told mainly from his point of view, of just how Rochester is undone by his travels (parts one and three are principally narrated by Antoinette). The actual experience of travel in *Wide Sargasso Sea* thus reveals the myth of travel by undermining the illusion of Rochester's agency, his stalwart independence, and his assertions of power.

In the novel, Rhys employs travel as a metaphor for identity but discards that metaphor as an inadequate representation masking the shifting terrain of racialized and gendered power and privilege that defines imperial travel. Thus her novel critiques the traditional gendering of travel as masculine and uncovers the realities undergirding such myths.⁴ Rhys's most radical critique of Rochester's travel is her revelation of the passivity and commodification that define his journey. For Rhys, the myth of travel as the privileged terrain of the economically secure, British white male operating with the freedoms granted him by his status and the fortifications of empire is a fiction that masks the harder truth: that travel undertaken under the umbrella of empire was often not travel at all, but rather a form of forced migration. The forced migration of British subjects – undertaken often with the illusion of agency – is what drove both women and men to voyage through the realms of the British Empire. As Rhys demonstrates, that migration is akin to but not reducible to slavery; what Rochester experiences is decidedly not the same as the experience of the African slave in the Middle Passage. Still, Rhys does draw

(104). Such a view holds with another typical line of Rhys criticism which argues that Rochester "maintain[s his] Englishness untainted throughout" the novel (Halloran 99).

⁴ A large body of criticism explores the relationship between gender and travel and the possibilities for a feminist geography, including Caren Kaplan's "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse" (1987), Sara Mills's groundbreaking *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991), Gillian Rose's *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993), Rose and Alison Blunt's edited collection *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (1994) and Karen Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (1994).

certain parallels between the two in order to undermine the nostalgic myth of travel and unwind the traditional association between travel and imperial privilege in the popular British imagination. In Rochester's case, he desperately tries to maintain the illusion that he has embarked on a prototypical honeymoon voyage, but the truth is that he has been forced by his father to journey to the Caribbean in order to earn Antoinette's dowry and thus secure his standing in the world as a respectable and financially secure English gentleman. Even though Rochester's journey to the West Indies sharply contrasts with Antoinette's to England, Rhys draws parallels between the underlying financial, familial, sexual, and colonial forces driving both of them, forces present in *Jane Eyre* but often mitigated or merely alluded to.

Jane Eyre serves as Rhys's *ür*-text for Victorian notions of travel that she sees as persisting in contemporary England. In *Jane Eyre*, travel figures importantly both in Jane's personal *bildung* and in Rochester's public identity.⁵ Jane displays her interest in travel and in exotic places early in Brontë's novel. After reading about birds of Norway, "Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland," and other Arctic countries, she "formed an idea of my own: shadowy, [...] but strangely impressive" (6). Already, Brontë has highlighted Jane's interest in other, non-English places. As a child, Jane also loved *Gulliver's Travels*, which she "had again and again perused with delight. I doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see with my own eyes" what the characters in Swift's novel see (17). Again, as with her vision of northern countries, Jane inserts herself imaginatively into an unfamiliar, and, in this case, unreal landscape. Then, later, when she leaves Gateshead, she describes her departure in romantic terms, as

⁵ See Sharon Locy's "Travel and Space in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" (2002) for more on the relationship between Jane's development and the motif of travel.

the experience of being “whirled away to unknown, and as I then deemed, remote and mysterious regions” (35). Later still, she contemplates leaving school at Lowood and envisions her future in terms of travel: “I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils” (74). This vision takes an especially potent form once she arrives at Thornfield Hall, where, upon taking in the surrounding view, she “longed for a power of vision which overpass that limit [...] and what I believed in I wished to behold. [...] I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature” (95). Repeatedly, as these quotes demonstrate, Jane conceives her development as a form of geographic journeying ennobled by her imagination.

Given that Jane often thinks of her future in terms of movement, Rochester, because he is portrayed as a worldwide traveler, embodies this desire for travel. Rochester is described early on by Mrs. Fairfax as someone who “has travelled a great deal, and seen a great deal of the world” (92). He tries to impress Jane with this fact in one of his first lengthy conversations with her when he proclaims: “I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house” (117). Deep into the novel, he confesses to Jane that as a result of some “capital error” that he once committed – his first allusion to Bertha/Antoinette – he was forced to “wander here and there, seeking rest in exile” (191). When Rochester discusses the prospect of his marriage to Jane, he casts it as the opportunity for Jane to become, like him, a traveler and for her travel to redeem him:

You shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples: at Florence, Venice and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also. Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage, as my companions; now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter. (228)

In his final confession to Jane about his marriage to Bertha Mason, he describes what the voice of "Hope" had to say to him as he confronted the horror of his life in the West Indies: "live again in Europe. [...] You may take the maniac with you to England; confine her with due attendance and precautions at Thornfield: then travel yourself to what climes you will, and form what new tie you like. [...] Place her in safety and comfort: shelter her degradation with secrecy, and leave her" (271-72). All of this evidence suggests that *Jane Eyre* encodes a particular vision of travel. That vision is rooted in imperial fantasies of the freely wandering British subject, fantasies that are contrasted in the novel with the necessary containment of the colonial other. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester gets to wander freely in order to purge himself of his guilt and Jane is allowed to dream of unfettered travel as the fulfillment of her desire and development, a metaphor of upward social mobility; Bertha/Antoinette is denied even the possibility of travel. That denial forms the core of Rhys's examination of travel in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rhys demonstrates in all her fiction a repeated concern with national identity, with what Mary Lou Emery labels her "colonial and sexual exile" (xi), and with the ways that travel both empowers and disempowers her marginalized female protagonists. These concerns are born out of her own experiences as a white creole who was born on the Caribbean island of Dominica and who lived most of her life in England. In 1907, Rhys migrated from the West Indies to England when she was 16. While she had lived in Dominica, she had been at once a native, and because of the color of her skin, an

outsider. By the same token, when she moved to England, her whiteness marked her as belonging, but her accent, her nationality, and her West Indian enculturation always meant she never really belonged – a lack she felt her entire life. She also lived for a number of years in Holland, Paris, Budapest, and Vienna and then, when she moved back to England in 1928, never found a place in that country where she felt she belonged and so moved repeatedly within that island nation.

Rhys's life can be understood as the story of her movement from and through the Caribbean and Europe and how those journeys shaped her literary imagination. While writing about Rhys's adulthood, biographer Lillian Pizzichini describes her as "a wanderer, never belonging, haunted by a sense of loss. Dominica, Rhys would say many years later, was 'the only home I ever had'" (8). Elaine Savory elaborates on this characterization of Rhys: she "was self-contradictory and ambiguous about many issues of identity. She had an intense ambivalence towards both the Caribbean and England and was, in her culturally complex identity [...] unable to entirely belong anywhere" (3). Her life experiences align her with a tradition of women's travel writing that tends to focus more on the constraints of travel and "mistrusts the rhetoric of mastery, conquest, and quest" (Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages* 18): the West Indian and English female protagonists of Rhys's novels of the 20s and 30s are often set adrift in London and Paris, cities that are depicted as frightening, even hostile landscapes.⁶ In her earlier writing, Rhys continually renarrates the vexed and interrelated problems of psychic and

⁶ In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931) the protagonist, Julia Martin, returns to England from Paris to reunite with her mother and sister after a damaging but financially advantageous affair. *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Rhys's most autobiographical novel, centers on the journey of a Caribbean woman to England where she must survive by attracting men and getting involved in a number of illicit and damaging sexual relationships. In the novel, England is depicted as alien and hostile to her because she is West Indian, a woman, and poor. *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), the last of Rhys's published novels during this first phase of her literary career, presents the story of Sasha Jansen, an Englishwoman who escapes to Paris where she struggles because of her traumatic memories and her fraught relationship to the city.

geographic displacement, female agency, and the relationship between identity and nationality.

Because she occupies so many spaces and subject positions, Jean Rhys has been identified with a plentitude of literary categories; she has been discussed as Caribbean, Dominican, and British; as a white creole, an exile, and a writer without a nation. Her writing has been categorized variously as modern, postcolonial, postmodern, late modernist, and transnational. She is, as Kamau Brathwaite famously wrote, the “Helen of our wars.” Due to Rhys’s complicated life and identity, critics have often fallen into the trap of too patly categorizing her rather than assessing how she grapples with the intertwined themes of colonial and masculine power, female creative and sexual agency, and the convoluted relationship between self and place. Joya Uraizee, for example, in an otherwise insightful essay into how Rhys destabilizes Charlotte Brontë’s “epistemological structure from within,” insists that Rhys must be understood primarily as a postcolonial writer. Doing so, however, simplifies the complexities of Rhys’s own background and influences. Emery, on the contrary, persuasively argues that Rhys is best understood as a European modernist, a West Indian postcolonial subject, *and* a woman writer, and so argues that Rhys’s writing should be viewed as the product of the many spaces – literary, geographic, subjective – that Rhys ambivalently inhabited and negotiated.⁷

⁷ Veronica Marie Gregg also discusses how Rhys contested and questioned the complications involved in identifying as creole in *Jean Rhys’s Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (1995). Using the lens of “Creole-ness,” Marie demonstrates how Rhys constantly contemplated the particular histories, places, and cultures that informed her creole identity, and how, in her writing she confronted and constructed that shifting identity as she also tried to deconstruct its imperialist and colonialist underpinnings. In a related vein, see Delia Konzett’s *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (2002) for a compelling case for how Rhys’s multi-faceted ethnic identity redefines our understanding of modernism and modernist aesthetics.

Of particular concern for my project is how Rhys is discussed in relation to postimperial literary culture. Typically, her writing career is conceptualized as occurring in two phases: a first major phase during the 1920s and 30s that witnessed the publication of most of her work, and a second phase touched off by the surprise publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. In most of the large body of scholarship on Rhys and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, critics frame her writing in relationship to her childhood in Dominica and the interwar years of the 20s and 30s. Rarely, though, is she discussed in terms of the particular nexus of social and cultural changes detailed in Chapter One regarding the 1960s, despite the fact that she heavily revised *Wide Sargasso Sea* during that decade.⁸ It is as if because she became a recluse, she is discussed as though her world view froze after she left the public eye – many thought she had indeed passed away and were shocked when she published *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In this chapter I illustrate how the constellation of issues she addresses regarding English and Caribbean identities and the gendering of travel speak to the postimperial turn, just as Fowles and Naipaul are more clearly doing. As Judith L. Raiskin insists, Rhys's later fiction, including *Wide Sargasso Sea* and two short story collections, "is part of this postwar rethinking of cultural and political relations" (105), and therefore Rhys provides a "theoretical contribution to contemporary postcolonial theory and culture" along the same lines as Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Albert Camus. Further, "[t]he renewed questions of Englishness in emerging multi-cultural, multi-racial Britain after 1945," writes Youngjoo Kim, "puts particular emphasis on the significance of the issues that Rhys's novel addresses: Englishness in imperial space"

⁸ Rhys worked and reworked the material that became *Wide Sargasso Sea* over several decades, but primarily focused on it in intense bursts from 1958 until its publication. Pizzichini details Rhys's writing process during this time in Chapter 24 of her biography on Rhys.

(124). In response to those questions, Rhys crafts an anti-nostalgic narrative that deforms and demystifies the nostalgic, neo-imperial longing for a mythic, bygone day when travel was unproblematically an experience and expression of a coherent (masculine) English identity.⁹ In doing so, she offers a forceful rejoinder to 1960s English culture that the legacy of empire persists and despite imperial cultural amnesia, the history of the British Empire continues to powerfully haunt structures of Englishness during the postimperial turn. I focus on travel in *Wide Sargasso Sea* because the novel employs travelling plots to reveal and rewrite the radically disruptive potential of the travel experience both for the (supposedly) privileged traveler, Rochester, and the disempowered migrant, Antoinette.

My reading of Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates how travel can challenge the imperial expectations of the privileged traveler and thus points forward to how travel narratives can radically critique – rather than reaffirm – power. As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan write in *Tourists with Typewriters* (1999), travel writing, and writing about travel, often reaffirms the prejudices of the traveler; travel, however, also possesses “defamiliarizing capacities” which “adjust [our] sights to new perceptions: both of ‘other’ cultures and places and of the writer’s and reader’s perceiving culture” (viii). *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies this sort of perceptual readjustment; it defamiliarizes traditional travel narratives by illustrating the imbrication of British travel with gender. It exposes the intertwined forces of imperialism and patriarchy within the narrative of male travel

⁹ The novel also confronts the nostalgia felt by Antoinette for a lost Caribbean home to which she can never return. See John J. Su’s “‘Once I Would Have Gone Back...But Not Any Longer’: Nostalgia and Narrative Ethics in *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (2003) for an insightful analysis of this form of Edenic nostalgia for origins, where Su claims, “we must confront a disconcerting fact: Antoinette’s own search for moral purpose depends on the articulation of a nostalgic fantasy of return to a community that no longer exists” (159). I focus in my chapter, rather, on the depiction of Rochester as a mythologized Victorian traveler and the novel’s deconstruction of that nostalgic fantasy. Still, Su’s essay is an important reminder that multiple forms of nostalgia circulate in and around both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

and the lengths to which the postimperial writer must go in order to rethink the possibilities of travel for the subaltern subject. By exposing Rochester's travel as a form of forced migration, Rhys subverts the masculinized and class-bound entitlement of his journey, revealing how Rochester's honeymoon is in truth the other side of the coin to Antoinette's imprisonment in England. Meanwhile, Antoinette's time in England – her own "travel" experience – serves as the novel's dark reversal of Rochester's time in the Caribbean and works as a coda which retroactively reveals just how deeply unsettling travel can scramble established power relations.

2. The Stranger

"'England,' said Christophine, who was watching me. 'You think there is such a place?'" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 67)

For obvious and legitimate reasons, most of the criticism on *Wide Sargasso Sea* has focused on Antoinette, the madwoman in the attic relegated to the margins of *Jane Eyre* but given voice by Rhys. Many critics have discussed in particular Antoinette's creole status, as does Judith L. Raiskin in *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (1996), who describes creole identity as having an "elastic" boundary and internal conflicts that "cast the surrounding colonial vocabulary of nationality and racial identity into confusion as well" (3). Critics have also focused on Rochester's forced removal of Antoinette to England,¹⁰ a removal that in the final analysis is

¹⁰ As well as the characterization of Christophine, the narrative ethics of the novel, and its imbrication in the materiality of colonial institutions. In addition to the sources already cited, see Carine M. Mardorossian's "Shutting Up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (1999), Evelyn Hawthorne's "'Persistence of (Colonial) Memory': Jean Rhys's Carib Texts and Imperial Historiography" in *Ariel* (2001), Adlai H. Murdoch's "Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbitrator of Caribbean Creolization" (2003), Keith A. Russell's "'Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head': Christophine's Language and Refractive Space in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (2007), J. Dillon Brown's "Textual Entanglement: Jean Rhys's Critical Discourse" (2010), Shakti Jaising's "Who is Christophine? The Good Black Servant and the Contradictions of (Racial) Liberalism"

presented by Rhys as a form of transatlantic slave transportation. *Wide Sargasso Sea* tries to collapse through the metaphor of slavery the distinction between Antoinette, a white creole, and the Afro-Caribbean women she identifies with.¹¹ But this failed metaphor opens up other productive possibilities for Antoinette born out of what Antoinette perceives as her major deficiency, her creoleness. By bringing Antoinette to England, Rochester has unwittingly foregrounded the disjuncture between her identity and the England she now resides in. Imprisoned in England, her creole subject position renders her a stranger there, someone who is “unclassifiable,” an “anomaly, standing between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, friend and enemy” (Sarup 101-102). Defining the “stranger,” Eric J. Leeds claims that strangeness is a function of the traveler’s arrival: “Insofar as the traveler enters a place properly, he or she is a source of power, good, reputation, health, and the augmentation of social being. Insofar as one enters improperly, one is a pollutant and a danger, a source of contagion who deranges a sacred order of differentials” (89).

Antoinette is such a “pollutant and a danger” who “enters [England] improperly” as a shameful secret; she is an outsider whose difference is marked as so radically other that her very presence must be contained and controlled. She becomes, through this process, a threat to the order Rochester has established. Her status as a stranger, because her strangeness is a form of transgression, is what warrants her ability to challenge the boundaries of insider/outsider, white/black, travel/enslavement, England/the Caribbean.

(2010), and Trevor Hope’s “Revisiting the Imperial Archive: *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the Decomposition of Englishness” (2012).

¹¹ Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) has been especially helpful in my discussion here and later in this chapter regarding the metaphor of slavery and how the history of slavery often serves as the buried field of contrast against which modern ideas of self and culture are articulated.

Although many readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* see futility and failure in Antoinette's ultimate inescapability from the fate that befalls her in *Jane Eyre*, I argue that the novel, despite the tragedy of its ending, creates the possibility for a more radical reworking of women's movement for later writers than is normally allowed in critical conversations of the novel. It is able to do so because of Antoinette's status as a stranger and how that standing affects her experience of geographic space and movement. In order to consider her "journey" to England, it is first necessary to establish her creole identity and explain her sense of connection to the different geographies of the Caribbean and her yearning for the England of her imagination.

Antoinette's identity is located in the hazy internecine zone between black and white, West Indian and British. Rochester thinks early on that "[c]reole of pure English descent she may be, but [her eyes] are not English or European either" (39). And as Antoinette puts it to Rochester, describing the confusion she feels because of her creole status, "[s]o between you and I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (61). Her breathless confession, uttered without pause or punctuation, joins her feeling that she is without identity to her sense of homelessness in the world. Although she is passionately attached to her life in the Caribbean and the geography of Coulibri, she is poised between this strong sense of rootedness on the one hand and her detachment from national allegiance on the other, a detachment that manifests itself as her insight that she is a stranger everywhere. Antoinette's attitude towards her national identity is therefore characterized by its oscillation between belonging and isolation; in this sense she expresses one of the

defining characteristics of the diaspora, the sense of having no true home in the world and of being marked as strange everywhere she goes.

From her childhood, Antoinette has been caught between two worlds, at home in the Caribbean but attracted to an England she can only imagine. For instance, when her new step-father, Mr. Mason, moves in, she reflects on the English food they eat now: “I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine’s cooking” (21). Shortly thereafter, she avoids looking at one of the family’s servants by admiring her own “favorite picture, ‘The Miller’s Daughter’, a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders” (21). After staring longingly at this perfect vision of English femininity, she “looked across the white table-cloth and the vase of yellow roses” – across, that is, an idyllic, painterly, domestic tableau – “at Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English. And at my mother, so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either” (21). The difference between what is and is not English is perfectly clear to this young creole girl; at this stage her sense of the world is starkly divided, and England and Englishness represent desired states – national states, states of being – which rise above the confusion and squalor of life in Jamaica, rife as it is with violent cross-currents of racial resentment. Her belief that Mr. Mason was going to bring her sickly baby brother, Pierre, to England in order to heal him, to “be cured, made like other people” echoes this sentiment (22).

Once she has grown up and married Rochester, Antoinette discusses her fantasies of England with Christophine and expresses her “wish to see England’ (66). In the novel’s longest passage revealing Antoinette’s vision of England, she thinks

I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me....England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page

opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Characters of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours, or not even that? Cool green leaves in the short cool summer. Summer. There are fields of corn like sugar-cane fields, but gold colour and not so tall. After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White feathers falling? Torn pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. I must know more than I know already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my dream. But my dream had nothing to do with England and I must not think like this, I must remember about chandeliers and dancing, about swans and roses and snow. And snow. (66-67)

Antoinette's vision/prophecy conjoins her belief in England as a utopia with England as a terminal point. At first her understanding of England is crafted out of a tension between, on the one hand, the "closely crowded, heavy looking" words expressing industry and the inscrutability of English place names and geographic features like "wolds," and, on the other, her own free-floating fantasies of the English seasons and landscape. As the vision progresses, it morphs from her memory of reading about England to an impressionistic panorama of idyllic English seasons to a nightmare precursor to Thornfield Hall, Rochester's future home in England. By the time she arrives at the vision of "that house where I will be cold and not belonging," she is prophesying the future and the final frontier of both her imagination and her narrative, a dark image that she cannot countenance and which represents her entombment in *Jane Eyre*.

Despite this dark vision, Antoinette is unable to shake free from the dominance of an England that to her seems like the epicenter of the world. Rochester, in observing Antoinette's romanticization of England, is frustrated by the fact that no matter how many questions she asks him about England, his answers do not matter since

[h]er mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas

were fixed. About England and about Europe. I could not change them and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change. (56)

England has been so fixed in Antoinette's mind by colonial discourse that it has become myth, an idealized space outside of history which, at least as far as Rochester is concerned, has become an *idée fixe*. The great disjunction between Antoinette's "fixed ideas" about England and the "reality" which "might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her" carries forward to when she is finally and forcibly brought to England by a hardened and revenge-bent Rochester who will hide her away in Thornfield's attic, his burden and his secret.

"She said she loved [the West Indies]," Rochester thinks just before their final departure from Dominica. "This is the last she'll see of it" (99). By the time of their journey to England, Rochester has not only taken her away from the Caribbean but also ruined it for her. As she accuses him, "I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate" (88). Although they are still in Dominica when she states this, the "place" she refers to is never specified, suggesting that not only is Dominica ruined but so too is all of the West Indies and what they represent. For Antoinette, the West Indies were a place where "if everything else went out of my life I would still have this" (88). The vague reference to "this" takes in an entire world that Rochester has corrupted, a place she described earlier as the place "I love [...] more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person" (53). Rochester has "ruined" these islands for her by isolating her from the people she considered part of her family, like Christophine; by helping to cause her "madness"; by turning her paradise into an inescapable web of unhappy associations and memories.

Antoinette's voyage to England – which she has fantasized about for her entire life – is robbed of any of the trappings of travel and instead enters the territory of enslavement. Travel is only possible with some degree of agency and freedom, but Rochester robs her independence – a theft only possible because of colonial British laws – and instead renders her fantasy of travel to England as a nightmare of confinement and the (near) total loss of her freedom. Rhys presents this removal as a form of enslavement, but in so doing she elides the difference between the African slaves who were violently transported through the Middle Passage and creoles like Antoinette who benefited from their whiteness and from the slave system (her family were slave owners). Throughout the novel, Antoinette seeks to identify with the black characters who surround her, especially Christophine and her childhood friend, Tia; Rhys's comparison of Antoinette's imprisonment in England to slavery is an extension of this wished for black identification. But because it is a metaphor that ignores the historical and material realities which differentiate Antoinette's location in Caribbean culture from that of Christophine or Tia, it is a metaphor that collapses the racial and ethnic differences that in other ways the novel attempts to highlight.

Travel for a female white creole subject is shown in this text to be impossible; Antoinette belongs nowhere. Her identification with black Caribbean culture is founded on a collapse of the travel/enslavement distinction – the two extreme ends on a spectrum of geographic movement that extends from total freedom to total enslavement, from the fully active to the fully passive subject. She desperately wants to imagine herself as Tia's sister, as Christophine's daughter, but those fantasies rely on erasing racial difference, just as Rhys's metaphor of slavery relies on ignoring the ways that Antoinette's removal

to Thornfield is not reducible to enslavement. Antoinette is denied travel, and yet her forced displacement cannot conform to the enslavement paradigm to which Rhys's language aspires. As such, caught uneasily between a travel fantasy the novel insists is indeed unreal and slave conditions that do not compare, Antoinette's strangeness is highlighted. She is not a traveler like Rochester and she is not a slave. The tension produced by this conflict in the meaning of her movement exacerbates her transgressive potential because it cannot easily be understood with the framework of imperial ideology. Her movement conforms neither to the category of travel nor to that of slave transport, and yet it contains elements of both; it thus threatens the categories used to explain it. Despite – and perhaps because of – the novel's reliance on metaphors of slavery, *Wide Sargasso Sea* does demonstrate the potentially radical meaning of Antoinette's creole status. When she arrives in England, her identification as a stranger within the ideology of travel renders her a threat to the very meaning of that travel. The novel's conclusion asserts Antoinette's voyage to England as a journey where she retains some degree of agency in spite of its parallels with enslavement.

When Part Three opens, Antoinette's complete inability to recognize the England she now resides in, to accommodate her fantasy to the reality, symbolizes at its extreme the rupture between imperial rhetoric and lived reality. At Thornfield Hall, she insists that “[t]hey tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England” (107). It was during the course of their sea voyage that she imagines they “changed course and lost our way to England” since “[t]his cardboard house where I walk at night is not England” (107). Her refusal to believe that she is in England is only amended by

her belief that one day, allowed out of Thornfield, she finally arrived in the real England.

Her poignant description of this “England” is a bucolic image of the countryside:

That afternoon we went to England. There was grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England. If I could be here I'd get well again and the sound in my head would stop. Let me stay a little longer, I said, and [Grace Poole] sat down under a tree and went to sleep. A little way off there was a cart and a horse – a woman was driving it. It was she who sold me the knife. (109)

Antoinette clings here to a vision of England as an idyllic countryside. Her imprisonment in Thornfield just does not fit with this vision. Tragically, at this moment she believes that this English landscape can revive her, return her to sanity, rather than the Caribbean which was her home.

Hers is a true and permanent exile, not only because Rochester will never allow her to return to the West Indies, but because even in her imagination, she cannot return. What she experiences is not slavery: she is granted certain privileges no slave ever was given, such as the ability to take day trips to the countryside. She is not forced to work her body, although she is certainly imprisoned and pressed to service in Rochester's problematic moral economy, as is she forever cut off from what she sees as her home. Rochester has rendered her home a hell, forever interwoven with her memories of his cruel mistreatment of her. The only psychic safety she can picture at this point is of a fantasy England which is unsustainable and unrealistic, emptied of Rochester's newfound patriarchal control. But in the novel's final scenes, Antoinette is capable of some degree of agency, of turning her journey into an act of resistance. As Caren Kaplan argues, “men and women who move between the cultures, languages, and the various configurations of power and meaning in complex colonial situations possess [...] ‘oppositional consciousness’” and occupy a unique, liminal position in relation to

dominant cultures that is “fraught with tensions [with] the potential to lock the subject away in isolation and despair as well as the potential for critical innovation and particular strengths” (187). This is the position of the stranger, Antoinette.

I read the final scene of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in this light, for it is crucial to note that at the end of the novel, Antoinette has not yet actually burned down Thornfield Hall and killed herself in the process; she has only dreamed it. The difference between the two – the dream and the act – is the difference brought into being by imaginative possibility and at the very least leaves the reader not with a sense of futility but the impression of Antoinette’s assertion of her agency as a visitor to this foreign land. Savory argues that this ending “locates [Antoinette] finally in the Caribbean and in nature” because it involves her dream of rejoining her childhood friend Tia by a bathing pool they used to frequent: “when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there” (112). Although John J. Su is more skeptical of Antoinette’s dream, and characterizes it as a nostalgic fantasy of a Caribbean that never was, he does nonetheless claim that this ending involves a series of “aesthetic connections between moments” that “configure her life story as a coherent whole” and forms “an act of resistance against the history of colonial violence” (169). I agree with Su that the ending should be read as a moment of resistance against Rochester’s attempts to recast her life within the contexts amenable to his selfish needs, but, unlike Su, I claim that the true potency of her resistance rests in the very ambiguity of that final act.¹²

Antoinette’s resistance is highlighted by the novel’s closing sentences: “I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know

¹² See Eileen Williams-Wanquet’s “Towards Defining ‘Postrealism’ in British Literature” (2006) for her analysis that the novel’s ending emphasizes the potency of Antoinette’s resistant imagination whereby “dream triumphs over reality” (413).

why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage” (112). At this moment, she has embarked, of her own volition, on a “dark passage” or journey of her own. The fact that Rhys leaves the burning of Thornfield Hall unnarrated – hinted at but unrealized by the lit candle – keeps open the door for any number of possible futures. Even though we are invited to read this as the last moment before Antoinette destroys Thornfield, the productive ambiguity of the moment creates a sense of potential and not of destruction. Rhys leaves us with the weighted moment of choice, of Antoinette’s sense of purpose and agency in her journey. It is a moment that contrasts sharply with the foreclosure of possibility that inheres in Rochester’s journey.

3. Rochester’s Honeymoon and the Cost of Travel

“You see – I have never liked England or most English people much – or let’s say I am terrified of them. They are a bit terrifying don’t you think?” (Rhys qtd. in Wyndham 280).

Rhys’s Rochester is quite clear about his purposes for travelling to Dominica: to fulfill his mission of marrying Antoinette and asserting his mastery over the space he visits, while demonstrating to his father his displeasure with the role assigned to him. In spite of his desire to present himself as a prototypical British traveler, his sense of purposefulness is belied by the fact that his father has essentially had his body sold to Antoinette in order to secure Rochester’s own financial and familial foothold. He has, that is, already been commodified before he ever sets foot in the West Indies. Richard Mason, Antoinette’s step-brother and Mr. Mason’s son, has offered to pay Rochester to marry Antoinette. As the second son in his own family, Rochester has little choice but to

accept since his father, whom he describes as a disapproving “face with thin lips” (62), has made it clear that he must make his own way in the world. Because he has always already been emasculated by the selling of his name, his body, and his Englishness, when he arrives in the West Indies he is excessively anxious about establishing his patriarchal standing. As Robert Kendrick argues, Rochester “does not fit his class’s narrative of a mature male subject.” His marriage to Antoinette, Kendrick continues, “threatens some dissolution, some ultimate inability to imagine himself within the dominant ideological frame as a ‘mature’ or ‘whole’ male subject” (236). Rochester’s reaction to the people and the geography of Dominica becomes as a result his attempt to assert his male authority over an untamed wilderness which threatens the myth of aggressive and economically advantaged travel that he so desires to perform (and narrate).

As Part Two opens up, Rochester has arrived in a Dominica which is at this stage a symbol for Rhys of a pre-touristic Caribbean, as of yet not declared by the dictates of a tourist economy. This is a Dominica less contained and more darkly threatening and unstable than that of Rhys’s 20th century Dominica.¹³ Rochester’s time spent there unveils the threat this island poses to his sense of self and the lengths he will go to suppress that threat. When he first arrives on the island, Rochester contemplates the final trek to their “waiting honeymoon house” from a fishing village called Massacre (38). Looking around, he observes “the sad leaning cocoanut palms, the fishing boats drawn up on the shingly beach, the uneven row of whitewashed huts” (38). This first image of the

¹³ Rhys reflected on the difference between the Dominica of her childhood and what the Dominica of the postwar years might become: “Dominica, a most lovely and melancholy place where I was born, not very attractive to tourists! (I wonder what will happen to it now?)” (Wyndham 171). She also noted what she saw as Dominica’s strange brew of enchantment and threat: it “is (or was) a lovely, lost *and magic* place but, if you understand, a *violent* place. (Perhaps there is violence in *all magic* and *all beauty*” (Wyndham 269).

Caribbean, seen through his eyes, disappoints; before they have reached their final destination, Rochester is already disheartened by Dominica. Even the people are disquieting: regarding the “little half-caste servant” Amélie who is accompanying them, he relates how “[s]he was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place” (38). The paranoia he expresses at this moment and that he experiences during his entire honeymoon is both a symptom of his emasculation there – he constantly doubts his own authority at such times – and a cause of it, in that it feeds a cycle whereby the more he worries about his servants betraying him, the more his own self-certainty becomes eroded. Further upsetting his initial arrival is the fact that he had envisioned Dominica as so far removed from Western civilization as to be unimaginable, merely a reference point on a map. But he discovers upon his arrival that it is a real place, albeit one where he can still assert his desire. “So this is Massacre,” he thinks. “Not the end of the world, only the last stage of our interminable journey from Jamaica, the start of our sweet honeymoon” (38-39).

Nonetheless, despite – or, perhaps, because of – this early sense that something is amiss, Rochester repeatedly tries to master everything and everyone he encounters and to present what Delia Konzett calls the [t]he empty ritual of impersonating a white mask of respectability” (136). This is the trajectory of Part Two and manifests itself in his marriage to Antoinette, his conflict with the strong-willed Christophine, and his general treatment of all the servants. One small moment illustrates his initial attitude toward the island, an attitude of wanting to be enchanted and to picturing himself as a would-be explorer mastering virgin soil: “Standing on the veranda I breathed the sweetness of the air. Cloves I could smell and cinnamon, roses and orange blossom. And an intoxicating

freshness as if all this had never been breathed before” (43). At this moment the earthy, spicy admixture of clove and cinnamon combined with the sweet citrus freshness of rose and orange comingle to enable Rochester’s fantasy that he has discovered a virginal – and enticing – wonderland. Even his ability here to distinguish and identify these scents speaks to his desire to classify and control. At the same time, this space stands in for the English landscape – sprawling, unpeopled, and under his command – that he has been denied back home because of his status as the second son.¹⁴ The mention of the rose, a traditional British symbol, alludes to the countryside of his homeland. Tellingly, this fantasy also invokes the underlying economic reality while subsuming it at the same time; clove, cinnamon, and especially citrus fruits were among the important exported products grown in the West Indies.

As even such seemingly innocent moments reveal, there is a clear, though mostly unspoken, economic dimension to his honeymoon, one that forcefully undermines his illusion that he is capable of mastering the island and that the island is a paradisiacal space outside the realm of the marketplace. Just as in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester has received a £30,000 dowry by marrying Antoinette. That money is in essence her inheritance from Mr. Mason; his money flows through his son, Richard, through Antoinette and to Rochester. It is a dowry built on the backs of the very slave system that colonialism and the Middle Passage forged, a dowry secured for Antoinette by her mother’s marriage to Mr. Mason. According to English law at the time, all of Antoinette’s inheritance now

¹⁴ As Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City* (1973), the binary established between England and the colonies in the imperial collective imagination is very much structured like the binary between city and country, in which the myth of pure, idyllic, rural Englishness is displaced outward from metropolitan centers like London and Manchester. He also argues that what happens across the 19th and into the 20th century is that as rural England is felt to be under greater and greater threat at home, the space of the colonies becomes the new rural, enchanted space of England.

belonged to Rochester; as she confesses to Christophine, “everything I had belongs to him” (66). This financial recompense – traded through the bodies of the African slaves forcibly brought to the Caribbean – underwrites the power dynamic between Rochester and his new bride: “I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks” (41).

This money is the cost of his self-respect, his independence, and his manliness.

Imagining the letter he would write to his father back in England, Rochester thinks, “I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain?” (41). Here, Rochester is hyperaware of his precarious position and his indebtedness to Antoinette in securing his station (though the debt to the slave system goes unacknowledged on his behalf as does the fact that Antoinette gains no real control over Rochester as a commodity).

Although he is not legally indebted to Antoinette, he perceives their relationship in terms of the debt he owes her, a debt that he repeatedly tries to forget but that keeps surfacing in his concerns over whether she has “bought” him. In the letter he writes shortly thereafter to his father, he concedes that “All is well and has gone according to your plans and wishes” (45). As this concession illustrates, Rochester is, in this rare moment, expressing the fact that his travel to Dominica was not his choice. His forced migration to the island was the result of his father’s express “plans and wishes,” the manifestation of his father’s vision of who he should be in the world. What this means for his journey to the West Indies is clear: this is a voyage of redemption, one where the traveler seeks to claim his place in the world and establish his identity. But the

traditional self-reliance and masculine agency characterizing such a journey is undercut here by the fact that his identity is founded on another's purse and, tracing that purse's origins, on the slave economy.¹⁵

Rochester's insecurities and paranoia regarding his marriage are demonstrated when Antoinette expresses her fears about marrying him on the day of the wedding. Rochester confesses to himself that "I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl" (46). Or, as Christophine says in one of the novel's climactic scenes, "She don't come to your house in this place England they tell me about, she don't come to your beautiful house to beg you to marry with her. No, it's you come all the long way to her house – it's you beg her to marry" (95). When he first meets Antoinette, he insists to himself that "the girl I was to marry" "meant nothing to me" (45); his attempt to objectify and diminish her is performed out of his need to bury the truth behind his honeymoon. Shame and the loss of his financial windfall will be his lot should he fail in his motivation for visiting this island colony and be rejected by a woman he considers his social and racial inferior; his travel is therefore intertwined with and inseparable from both the economic and the sexual. Even though his time spent in the Caribbean and his relationship with Antoinette are heavily mediated by his relationship to his father and to England, he finds that the woman and the place don't neatly conform to his expectations of them. In his attempt to master island and bride, Rochester discovers – at least while he is still in Dominica – that his power is flimsy at best, his illusions about his honeymoon voyage upturned by his experiences there.

¹⁵ Antoinette equally lacks any agency in the marriage; she is married off to Rochester to consolidate Mr. Mason's social position via Rochester's name and his seemingly unquestionable Englishness.

Taking a closer look at how Rochester compares with Mr. Mason, who like Rochester is an Englishman who journeyed to the Caribbean to find a white creole bride, demonstrates just how much more precarious Rochester's situation is and illuminates how their vastly different financial worth shapes their experience of the West Indies and their ability to handle the threatening capacity of the tropics' overwhelming sensuality. Like Rochester, Mr. Mason came to the West Indies (in his case, Antoinette's homeland, Jamaica) with certain rigid expectations in place, including the assumption that the natives would be completely docile and he would be totally safe there. Unlike Rochester, however, Mr. Mason originally travelled to the Caribbean in order to revive the colonial glory of the Cosway estate, Coulibri, once a majestic plantation but now, as a result of the Emancipation Act of 1833, a ruin. Rochester journeys there under the guise of satisfying his sense of entitlement and underwriting his masculinity; Mr. Mason takes the same journey in order to powerfully assert a masculine and colonial dominance he has unshakeable faith in. As a result, Mr. Mason never doubts his ability to master that space (until, that is, he is violently confronted with the islanders' hostility and his new wife's righteous anger at her nuptial captivity). When Antoinette's mother, Annette (who has also in effect sold her body for personal gain) begs him that they should leave Jamaica because of the natives' resentment towards her, he retorts "[t]hey're too damn lazy to be dangerous" (19). And to her response that "They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand," his dismissive and arrogant retort is, "No, I don't understand. [...] I don't understand at all" (19). This is the reason he refuses to leave Coulibri: he cannot perceive nor imagine the complex racial hostility of the local inhabitants and the possible threat they pose to him

and his new family. Antoinette can, however; when contemplating the resentment that black Jamaicans feel towards their family, she thinks, “I wish I could tell him that out here is not at like English people think it is. I wish...” (20). Mr. Mason, a representative of arrogant British imperial attitudes towards the colonies, has arrived in Jamaica armed with his lazy, racist assumptions about the island people, and Antoinette’s unspoken rejoinders to his point of view preview the more multilayered, contradictory, and disorienting experience Rochester is to face in Dominica.

The difference between Mr. Mason, an earlier example of an Englishman coming to the West Indies to claim his bride, and Rochester highlights why Rochester’s time in the West Indies differs so much from Mr. Mason’s. Most notably, in comparing the two men’s experiences, it is clear just how much more susceptible to change is Rochester, how much more influenced he is by his time in the Caribbean, how much more conflicted he is about his attitudes towards and experience of the Caribbean. To the degree that Rochester has been emasculated by his familial and financial position, he is rendered that much more receptive to the influence of his travel destination. Rochester feels what Eric J. Leed describes as “the fear that makes the individual [traveler] ‘porous’ and sensitive [...] the fear of the wayfarer, the loss of security” (10). Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose identify that response as determined by “a space of some kind of resistance” that always coheres within a patriarchal vision of space, a vision “that has to be constituted” as “transparent” and thus amenable to “power, knowledge, and control” (15). Lacking the power to contain and control his body, Rochester is unable to maintain the traveler’s illusion, what Leed terms the “alienated eye” of the observing traveler, that he is left

untouched.¹⁶ The “fever” he catches after first arriving in Jamaica is one example of how his body has become infected by this space, how it has resisted his imperializing intentions, and is symbolic of the psychological infection the islands have wrought.¹⁷

Rochester’s alienated eye is corrupted by the island in other ways as well. Due to the true motive behind Rochester’s journey to the Caribbean, the shameful truth at its heart, he is especially prone to uncertainty about his place in Dominica while honeymooning there and anxious about his lack of mastery of the island. Thus, as is repeatedly demonstrated in the novel, Rochester struggles to stand outside his own conceptual frames in his understanding of the island. The tension between the traveler’s desire to authentically experience a visited place and need to understand that place through prior frameworks is present in every journey, but in Rochester’s situation that tension is especially exacerbated. In this case, as was true for many British travelers during and after empire, Rochester’s frame for understanding Dominica is England itself. When he first arrives in Dominica, he repeatedly imagines Antoinette and the Dominican landscape in English terms. For instance, upon arriving at their honeymoon cottage, Rochester observes how Antoinette “might have been any pretty English girl;” the earth red, just as it is “in parts of England too;” the cottage “like an imitation of an English summer house” (42). In a later scene, he fixes in his mind an image of a Dominican scene like a postcard, frozen and timeless: “I can remember every second of that morning, if I shut my eyes I can see the deep blue colour of the sky and the mango leaves, the pink and red hibiscus, the yellow handkerchief [Christophine] wore round her

¹⁶ See chapter 7 in Leed’s *The Mind of the Traveler* (1991).

¹⁷ Other examples include his susceptibility to Christophine’s obeah practices and to the effects of the locally produced rum.

head [...] but now I see everything still, fixed for ever like the colours in a stained-glass window. Only the clouds move” (71). At this moment, Rochester literalizes the image of the frame via the “stained-glass window,” translating the scene into a comprehensible art object like a church’s window.¹⁸

Despite these comparisons, however, he is clearly threatened by the island; indeed, this sense of foreboding is precisely what incites his comparisons to England as a way of taming that threat. During their hike up the mountain to their honeymoon house, he takes in his first grand view of the island:

On one side the wall of green, on the other a steep drop down to the ravine below. We pulled up and looked at the hills, the mountains and the blue-green sea. There was a soft warm wind blowing but I understood why the porter had called it a wild place. Not only wild but menacing. Those hills would close in on you. [...] Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after [Antoinette]. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. (41)

The too-muchness of Dominica oppresses him, escapes his ability to contain the island in language. Bright colors here threaten him and will not be contained in the image of a window. As he thinks later when writing home to his father, “[a]s for my confused impressions they will never be written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up” (45). The overwhelming sensuousness of Rochester’s experience and the eroticized threat that Dominica represents to him are symptoms of his unstable standing during his journey. Because Rochester’s own body is at stake, traded by his father in exchange for Antoinette’s purse, Rochester displaces his own anxieties and fears about his body and

¹⁸ Laura E. Ciolkowski details in “Navigating the *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Colonial History, English Fiction, and British Empire” (1997) how “Rochester lays claim to ‘Englishness’ with increasing confidence over the course of Rhys’s text. Yet, his defense of its integrity and the ways in which he must continually monitor its borders reveal the perilously open and unfinished terrain of colonial difference” (348). The examples I detail here of Rochester framing Dominica through an English lens – laying claim to his Englishness – fits this paradigm.

his identity onto the space of the colony. Colonial spaces operated in the British imperial imagination as the perfect blank spaces onto which such atavistic, exotic fantasies could be projected. Specifically, Rochester's experience is an instance of what Anne McClintock terms "porno-tropics," exotic places on the map eroticized in the "European imagination [into] a fantastic magical lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" (22). But as Rochester discovers, those spaces, when encountered in person, could upset the traveler's calcified expectations, bursting forth out of the lantern in unexpected and startling ways. Therefore, porno-tropicality expresses itself as a form of what Jana Giles labels "the unrepresentability of the post-colonial sublime" (156), an "uncontrollable excess" (157) that reveals how both Rochester and Antoinette experience a "form of parallel perdition" (170).¹⁹

One of the novel's pivotal exchanges between Antoinette and Rochester reveals both Rochester's disorientation brought on by this post-colonial sublime and the parallel between his inability to comprehend the colonial island and Antoinette's equal and opposite struggle to imagine the reality of England. Once the two are married, Antoinette clings to her idea of England as a pure state, a dream one wakes into. "Is it true" she asks Rochester, "that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up" (47). The words "cold dark dream" resonate here, suggesting a fantasy of a place that is both impossibly unreal but frightening, isolating, bordering on the nightmarish. And yet Antoinette longs to "wake up" into that dream, shift, so it seems, from one fiction into another. England here represents the same

¹⁹ Giles discusses the nature of this sublime in great detail in her excellent essay, "The Landscape and the Other: Aesthetics, Representation, and the Post-Colonial Sublime in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (2002).

kind of idealized space it has to innumerable colonial subjects, a utopia, and yet her rhetoric here hints at a dystopic underbelly to that vision.

Compellingly, Rochester is equally incapable of believing in Dominica and threatened by his imagined version of that space, even though as he states these words he is standing on its very ground:

‘Well,’ I answered annoyed, ‘that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.’

‘But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?’

‘And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?’

‘More easily,’ she said, ‘much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.’

‘No, this is unreal and like a dream,’ I thought. (47)

The parallel between the two characters is striking here and suggests an affinity between them which bridges the great divide which separate them. The similarities between Rochester and Antoinette suggest, despite their vast differences, that Rochester’s claims on reality are potentially just as tenuous as Antoinette’s, that, at times, his firm grasp of a cohesive self-conception is just as slippery.

However, the fact that both Rochester and Antoinette are equally unable to imagine the reality of the other’s home country is complicated by the differences between their two points of view. First, Rochester’s description of England is tied to the world of humanity, of modern spaces and man-made landscapes, as captured in the phrase “millions of people; their houses and their streets”; Antoinette’s description of the West Indies is rooted in the natural landscape, bereft of people. Second, Rochester, as he denies the plausibility of Dominica, is simultaneously witnessing its reality, whereas Antoinette has never been to England. Finally, Antoinette vocalizes her objection to Rochester when she insists that Rochester’s England can “much more easily” “be like a

dream.” Rochester only *thinks* his final retort: “No, this is unreal and like a dream.” The disjunction between their perspectives suggests the deeper unreality of the urban world; Antoinette cannot begin to fathom such a place, made up as it is of the collective fantasies of peoples brought into being: roads, buildings. At the same time, the differences between their points of view highlight Rochester’s trenchant inability to interpret a world that surpasses his understanding. This is what Dominica represents to him: both a pleasure paradise and, increasingly, a space that exceeds his imagination, that overflows the imperial schema he uses to frame it and becomes the unspeakable. The fact that he only *thinks* his final rebuttal rather than articulating it out loud reveals his hesitancy, his lack of confidence in voicing the persistent dream-like feeling which has pervaded his experience of Dominica. To voice that would be to voice not only the irrational but to admit to his susceptibility, his porous-ness, his loss of control – and the associated loss of his masculinity.²⁰

Rochester’s responses to Dominica as he spends more time there further confirm his increasingly difficult struggle to fit his experience of the island with his traveler’s expectations of it. While observing the servant Baptiste, for instance, he notices his “mournful expression” and “thought these people are very vulnerable” (61). This moment launches him into a reverie on his own emotional life and his response to the island: “How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. [...] It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted. If these mountains challenge

²⁰ In “Silencing the Male: Rochester’s Muteness” (2008), Monika Pietrzak-Franger discusses the trope of silence in both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* as representing the duality of Rochester’s power to withhold himself as part of his performance of maleness and his inability to give voice to his interiority because of the dictates of that performance: “Forced into silence on the subject of his feelings, Rochester expects the same from other men [...]. In this way, Rhys makes him a victim of the sanctioned models of masculinity” (27-28).

me, or Baptiste's face, or Antoinette's eyes, they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal (England must be quite unreal and like a dream she said)" (61). All "challenges" to him are discredited as existing outside the real, either erroneous or the stuff of women's fiction (melodrama). Most revealing here is the parenthesis, since it demonstrates the degree to which Rochester is haunted by Antoinette's rejection of England's reality.

Rochester's psychic vulnerability, his openness in spite of his attempts to remain self-contained and uncontaminated, are again on display at this moment. Once events start spiraling out of control, Rochester confesses to Antoinette his belief that Dominica has taken on a life of its own, has become openly aggressive towards him. "[T]he feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong," he thinks. To Antoinette, he admits that "I feel very much a stranger here, [...] I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side'" (78). This paranoid fantasy represents the ultimate traveler's nightmare. Further, his personification of the island illustrates the degree to which, unbeknownst to him, he has internalized the belief system of obeah (the locally practiced belief system tied to witchcraft and animism) and thus been changed by his time there. Antoinette responds by saying, "You are quite mistaken, [...] It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else" (78).

Worst of all, from Rochester's point of view, is that the island seems to have tropicalized him, inflated his sexual nature – the "madness" that has supposedly infected white creoles on the island, including Antoinette's mother. He describes his lust for Antoinette as an insatiable hunger rooted in his hostility towards her and this island:

I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight. In the long afternoons when the house was empty.

[...] Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was. [...] I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. [...] One afternoon the sight of a dress which she'd left lying on her bedroom floor made me breathless and savage with desire. (55)

This is the most damning threat of all, since it means that Rochester has succumbed to the island's sway completely, allowing his passions to overrule his reason. Rochester was debased, unmanned in being sent to Dominica by his father in the first place; his susceptibility to Dominica's influence and his understanding of the island's landscape and peoples are the product of this original debasement. Later, when he sleeps with the "half-caste servant" (38) Amélie in the room just next to his and Antoinette's bedroom, he is simultaneously demonstrating his independence from Antoinette and further debasing himself by sleeping with the racial other, becoming tainted by her. "She was so gay, so natural," he reflects, "and something of this gaiety she must have given to me [...]. In the morning, of course, I felt differently. [...] [H]er skin was darker, her lips thicker than I thought" (84). The morning light reveals the depth to which he has sunk: total racial depravity.

What haunts and threatens him, though, is what ultimately hardens him; although Rochester arrives as a disinherited second son, he departs having reestablished his masculinity in the face of a "hostile" colonial space which in its threat causes his defenses to coalesce. As Jana Giles puts it, Rochester's "confrontation with the excess of the sublime [...] causes him to inscribe his own colonial ethnographic text onto the blank space of Antoinette as a means of replacing his dis-placed sense of self" (156). Now that he has Antoinette's money, he has the ability to assert his masculine authority, bankrolled as it is by the commodification of his sexuality and his Englishness, and therefore also to reinscribe his text of the British male traveler's superiority and rationality. When he

refuses Christophine's pleas for him to return half of Antoinette's dowry, for instance, he rallies himself in the face of her hypnotic speech, threatening that "[t]here must be some law and order even here in this God-forsaken island" (96). Furthermore, whereas the island had, for a time, been for Rochester a sensory wonder that exceeded in its otherworldliness his ability to translate it into language, he now rejects the island completely, refusing in particular the visual dimension of the island's power over him. In retort to Christophine, he says "loudly and wildly, 'And do you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place'" (96). His specific rejection of sight is a rejection of the island's influence over him. And his earlier enchantment with the island turns to hate:

I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place.

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it.

So we rode away and left it – the hidden place. (103)

The "magic and loveliness" that Rochester loathes with such animosity here is all that is for him ineffable about Dominica, all that shatters representation and exceeds his epistemology. The island has maintained its "secret [Rochester] would never know," its "hidden place," and so his anticipation of total understanding, of Dominica's full transparency, has been thwarted. The island – like the people, like Antoinette – has proven, in its contradictions, to be unknowable, as unruly and unmappable as the streets and houses of British cities are familiar, civilized. Just as the people are full of "laughter and their tears," capable of both "flattery and envy, conceit and deceit," the island is

simultaneously and maddeningly defined by “indifference and cruelty which was part of its loveliness.” Therefore, as Giles describes it, the “eternal and unsatisfiable desire” that his sublime experience has engendered must be “transmute[d] into hatred” lest it “make him its supplicant and prisoner” (174).

Towards the end of his time in Dominica, Rochester longs for England, and in his longing devolves into a child-like understanding of the England he had left behind. When the tension between Rochester and Antoinette climaxes and Antoinette in particular has lost her grip on reality, Rochester decides they are going to depart for Jamaica. After making these plans, he mindlessly sketches a house peopled with stick figures, “an English house.” Staring at it, he thinks, “English trees. I wondered if I should ever see England again” (98). England has dwindled here down to its most essential – an “English house” and “English trees” – and a vision in which the nation is an overdetermining force defining all. It is also a vision that has shifted from the urban-centered one he expressed earlier to one rooted in the English countryside, the seat of authentic English identity.

In spite of his fetishization of a lost English past and his resistance to change while in the West Indies, Rochester *has* indeed been transformed. Mrs. Eff, a long-time Rochester family servant, marks this when she says at the start of Part Three, “His stay in the West Indies has changed him out of all knowledge. He has grey in his hair and misery in his eyes” (105). In travelling to the West Indies to secure his bride and her dowry, Rochester had maintained his conviction in the myth of the traveling Englishman during the age of empire. What he discovered, though, was that the distinction between the travelling self and the colonial space is impossible to sustain when the pretense of his travelling self –

aloof, objective, assertive – has been always already corrupted by his father's sale and Antoinette's purchase of his body. That is, travelling to the West Indies did not commodify Rochester and rob him of his agency; doing so revealed that he had already been emasculated and sold by his father. Travel for Rochester was never possible because the preconditions of travel were for Rochester never secured. Instead, ultimately, his travel was founded by the selling of African bodies and undermined by the parallels between the sale of his body and that of the slaves upon which his journey depended.

His removal of Antoinette, his refusal to grant her freedom, is his recompense for his unmaning. Getting ready to depart, he thinks, bitterly, "They bought me, *me* with your paltry money. You helped them to do it. You deceived me, betrayed me, and you'll do worse if you get the chance...." (102). The fierceness by which Rochester reestablishes his power in the novel's climax represents the lengths to which he must go to rescue himself. His forced removal of Antoinette to England is a stark display of what it takes for him to reassert himself and his Englishness in the face of a journey which has threatened everything he wants so desperately to believe about himself and his patriarchal dominance. In the end, he returns a different man, his patrimony returned, the defenses surrounding his Englishness and his masculinity refortified. The deaths of his father and brother have only served to further secure his holdings and to eliminate the threat their lives posed to his ascendance as a patriarch. Finally, he has enacted his revenge for his forced migration to the West Indies by forcing on Antoinette the reverse journey, by expelling her from her home. Rochester has rewritten the narrative of his forced migration, but the novel's ending, where Antoinette heads out in the middle of the night,

candle in hand, gestures at her self-immolation and the destruction of Thornfield Hall as narrated in *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's home burns to the ground in an act that dramatically undermines the motive behind his forceful removal of Antoinette to an England where she never belonged. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester disappears from the text in Part Three, giving way to Antoinette's strange counter-discourse and the radical meaning of her journey to England. Rhys ends her novel not with the triumph of a reinvigorated Englishness, but with its displacement.

4. Gendering Travel

"[E]verybody knows England isn't a woman's country." (Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* 157)

By contrasting the journey of Rochester and Antoinette, *Wide Sargasso Sea* throws into sharp display the role that gender difference plays in travel and the ways that "travel itself is a thoroughly gendered category" (Holland and Huggan 111). As Holland and Huggan claim, "Travel and travel writing are saturated with mythology, but more often than not the myths they invoke are predominately male. [...] The rhetoric of travel is shot through with metaphors that reinforce male prerogatives to wander and conquer as they please" (111). Even more pointed is the critique of Blunt and Rose who elucidate how "the association of indigenous women with colonized land legitimated perceptions of both women and land as objects of colonization. Imperialist literature often incorporated sexual imagery to create and sustain the heroic status of male colonizers" (10). If we read "travelers" here in place of "colonizers," then some compelling parallels of gendered power dynamics emerge from the three novels at the core of my project.

I return briefly to *The Magus* and *The Mimic Men* to detail certain patterns of masculinized travel and expand on how Rhys offers a challenge to those trenchant ideas.

The arguments of Holland and Huggan and of Blunt and Rose apply to both *The Magus* and *The Mimic Men*, where the privilege of their protagonists' travels is tied to both their class status and their gender. In those novels, being male enables the fantasy that they are in exile. Exile is a masculinized category, a form of martyrdom thrust upon the suffering male who has earned the greatest punishment a country can inflict (or, as is often the case, a self-inflicted but urgently felt state deemed necessary by the man who rejects his home country).²¹ Both Nicholas and Ralph, by exiling themselves, join part of a modernist literary and artistic tradition of abandoning one's home country to become one's true self, to find one's voice in the world.²² Further, for both protagonists – and for Rochester as well – their travel experiences are highlighted by their interaction with women and by their sexual desire and conquest of women's bodies. These bodies come to stand in for the national cultures that these traveling men desire to immerse themselves in, to reject and dominate, or to return to. As Georges Van Den Abbeele observes regarding the pleasures of male travel, “the unpredictable pleasure/anxiety of travel [can be understood] in terms of a male eros both attracted and repulsed by sexual difference” (xxv). Furthermore, as Joane Nagel insists in *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality* (2003), “national and sexual boundaries are mutually reinforcing. Implicit in the idea of the nation [...] are certain prescriptions and proscriptions for sexual crossing” (141). This is

²¹ See Holland and Huggan Chapter Three on the gendering of travel more generally and travel narratives written by women that challenge the affinity between maleness and freedom. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002) contains a chapter that provides an overview of the relationship between gender and the genre of travel writing and is a useful starting point as well.

²² The list of such writers and artists is long, but perhaps Stephen Dedalus is the best representative when he leaves Ireland behind at the end of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* to exile himself in France. Ralph too wants to be an artist, a writer, and even Nicholas sees himself, at least when he first goes to Greece, as a budding poet.

precisely the phenomenon occurring within the male travel narratives of Fowles and Naipaul, and, in a more self-critical fashion, Rhys.²³

For Nicholas, the display of his masculinity authorizes his sense that the Greek island of Phraxos exists for his pleasure and authorizes his eroticization of his relationship to the island; this display asserts his maleness in the face of what Andrew Tobin calls the postwar “crisis in masculinity” in England (qtd. in Woodcock). Nicholas’s pursuit of women is driven by his idealization of “the feminine” as a kind of Jungian archetype representing nature, freedom, and erotics and by his quest to play with different forms of national identity. Nicholas’s feminization of Greece is an example of his idealization of “the feminine”; his relationship with Alison an example of how he sexualizes difference and his attraction to otherness. “She had two voices;” Nicholas tells us, “one almost Australian, one almost English” (26). He goes on: “her voice, only very slightly Australian, yet not English, veered between harshness, faint nasal rancidity, and a strange salty directness. She was bizarre, a kind of human oxymoron” (26). Caught between two cultures, her mongrel status is, for Nicholas, sanction for the sense of superiority that taints his attitude towards her for most of the novel. Later, he tells Lily/Julie in an attempt to deny any connection he may have to Alison that ““You know what Australians are like. [...] They’re terribly half-baked culturally. They don’t really know who they

²³ My argument here builds on the insights of Jane Garrity’s *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (2003). Garrity examines the imbrication of national and gender identities to understand how “the category of *Englishness* is inflected by gender” in interwar woman’s novels (5). I extend her argument that because their novels served as “exemplary site[s] through which both the hegemony of and critical resistance to national identity formation are staged” (1) they found themselves “rhetorically invested in mapping psychic and literary geographies while seeking to divest [them]selves of the legacy of violence implicit in reterritorialization” (3). If, despite their criticisms of empire, modernist women writers tended to employ metaphors of empire and Englishness to assert British women’s racial purity, Rhys quite explicitly challenges that paradigm by asking what role the female white creole’s body plays in the staging of English national identity. Indeed, Garrity briefly cites Rhys as a counter-example to the writers she focuses on: Rhys “exposes the fallacy of the freedom of displacement, showing how the valuation of travel depends upon a sense of rootedness to place” (27).

are, where they belong. Part of her was very . . . gauche. Anti-British. Another side . . . I suppose I felt sorry for her basically” (212). Ironically, his attraction to her is partially based on that which makes her an outsider to English culture, which marks her as, crucially, not English: “She had a very un-English ability to flash out some truth, some seriousness, some quick surge of interest” (30). Sleeping with Alison, at least in the first section of the novel, allows him to do two things. It enables him to exercise his dominance over a “colonial” and thus surreptitiously perform the continued power and virility of Englishness.²⁴ Doing so also grants him the thrill of contact with the Australian other, of “slumming it” with a woman who is not-quite British, not-quite civilized.

Nicholas’s womanizing is also determined by his simultaneous and constant need to feel connected to a bedrock of English identity. Even as he rejects Englishness in favor of a feminized Greekness during the course of the godgame, he is primarily attracted to Julie/Lily because they seem to share such a similar background. She is first presented as a quintessentially English girl, and the narrative of the godgame works to emphasize just how similar her background is to Nicholas. Nicholas delights in the common ground he believes he shares with her: “Her voice was completely English. For some reason I had expected a foreign accent; but I could place this exactly. It was my own; a product of boarding school, university, the accent of what a sociologist once called the Dominant Hundred Thousand” (151). Repeatedly, he joins his attraction to her with what he views

²⁴ Bruce Woodcock argues that a central theme of *The Magus* is “masculinity on trial” and that the godgame is “an indictment of [Nicholas’s] behavior as a man and a test of capacity to change” (45). See also Chapter 7 in Wendy Webster’s *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (2005) on the emasculation of postwar metropolitan men.

as her quintessential Englishness.²⁵ In the case of both Alison and Julie/Lily, Nicholas's attraction to them is overdetermined by their national identities and inseparable from his own conflicted attitudes towards Englishness – to reject it and to master it.

Ralph, like Nicholas, is a womanizer. But Ralph requires a more strident performance of his masculinity because his colonial and racial status unmans him; his sense of national belonging is more tenuous than Nicholas's due to the history of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. As Steph Ceraso and Patricia Connolly put it, Ralph's masculine staging is "representative of the consistent inability of Indian men to maintain a strong hegemonic sense of masculinity" in the context of "hegemonic British representations of masculinity." This was especially true of the colonial period but persisted into the mid-20th century: "The British view of Indian men [...] adhered to a colonial sexual script, and they were seen [...] as undersexed: passive, feminine, deferential, and incapable of autonomous action" (Nagel 151). In this uneasy state, Ralph pursues myriad women, fantasizing about how each of them offers a portal to a better, more complete future, fantasies that often revolve around his escape to another distant, romanticized, often European locale. His ultimately doomed marriage to Sandra, who is English, embodies his attraction to Englishness in particular and his great hope to claim that identity as his own. He fetishizes her body, especially her breasts, and continually displaces his imagined communion with Englishness onto her highly sexualized body, a body linked with excess and plentitude. "To me," he tells us, "drifting about the big city that had

²⁵ Deep into the masque, Lily/Julie's supposed Englishness is indeed the only stable center for him in a world that has otherwise turned topsy-turvy, even if her identity is itself deeply problematic because always performed. In the revised version of the novel, Fowles spells out her Englishness even more explicitly, as in one scene where Nicholas confesses that he "clung to my memory of Julie in the water, Julie at countless moments that must have been sincere; and to her Englishness, all that middle-class and university background we shared" (456).

reduced me to futility, she was all that was positive. She showed how much could be extracted so easily from the city” (54). For Ralph, she represents access to, knowledge of, and intimacy with London and with the heart of England.²⁶ Ralph must constantly assert his masculinity because it has been rendered fraught by his racial status and by his imagined loss of a stable geographic center and stable national identity. Thus the novel suggests that he has a number of sexual dalliances during the course of his travels, but always with European women, never with Isabellans, whether of Indian or African origin.

Both characters, Nicholas and Ralph, share with Rochester an innate belief that their traveling is inseparable from the exercise of their libidos and that part of the pleasure of travel is the transgression of what Nagel terms “ethnosexual frontiers.” Their masculinity forms a major component of the justification for the kind of travel they experience, in all cases an imagined exile undertaken to recuperate their agency in the world and shore up whatever version of Englishness best bulwarks their particular ideological and ontological deficiencies. In all three cases, travel is intended, in part, to reassert their masculinity in the face of some form of diminishment: the anachronism of middle class Britishness for Nicholas, the instability of national belonging for Ralph, and the threat to his class standing for Rochester. Further, in *The Magus*, Nicholas’s masculinity is “tainted” by several allusions to his attraction to Greek boys; in *The Mimic Men*, Ralph’s is feminized by his lack of agency, his assumption of the flâneur’s stylings.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, though, Rhys fully explores what was only nascent for Fowles and Naipaul: the subversive role travel can play in male sexuality and national self-definition. As Leed claims,

²⁶ And he represents to her the Indian other, all that is not England (an England she has grown quite tired of and indeed wants to escape from).

Man's search for eminence, for recognition, for a consummation and certainty of self has long been channeled through the agency of travel. [...] In travel men have sought to appropriate not just a world but a self image, a projected masculine persona which assumed the form of father, god, stranger, hero, holy man, knight (220-21).

Although travel has, as Leed demonstrates, always been partly about defining maleness, that historical association takes on a particular valence in a postimperial context. The masculinity that is in crisis for Rochester is intertwined with the crisis of British authority in the colonies, an authority that as Rhys was writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* was diminishing rapidly. In the case of Rochester, he must overplay his hand in order to establish that he is indeed cut from the same cloth as the mythic culturally idealized male traveler, an ideal that was partially constructed by colonial discourse and that British exceptionalism was intended to celebrate. As Youngjoo Kim puts it, "Rhys underscores the insecurity of the husband's English masculinity, the insecurity which is generated by" primogeniture, a law which in turn "dislocates him at the margins of the English empire" (103).²⁷ Rochester sees the island to which he has travelled as "a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. [...] What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing" (52). Rochester's feminization of the island, a trope that threads its way through a long history of colonial discourse – is of a piece with his need to sexually conquer, to get at what the island, and Antoinette, hide. When Rochester sleeps with Amélie, he is allowing himself to claim pleasures which he views as rightfully his. Rochester's sexual conquests, though, are symptoms of a greater and more urgent need: his desire to shore up his self-

²⁷ In "Jean Rhys's Nameless Englishman: The Imperial Quest for English Masculinity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Kim enumerates the "references to racial difference and allusions to otherness" embedded in Brontë's depiction of Rochester and in what she claims is the other precursor for Rhy's version of Rochester, Emily Brontë's Heathcliff (108). These references and allusions inscribe Rochester as already "at odds with the dominant narrative of English masculinity" (108).

esteem and his masculinity given the unspoken reality that he himself has been turned into a passive sexual commodity by his father. The threat to Rochester's maleness implicit in the commodification of his body feeds his urgent desire to eroticize the island and his journey there.

Rochester's honeymoon trip turns on his need to shore up the source of an authority that he views as rightfully his own, an authority stripped from him by the accidents of birth order and the higher authority of his father. The authority that Rochester's travels are intended to create is rooted in an idealized, masculinized, upper class Englishness which warrants and in turn is justified by empire. Lording over the colonies he visits is Rochester's supposed right, as he would have it, but it is a right he has journeyed there to conceive. His time in Dominica upsets all of his illusions that he is travelling independently; that his motives are noble and abstract; that he is master and commander of his fate and of this colonial space. Antoinette's acquiescence, the island's secrets, the servants' subservience: none of these yield themselves to him. What the novel demonstrates is that Rochester even betrays himself in his susceptibility to the island's influence and in his desperate need to establish his identity in terms of the others he is at such pains to exoticize. By forcing upon Antoinette a reverse journey, a dark mirror to the West Indian migrant's tales being published at the same time as *Wide Sargasso Sea's* release, Rochester inadvertently reveals the fictionality at the heart of Englishness and the gendered power dynamic locomoting travel. "At the end of Rhys's novel," claims Robert Kendrick, "Edward is at the margins of Victorian masculinity precisely because he is aware of the fictive nature of the dominant narrative" (246). The utopian England Antoinette always dreamed of truly does not exist, her journey there far from over, just as

Rochester's travelling fantasy collapses in on itself in his attempt to hide his shameful secret: his travel comes at the cost of his body, his masculinity, his Englishness. This, Rhys suggests, is part of the cost – and the fortification – of empire. And even though in the end Rochester seems to remake his identity and reestablish his place in the world, the ambiguous ending of Antoinette's journey, caught between destruction and creation, demonstrates the subversive potential of her own radical journey.

As my discussion here emphasizes, the crisis of masculinity explored by Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys is intertwined in the 1960s with a crisis in whiteness and crisis in Englishness. Rhys shows us how assertions of maleness compensate for the loss of imperial control and how travel as a metaphor for the relationship between England and the (former) colonies can ultimately challenge the myth of imperial travel. If travel during the colonial period could not sustain the myths of the English traveling male subject, as Rhys persuasively illustrates in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and travel during the postimperial turn equally couldn't as Fowles and Naipaul show, then what these texts demonstrate when taken in full is that imperial travel has always been founded on a myth. As Rhys illustrated with the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, no amount of nostalgia could revivify an ideal of Victorian travel that never existed in the first place.

CONCLUSION

The three writers at the core of my project – John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul, and Jean Rhys – challenge the cultural dominance of imperial nostalgia in the 1960s by employing and then questioning the intertwined meanings of English national identity and travel. As my project has demonstrated, each of them references past travel fictions in order to illustrate the insufficiency of travel as a functional metaphor for emerging postimperial identities. The dissolution of the British Empire, which Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys explore in their fictions, requires a rethinking of the relationship between English identity and location, an acknowledgement that Englishness has always been a dispersed, centerless formation as theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Anthony Easthope argue. Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys question both the trend towards parochial settings and the imperial nostalgia prevalent in popular fictions of the 1950s and 60s: the inward-looking fictions of Osborne, Amis, Sillitoe, and other writers associated with the Angry Young Men; the depictions of travel in the James Bond books and films, the Middle Englandism of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, the gentlemanly travel adventures presented by the likes of Evelyn Waugh or Graham Greene. In writing against the grain of these fictions, Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys narrate an emergent Englishness which is decoupled from the privileges of travel conducted under empire's influence.

In asserting my project's thesis – that 1960s travel fictions by Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys critique imperial nostalgia by demonstrating travel's inability to maintain coherent notions of Englishness – I contribute to a number of ongoing critical conversations. Jed Esty identifies the late modernist writing of the 1930s and 1940s as initiating an

“anthropological turn” and Peter J. Kalliney describes the postwar continuance of that inward self-examination, but neither Esty nor Kalliney focus on the 1960s in particular nor how Englishness was conceived through forms of dislocation during that time. This oversight on their part is symptomatic of the larger pattern in critical surveys which by and large either overlook or under-theorize 1960s British literary production and writing about Englishness during this period. I thus join the voices of John Brannigan, Andrzej Gašiorek, Alan Sinfield, Patricia Waugh, and Wendy Webster in arguing for more attention paid to reading and theorizing the literary output of the postwar decades. In addition, as I argue throughout this project, the 1960s must be framed by the dissolution of the British Empire, whether empire was acknowledge or not by the texts that were, either way, clearly influenced by the massive transformations in England’s global standing and national identity, changes that Dominic Sandbrook and other cultural historians detail. Like the work of Simon Gikandi and Ian Baucom, my project therefore sheds further light on how Englishness was imagined after empire, particularly during the uncertainty and confusion surrounding discussions and depictions of English identity in the 1960s, caught as they were between conservatism and youthful rebellion.

What must also be emphasized is the interpenetration of Englishness with race, class, and gender differences and how the traditional coding of the English traveler as white, middle-upper class, and male informed the travel fictions of Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys. Naipaul and Rhys are particularly intent on challenging those associations and the hegemonic position of the traveler and asking to what degree travel is possible for the subjects of the (former) empire. The gendered nature of travel became especially fraught during this period as English masculinity was threatened by the loss of empire, just as the

racial purity of Englishness was undermined by new theories of nationality and by the demographic and cultural changes occurring in England. Finally, my project contributes to our understanding of how the economic and material realities of travel affect and erode travel metaphors. It extends Cora Kaplan's insights by focusing on how Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys all explore the relationship between imperial fantasies of Englishness and the material conditions of travel that upset those fantasies. My project thus enables us to better understand how Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys undermined past travel narratives by reasserting the materiality of travel and its imbrication in the realities of place and the economics of movement.

Each of the authors I focus on critiques the tradition of British travel writing in particular ways that are suited to their own interest in reimagining Englishness. In the case of *The Magus*, Nicholas Urfe ultimately confronts the Mitford in himself, the underpinnings of imperial power that sanction his travel to Greece and that are the hidden underbelly of the godgame. There is no English identity he can recuperate from the imperial past – the two are intertwined – and that truth, Fowles demonstrates, must be confronted for any meaningful rethinking of English identity after empire. In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul addresses the limits of travel as a metaphor for postcolonial identity by exploring the ways in which Ralph Singh's journeying disables his agency. Where Ralph ultimately succeeds, Naipaul suggests, is in abandoning the metaphor of travel and in positioning himself as the author of what in the end proves to be an anti-nostalgic travel novel. Finally, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys exposes the disjunction between Edward Rochester's fantasy of travel and his actual experience in the Caribbean. In this case, his travel is really a form of forced migration and not an exercise of his privilege as an

Englishman, even if in the end he resorts to his power over Antoinette in order to enslave her in England.

In all three cases, these writers offer a unique contribution to 20th century depictions of Englishness and travel. Their travel fictions reflect on the postimperial turn and the nostalgia that turn awoke by insisting on the limits of a nostalgia expressed for some golden age of travel that is unrecoverable, if it ever existed at all. Unlike many of the modernists, these three writers are unable to assert travel's functional and metaphoric power to sustain traditional notions of English decency, superiority, and inherent, paradigmatic uniqueness on the world stage. And unlike the next generation of writers who contributed to a more thoroughgoing critique of Englishness and the hegemony of the traveler, Fowles and Naipaul in particular seem haunted by the very imperial travel narratives they undermine. All three writers I focus on reveal the constructed nature of Englishness and craft characters around the search for an English identity that in the end those characters can never fully locate nor embody. Travel narratives of all varieties have given shape to those constructions of national identity and have often been employed to assert the permanence and timelessness of the English character, but the three writers I focus on in this project demonstrate how, because the meaning of travel and Englishness were changing concurrently and in conjunction during the postimperial turn, such travel narratives no longer suffice for cementing a mythic English selfhood.

I hope that this project offers some new ways to consider the role of travel narratives in shaping postimperial identities and to conceive of the place of mid-century writing within the narratives of modernism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and globalization. Despite 21st century celebrations of diversity and multiculturalism in British society, Paul

Gilroy insists in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) that Englishness continues to be structured around essentialist and racialized discourses rooted in nostalgic versions of the nation. The anti-nostalgia travel narratives of Fowles, Naipaul, and Rhys are as relevant today as they were in the 1960s in countering this sense of melancholia. I thus end with an example that illustrates the urgency felt by writers during the postimperial turn to rethink Englishness and thus the necessity of situating their work within this period.

In 1958, Doris Lessing, born in Persia, published an essay entitled "The Small Personal Voice" in *Declaration*, a multi-authored collection which contains a number of essays criticizing different aspects of postwar English society. Speaking of contemporary British literature in particular, Lessing writes: "We are not living in an exciting literary period but in a dull one. We are not producing masterpieces, but large numbers of small, quite lively, intelligent novels. Above all, current British literature is provincial. This in spite of the emergence of the Angry Young Men" (196). She continues, after giving these male authors their due, "Yet they are extremely provincial and I do not mean by provincial that they come from or write about the provinces. I mean that their horizons are bounded by their immediate experience of British life and standards" (197). After exposing this massive limitation in the literary scene, Lessing broadens her perspective to discuss the complacency, narrowness, and naïveté she observes in British culture at large. She muses:

It is a country so profoundly parochial that people like myself, coming in from outside, never cease to marvel. Do the British people know that all over what is politely referred to as the Commonwealth, millions of people continually discuss and speculate about their probable reactions to this or that event? No, and if they did, they would not care. [...] Does the Labour movement understand that hundreds of thousands of the more intelligent people in the Colonies, people whose awakening has very often been fed by the generous age of British literature

- poets like Shelley and Byron and Burns, writers like Dickens - look to them for help and guidance? [...]

Thinking internationally means choosing a particular shade of half-envious, half-patronizing emotion to feel about the United States; or collecting money for Hungary, or taking little holidays in Europe, or liking French or Italian films.

Meanwhile the world churns, bubbles and ferments. [...]

And the most exciting and interesting writers we are producing in this country, for all their vitality, are sunk inside the parochialism. (198-99)

Lessing's criticism of English literature's nativism and what she sees as the dominant attitude towards "thinking internationally" in the 1950s echoes the work of John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul, and Jean Rhys and their own attempts to reimagine the affiliation between self and place in the emergent postimperial order. In sum, my project articulates how writers like Fowles, Naipaul and Rhys rejected parochialism and embraced travel as a means to rethink the possibilities and perils of an Englishness churning, bubbling, fermenting – an English identity at once indefinable, unfamiliar, and unlocatable.

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