

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: OCCASIONS FOR READING: LITERARY ENCOUNTERS AND THE MAKING OF THE WEST INDIES

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“Occasions for Reading” argues for a new methodology of postcolonial reading that traces the origins of Anglophone Caribbean literary history and redirects the routes of West Indian literary production and canon formation. Historically, West Indian writers have sought an “ideal” reader of their work, though the definition and depiction of that ideal reader have varied. Anglophone Caribbean authors’ own relationships to the act of reading and to the influence of reading on their own and on their characters’ identity formation also direct or re-direct nation and canon formation. By engaging postcolonial theory, reader-response theory, post-structuralism, and reception studies, the dissertation investigates the production of the reader in and of Caribbean literary texts and of the social spaces in which they circulate. This dissertation situates the act of reading at the core of colonial and postcolonial representations of the Anglophone Caribbean and offers the culture of reception as a mode through which the geography of the West Indies is implicated in connecting West Indian people and identities across the diaspora.

Acts and scenes of reading in West Indian novels produce a critique of Imperial knowledge production and illustrate how Caribbean subjects transform the intellectual, psychological or political meanings derived from reading colonial texts into a postcolonial epistemology. Such transformations provoke a range of consequences for

these character-readers who must either leave the Caribbean region or continue to stake out their legitimacy and rootedness. Reading prompts characters' transgressions or resistance against persistent political, aesthetic or cultural narratives of colonialism historically informing Caribbean identity. By extension, characters' engagements with reading reveal twentieth-century West Indian authors' preoccupations with and resistance to colonial ontology. Issues of race, class, and gender influence the acts and scenes of reading in canonical West Indian novels analyzed in this study, including C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley*, V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*, Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House*, Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*.

Following the historiography of the function of the reader in West Indian novels, the dissertation contends with contemporary concerns, in the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century, about where and how novels on the Caribbean experience are read, particularly by non-academic reading publics. Significant moments of literary reception in the U.K. and reception culture of Caribbean literature in the United States allow for a focus on contemporary novels and memoirs including Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*. In an examination of how writers such as Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat have responded to the readers who encounter and assess their work, I critique apparent confluences of Caribbean literature, Caribbean geography or landscape, and Caribbean identity. Slippages in understanding the differences and boundaries between these concepts – literature, geography, and identity – in reading practices warrant a more methodological view of the impact of reading and reception on Caribbean literary history and its global reach. While representations of readers within the Caribbean space reveal a desire for a distinct origin and rootedness in the Caribbean

landscape, migrant writers redefine the legacy and relevance of Caribbean literature through a discourse of emotion without boundaries or frontiers. As a whole, this dissertation challenges the dominant view of primarily political origins of postcolonial Caribbean literature, upholding its less recognized genealogy in intellectual and aesthetic discourses.

OCCASIONS FOR READING
LITERARY ENCOUNTERS AND THE MAKING OF THE WEST INDIES

By

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Chapter One
Introduction: Reading in the West Indies

“These men had to leave if they were going to function as writers, since books, in that particular colonial conception of literature, were not – meaning, too, are not supposed to be – written by natives. Those among the natives who read also believed that; for all the books they read, their whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from outside: Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang.”

---George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

West Indian literature became a phenomenon for West Indians through the radio, an ironic medium twist with serendipitous effects. An Irishman named Henry Swanzy, along with executives at BBC radio in London, introduced the world to a group of young men whose talent, rich with promise, figured as the only treasure the British empire had not discovered, conquered, mastered. Swanzy’s radio show, BBC’s *Caribbean Voices*, while it featured mainly poetry, emphasized the work of aspiring writers –those living in the Caribbean alongside those who had already migrated to England – who would later place the West Indian novel on the global map.¹ One of these young writers was Barbadian George Lamming. In his widely anthologized essay “The Occasion for Speaking,” published in *The Pleasures of Exile* and to which the title of my dissertation pays homage, Lamming rationalizes his decision, and that of other West Indian writers, to leave his home country and move to England. Lamming explains that the cultural climate of the British colonial islands was not suited to cultural production and that London provided an environment more accommodating to literary minds, if not these young men’s racially marked bodies. One of Lamming’s ideals in this historical moment included seeing the “universality of regional cultures” applied to the West Indies through the marketing of an authentic Caribbean identity, found most assuredly in the peasant class (*Pleasures of Exile* 29). The West Indian novel form, then, became the primary

means to place the Caribbean in any international cultural context. The young author's assessment of regional literary culture in his collection of essays carries one primary indictment: the Caribbean region's lack of a healthy reading appetite is largely responsible for the paralysis of literary culture, despite Lamming's assertion that "The West Indian [is] the most cosmopolitan man in the world" (*Pleasures of Exile* 37).

Literary historiography highlights the preoccupation with readers, audiences, and the act of reading in Caribbean literary history. Acts of reading reveal the peculiar ways in which the construction of Caribbean literature imbricates West Indian identity. Because reading frames colonial identity formation in the Caribbean, it serves to ameliorate the difficulties in defining West Indian identity and Caribbean literature as a body of work. The following conditions of reading matter in this project: who reads in or about the Caribbean, what is read, the location of said reading and finally the marking and making of texts as readable. For literature classified or marketed as "Caribbean" by its authors, critics, or the academic community, the representation of fictional readers in West Indian novels and the construction of and reception by "real" readers of Caribbean literature elicit varied and even contradictory responses, enabling an epistemological understanding of the relationship between the literary and the political in the region that goes beyond the sociological and registers in aesthetics and affect. Roland Barthes' suggestions that "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" ("The Death of the Author" 148) guide us to open a significant debate in Caribbean literary studies. The integrity of Caribbean literature and its literary history is more than an ethnographic exercise in colonial and postcolonial discourse. In

shifting the focus from the writer to the reader, a consideration of the act of reading as a working archive of colonial epistemology and postcolonial ontology emerges.

The idea for this project began with a single question that haunted me on a particular visit to my hometown in Dominica. On a visit to my high school alma mater in November 2005, I gave a short lecture to students in an advanced English Literature course. My description of my work in graduate school and my research interests seemed an anomaly to the students I addressed. In a twenty-first century postcolonial Caribbean context, that someone would study and teach Caribbean literature for a living still seemed an arbitrary choice. But what seemed more astounding to this group was that such a thing as “Caribbean literature” existed currently in a vibrant form, that literary production in the West Indies was not simply a product of some political or historical moments, but remained an active contemporary enterprise. Surely, I could begin to explain the paucity of literary acumen among students and citizens with the absence of an active and long-standing higher education base in Dominica. The smaller islands of the Anglophone Caribbean differed from the more populated and more developed nations of the Caribbean community serving as the university centers of the region – Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad. Particularly, the University of the West Indies campuses² serve a critical need in the region, generating important literary criticism and maintaining an interdependent relationship between writers, scholars and activists. The university also functions as the vehicle of outreach, extending intellectual ideals of literary or political import into the wider community. So while in islands like Dominica, with only satellite campuses for distance education, literary discourse and intellectual memory appear limited (reflected in the high school students’ lack of mastery and interest), the

Anglophone Caribbean's development of a literary tradition – creative and critical – demonstrates the investment in and attention to Caribbean literary historiography.

Although much has improved in the structure of and attitudes towards teaching and learning literature in the West Indies, the astonishment expressed by the high school students does not surprise given the region's educational history. The curriculum for West Indian students in 2005 had insufficiently deviated from the colonial educational model implemented since the mid-nineteenth century. A leading Caribbean historian, Sir Eric Williams, asserts that “the colonial system was seen at its worst in its neglect and abuse of educational facilities” (456), evidenced in the unclear priorities in the curriculum and in the inequitable dissemination of that curriculum by the state. He explains,

The curriculum ... was based very largely on foreign materials that bore no relation to the daily lives of the pupils or to their environment. The educational system of the Caribbean violated the fundamental principle that education should proceed from the known to the unknown, from the village to the great wide world, from the indigenous plants, animals and insects to the flora and fauna of strange countries, from the economy of the village and household to the economics of the world. (Williams 460)

Colonial education profaned and inverted the precepts of Enlightenment culture the British Empire had championed as one of the great gifts of its civilizing mission. Merle Hodge explains the implications of this colonial premise on twentieth-century colonial

Caribbean communities as she reflects on the production on her own novel about colonial education, *Crick, Crack Monkey*. In explaining the transformation of the school systems, Hodge argues, “When I went to school, the system was more elitist, because only a handful of children got to secondary school. Now the schools have been democratized in the sense that there are more school places and more children getting educated. But you have a distinct kind of division between the kinds of schools, and who gets into which schools” (Balutansky and Hodge 656). The Common Entrance Examination determined the placement of students in the island’s elite high schools according to their academic achievement on the test. However, the unequal distribution of resources and teachers across schools and of funding to students led to inequality in the curriculum as well. Consequently, the actual material presented in classrooms not only reflected the foreign knowledge adopted from Europe but also confirmed that while much had changed since the nineteenth century, inconsistency in the form and content of learning was still dominant. My experience in Dominica was an example of how this educational structure persists in the contemporary postcolonial West Indies, a fact noted earlier by George Lamming in 1960. The students had been reading Shakespeare and Western canonical writers for the last four years of their high school careers. Poet Olive Senior describes the internal conflict associated with such a practice in her poem “Colonial Girls School.” The poem aptly describes the instructional setting in the colonial and independent British West Indies. Amidst Senior’s complaints of other “civilizing,” oppressive tactics, she observes, “...the language of Shakespeare/ Told us nothing about ourselves/ There was nothing about us at all” (Senior 21). Even when the speaker and her peers knew that nothing of their lives participated in the temporal and geographical distance Shakespeare

represented, they knew the mastery of that language counted. Living in a world where the language of Empire remained hegemonic, mastery of Shakespeare meant a mastery of a cultural ideal. But how does and did that ideal manifest itself in the literary culture specifically?

To the students in Dominica, literary mastery that produced Caribbean literature still seemed exceptional in their imagination. And while they were completely aware that people from the region did write,³ the authors they cited – V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Michael Anthony, Sam Selvon – were historical figures in their perception, rather than active producers of culture in the region. Consequently, these “historical” figures only appeared sporadically in the students’ curriculum. Moreover, the fact that I could recite from memory a seemingly endless list of names of contemporary authors – West Indian, US or European – left the students in awe. To them Brontë, Austen and Blake (and a few other “historical” authors) prompted recitation and repetition. They recognized the name of Dominican author Jean Rhys because the country had finally decided to use her fame as part of its tourism agenda and she was one of the canonical, “historical” authors appearing on the CXC curriculum’s reading list. I left that experience wondering why no one in that room knew Jamaica Kincaid, not only because she was my favorite author, but also because her mother was of Dominican descent. Kincaid’s novel *Autobiography of My Mother* takes place in Dominica and Kincaid herself held more popular attention internationally than any of the “historical” West Indian writers they had recognized. I wondered about this lack of literary and cultural awareness in the most elite educational institution on the island as I wandered into the various bookstores of the city trying to construct an answer.

While books by local or regional authors were relegated to a special section in the stores, often under-stocked and quite expensive, the bookstores showcased full shelves of paperback popular fiction by John Grisham, James Patterson and V.C. Andrews. In Dominica, as in many other West Indian countries, the bookstore reserved the most space for textbooks. Reading for instruction prevails as the order of the day. Moreover, any notion of leisure or pleasure to be derived from reading did not exist in the literary world but in the journalistic. The newspaper provides the primary means of interaction with everyday life.⁴ And “Literature”- Shakespeare, Bronte, Austen, Naipaul and Walcott - lingered in the textbook section. Should I consider the placement of these books a product of the expectation, or the reality and function, of reading in the West Indies? Is reading not for appreciation, but only for the mechanics of (post)imperial instruction? I left this trip energized to find an answer, a solution even, to this problem of readership. Why had something like Caribbean literature, an example of all the trendy postcolonial material in the U.S., U.K. and Canada, become endangered in its homelands? I ended with the question: where is the literature in and of the Caribbean? I searched for an answer at the place I began: a quest for readers.⁵

The analysis of the formation of literary culture in the Anglophone Caribbean by artist-scholars like C. L. R. James, George Lamming, Kamau Braithwaite, V. S. Naipaul, had already occurred in their early writing careers. Lamming’s most important critical work, *The Pleasures of Exile*, consolidates the desires of these early writers by deconstructing the culture of authorship and readership in the region. He argues that because reading for leisure never existed as a common or invited practice in the mostly black, peasant world of the British West Indies, working as a writer would never be a

recognized or viable profession. While he contends that “the West Indian writer is the first to add a new dimension to writing about the West Indian community” (37) through literature that challenged the imperial gaze of the colonial period,⁶ he acknowledges that “the situation of a West Indian writer, living and working in his own community, assumes intolerable difficulties. The West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilised [sic] activity which justifies itself as an exercise of the mind” (42). For Lamming and his contemporaries, having careers as writers did not surface as an option, for a local venue or audience for their work had not materialized. Writing only further isolated them from their homelands because their ideal reader – the West Indian reader – did not exist.

In V.S. Naipaul’s literary memoirs, he writes that the culture of owning books and reading books associated itself with class status and the mimicry of colonial British behavior, but did not constitute an affective experience. Speaking of the English school stories he encountered in primary school, he claims,

I couldn’t see the point of these artificial excitements, or the point of detective novels (a lot of reading with a certain amount of misdirection, for a little bit of puzzle). And when, not knowing much about new reputations, I tried plain English novels from the public library, too many questions got in the way – about the reality of the people, the artificiality of the narrative method, the purpose of the whole set-up thing, the end reward for me. (*Literary Occasions* 10)

Naipaul's retrospective situates him as an average West Indian reader attempting to make sense of the material he faced. His experience as a reader undoubtedly resembles that of students in the contemporary classroom, when prompted to describe the texts they know well. Their excitement in finding novels that do offer them the "reality" or an "end reward" suggests that the "what" in their reading experience created ambivalence about not only who they were, but also about what they were supposed to value. Naipaul further illustrates the defeat of this ambivalent encounter: "I couldn't truly call myself a reader. I never had the capacity to lose myself in a book; like my father, I could only read in little bits" (Naipaul, *Literary Occasions* 11). What happens when a Caribbean person reads a book, or when a person reads a Caribbean novel or other text is at the heart of the question about Caribbean identity. The range of reader response theories applied to Western canonical texts offers a point of departure from which to think through the links between reading and colonial and/or postcolonial identity formation in the Caribbean space. Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological view of relationships between texts and readers exposes the nuances that may emerge in the geographical and socio-political constructs of Anglophone Caribbean readership. The process of reading happens in different ways for different readers and, according to Iser, depends notably on the experiential factors that inform a reader's perception of the work. It is in this space of location and experience that interpretation can take place, in which the text's virtual dimension can be manifest. This space of production can include textual experience, such as recognizing and responding to intertextual references to other literary works, or personal experience, an entanglement that Iser refers to as consistency-building.⁷ What these experiences mean, more than what they actually are, give shape and weight to the

meaning of a text. As a result, Iser argues, “Expectations are scarcely ever fulfilled in truly literary texts. If they were, then such texts would be confined to the fulfillment of a given expectation and one would inevitably ask what such an event was supposed to achieve” (Iser 53). The multiple ethnic, racial, linguistic and cultural registers of Caribbean identity produce a constant desire to find fulfillment in print culture, whereby Caribbean subjects make sense of the idea of self that seems completely foreign to their daily lives. For West Indian writers, who all begin as readers, the duality of their identity is defined by a constant competition between a need to be universal and an anxiety against specificity and essentialism of the Caribbean space by readers of their work.

George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul discuss their own lives as examples of the influence of literature in shaping their immediate lived experiences. The often-contradictory elements of their reading and learning asked them to adopt foreign and distant ways of knowing and feeling. Consequently, in their work as writers, the act of reading serves as the conduit through which they address the anxieties of conflicting identities, and the act of writing allows them to transform these anxieties, producing a readable product that seeks to resolve the contradictions in the writers’ lives.

Although Lamming and Naipaul’s political views about the Caribbean would never really align, their agreement on the role of readership in authenticating literary culture in the region articulates itself most clearly in Naipaul’s assessment of his father’s writing experience at the turn of the century:

He did become a writer, though not in the way he wanted. He did good work; his stories gave our community a past that would otherwise have

been lost. But there was a mismatch between the ambition, coming from outside, from another culture, and our community, which had no living literary tradition; and my father's hard-won stories have found very few readers among the people they were about. (*Literary Occasions* 31)

This search for literary culture through sites of reading dates back earlier than the migration impulse of the mid-century, which suggests that the exile of West Indian authors during this period may have been legitimately the last resort. Their efforts, and those of their predecessors, to cultivate a literary market by fostering literacy, seemed to fall on blind eyes and deaf ears.

A search for actual readers led me in an ironic way into the books, the fiction, poetry and drama of West Indian writers who, in the absence of finding people other than themselves to read their work, had to create the ideal characters who mirrored their own reading experience. Would these characters serve as a model for other readers? Once published, would the authors have an audience to read about their characters at all? The early to mid-twentieth century Caribbean literary climate presented a significant problem for those invested in producing a classical model of literary production: finding a readership in geographical spaces of the region splintered against the readers found in textual or distant foreign places (England or the United States). In this regard, the emergence of Caribbean literature mirrored, in many ways, the dislocated and distant political structures of colonialism already in place.

Yet, even by the time Jamaica Kincaid, one of these voluntary exile writers, publishes *My Brother* in 1997, Lamming's question still pertains, and the desire to find a

reader and engage in reading the Caribbean reigns paramount. The narrator, whose work as a writer is fraught with controversy over her relationship to her homeland, considers the unbridgeable chasm between the writing she produces – its subject matter and intent – and the audience that receives and embraces it:

At the moment I seemed to be having such a triumph, [sic] a book I had written interested people who knew nothing at all about me (for is that not a desire of people who on writing books allow them to be published and exposed to a public: that people who do not know them, absolute strangers, will buy the book and read it and then like it). (*My Brother* 156)

Even after a prolific and controversial oeuvre has positioned her as an iconic recorder of the various tensions of life in the Caribbean and its diaspora, Kincaid describes here the complications of readership and the paradox of the author's desire for universality amidst a yearning for subjectivity and specificity. As Wayne Booth observes, an "author creates, in short, an image of himself and an image of his reader ... and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement" (qtd in Richardson 32). The examples discussed above in Lamming, Naipaul and Kincaid reveal an anxiety in the Caribbean canon that ironically reflects the anxieties of Western concepts of authorship that postcolonial writers might otherwise repudiate. The West Indian writer finds difficulty in creating an image of a reader "in complete agreement" with her own image under the logic of colonialism. Belinda Edmondson explains the contradiction that would make such an alignment difficult:

And indeed the “traditional” Anglophone West Indian novel – that is the late-colonial/ post-independence novel of the 1930s through the 1960s – usually has as its theme or dominant motif the quest of the West Indies for a national and cultural identity. It is almost by definition oppositional, since it seeks to establish a regional/cultural identity against what is perceived as an imposed European culture. The impetus for a Caribbean aesthetic has similar political motives in its striving to uncover an “authentic” and liberating African-based culture from the stifling confines of European mores and structures. (“Race, Tradition” 117)

Because the writer’s compromised sense of self in relation to the British Empire, and the writer’s sense of belonging to a nation or community – i.e., confluences between region and nation – are frequently at odds, the notion of an ideal reader can seem ontologically opposed to the nature of Caribbean identity. As a result, West Indian writers, particularly in this boom period that Edmondson references, seek out contexts of reading, literacy, language, and education in the thematic and formal aspects of their writing. The representations of West Indian subjects in the novels of this time illuminate the anxiety of trying to reconcile the racial, ethnic, and class differences between self and Empire through a borrowed and systemically antagonistic intellectual discourse.

By tracing the various relationships among writers and texts and readers, this dissertation explains the ways in which individual and collective encounters with literature have shaped West Indian identity from the late colonial into the postcolonial

period. The relationship of Britain to its colonies solidified the power of education and literacy as civilizing tools. When transformed into liberating tools by the former colonial subjects, these tools help create a culture of readers and writers who resist colonial hegemony through literary mastery. By historicizing the reader in social spaces and highlighting the production of the reader in Caribbean literary texts, the role of reception occurs centrally while remaining an ignored category that simulates the region's "irruption into modernity" (*Caribbean Discourse* 100) from forces within and outside the region. Rather than approach reading as an activity that illustrates the cultural currency in the Anglophone Caribbean, the act of reading is actually a methodological way to interpret the various modes of knowledge production and exchange.

While the terms Caribbean and West Indian can be interchangeable in referring to writers and their works about the region, my focus is on the literature, writers and readers of the British West Indies. The Anglophone Caribbean's relationship with reading is peculiar because of the systemic education employed in countries such as Jamaica, Barbados and Belize. In this area, the mode of colonial education introduced in the British colonies was heavily invested in the act of reading as a civilizing schema. Textbooks called "readers" filled with various annals of British Empire history and culture, trained students to be proper colonial subjects. The French colonies, for example, also used similar attempts during their colonial periods. Theorist Edouard Glissant expresses his own frustration with the dichotomies of the oral and written that emanate from the French Empire's brand of knowledge production and dissemination:

When the experience of reading, then access to “knowledge,” is granted to a fraction of a community with an oral tradition (and this done by an elitist system of education), the resulting dislocation is limited in its effect. One part of this elite is “wild” about its brand new knowledge; the rest of the community retains for some time, and alongside this delirium, its sanity.

(Caribbean Discourse 11)

Yet, the place of alternate languages and cultures, such as Creole, and issues of orality ensured a unique struggle in the French West Indies between the “wild” and the “insane” that assumed a different configuration in the British West Indies.⁸

Authors of the Francophone Caribbean tradition have also been preoccupied with the questions of education, language and reading that present as dominant themes in the Anglophone tradition. The Creolité theories presented by Patrick Chamoiseau and other leading Francophone scholars and artists privilege discourses of Caribbean life that are dominated by non-European linguistic infusions. In their imaginary, the Creole language itself becomes an anti-colonial method of reading and interpretation of life in the Antillean landscape. Taking a more literal approach to acts of reading also reveal a rich body of work in Francophone Caribbean literature that depict the various methods and motives of reading and interpreting texts. Chamoiseau (*Texaco*) and Maryse Condé (*Desiderata*) are among authors who engage, in their plots and themes, the influence of acts and scenes of reading on individual and collective subject formations. While this dissertation solely focuses on Anglophone texts, the methodologies through which I approach these works provide a framework to newly analyze Francophone texts,

especially thinking about the act of translation of Francophone texts as another type or act of reading or hermeneutics. Additionally, comparative analyses of the functions of reading in both these historical and political contexts can serve as gateways to rethink the contemporary relationship between the Anglophone and Francophone traditions. At this moment, Anglophone Caribbean literary history functions as the prototype for constructing relationships among texts, writers, audiences, Caribbean history and the contemporary regional and diasporic present.

When George Lamming voiced his concerns about the place of reading in creating a literary and artistic community in the region, other scholars, critics and artists were already participating in intense conversation about the role of the artist in the newly independent nations of the West Indies. Kamau Braithwaite, for example, was a leader in actively disseminating cultural and political awareness to the larger population through home-grown publications like *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al*. As seen in his critical writing, Braithwaite's focus on the concept of nation language connects directly with the emergence of a literary field, where language ties inextricably to who can read and how that reading might take place. These publications highlighted the work of burgeoning artists and circulated ideas in the small literary community they had formed. Scholars interested in the emergence of a literary culture in the Caribbean attempted to chart its progress by paying attention to whether or not audiences were receiving these texts. For example, Henry Swanzy's assessment of Jamaica's book culture in the mid-twentieth century solidifies the exigence of engaging readers. His study focuses on the emergence of the bookshop in Jamaica and how it becomes a site for readership.⁹ Swanzy frequently contributed to *Bim* and corresponded with Frank Collymore and other artists and writers

who helped shape this initial body of work. Further, *Bim* was a site of active conversation and debate about the state and future of Caribbean literary studies in every genre and across every spectrum of the society. As Edward Baugh observes, “Indeed, *Bim* is important in the development of West Indian writing if only because it did much to foster in the would-be writers the idea that profession of letters is honourable [sic]. This was imperative in a society, semi-literate and un-literary, in which a boy was brought up to believe that he had to become either a doctor, a lawyer or a non-entity” (Baugh 7-8). Many of the essays and book reviews published in *Bim* considered what the function and long-term purpose of a cohesive body of work would be. Moreover, essays like A.J. Seymour’s “The Novel in the British Caribbean” (1966) sought to trace an origin or multiple origins for the work they built, while critics like John Wickham searched for a true West Indian consciousness in both the production and reception of West Indian prose fiction, in his essay “West Indian Writing,” printed in the magazine in 1974 and originally delivered at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill in Barbados.

Demystifying the concept of the West Indian reader requires demonstrating that Caribbean writers have not only longed for such a figure but have also tried to create one imaginatively. In the twentieth century a world opened in which readers became active agents able to develop distinct Caribbean identities. An early twentieth century novel that explicitly addresses many initial political and cultural concerns about a literary establishment in the region can serve as an example. C. L. R James’s contribution to West Indian literature is well-documented, and his only novel, *Minty Alley*, helps solidify the various aspects of the act of reading in and through Caribbean subjectivity.

C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley*: Defining a Domestic Tradition

In his 1959 essay "The Artist in the Caribbean," James argues that national resources will only add quality to artistic tradition in the West Indies when a national consciousness has been achieved. He identifies the artist as the integral source of a national culture and states emphatically, "the great artist is the result of a long and deeply rooted national tradition. I go further. He appears at the moment of transition in national life with results that are recognised [sic] as having significance for the whole civilized world" ("The Artist in the Caribbean" 185).¹⁰ James charges the artist with the responsibility of producing culture and custom that flourishes from West Indian soil. Surely, C. L. R. James's career reflected his achievement as a leader in this regard, emphasizing, throughout his professional life, the positive contribution of a distinct West Indian culture to the project of Englishness rather than vice versa.¹¹ James is indeed the most successful of Trinidadian writers in the 1920s and 1930s to participate in establishing a regional literary scene (Ramchand, "Introduction" 5). *Minty Alley* makes a significant contribution to those efforts and remains relevant even in contemporary conversations about the place of national consciousness in the global age.

An examination of masculinity and blackness through the trope of reading in this early novel reveals the imbrications of race and gender in C.L.R. James's representations of folk culture or the "yard" experience. Contrary to some assessments of a masculinist focus of the narrative, James actually presents strong resistance to concepts of Englishness tied to the dominant literary gentleman scholar as the ideal in the colonial social order. Moreover, *Minty Alley* exposes the perceived differences between people of

separate classes through the representation of the boarding house or semi-domestic space as way to interrogate the place of the artist or intellectual in the foreign vs. domestic binary of Caribbean cultural discourse. Kamau Braithwaite and other Caribbean scholars have theorized race and racial representation as a method of canonization of Caribbean literature.¹² For such scholars, literary representation of folk life proves critical to the emergence of both national consciousness and literary tradition. However, James does more than just establish a tradition that is predicated on racial representation. James' novel highlights the distance between the author and the reader that Lamming voices twenty years later in *The Pleasures of Exile*, and the act of reading is a motif through which James tries to account for solidarity between the artist/intellectual figure and the folk. *Minty Alley* establishes the desire for commensurability between the artist and the public, a desire at work in other Caribbean texts. James's articulation of this desire through the representation of the black middle-class male is undergirded by a cohort of women who influence every act of reading (textual or cultural) that the protagonist Haynes uses to negotiate his place in that community. However James, in his representations of race and gender in this novel, makes typically postmodern assumptions about the relationship between the male writer-reader-critic figure and the women who are the subjects or recipients of his project of self-making.

James focuses on the routine of the residents of No. 2 Minty Alley in order to speak to national concerns, even while he so skillfully never directly locates the events of the plot in any scene of national or political affairs. Unlike Naipaul, Earl Lovelace and other Anglophone writers, his work speaks to the concerns at the heart of his 1959 essay without depicting an actual political scene in the plot of the novel. James adroitly

manages to address the questions about race, gender and the relationship between Englishness and West Indianness in an era still entrenched in colonial practices and heightened political tensions. The novel succeeds because of James's uses of books and reading in domestic spaces to articulate the empowering place of difference – social, racial or gendered - in facilitating the kind of political awareness capable of catalyzing a rupture from colonialism.

As early as 1936, C. L. R. James creates Mr. Haynes in *Minty Alley*, a man of learning who uses his world of reading to retreat from the peasant world of the yard. *Minty Alley* is the only novel James wrote in his celebrated career and is one of few full-length novels by Afro-Caribbean authors written between the world wars,¹³ and evidence of the paucity of literary reading in the colonial Caribbean shows in its delayed re-publication till 1971. No. 2 *Minty Alley* exposes Haynes to a lifestyle unimaginable to him, although he always lived minutes away. By the end of the novel, Haynes questions his alienation in that space, an alienation Caribbean scholars have characterized as a deterrent to the success of early West Indian literature and writers and of the region's political ascension to independence as well: that the sharp distinction between social classes – the people who observe and the folk who are observed – makes it difficult to create solidarity or a national consciousness to catalyze social change. More importantly, the act of reading in the domestic space, this boarding house, illuminates challenges to Western orthodoxy in the colonial moment (especially the relationship between Englishness and West Indianness) through James's representations of race and gender in the novel.

The author's introduction of Haynes informs the reader very quickly that he is an avid reader. His employment at a local bookshop, it is implied, serves both as a cause and effect of his interest in learning and reading. But the narrator suggests that Haynes was suffocated by his mundane lifestyle of erudition, even in a culture that saw that practice as holding the true value of colonial achievement. He is the model citizen of the black West Indian middle class who "worked in the day and came home and read the books in the evening" (*Minty Alley* 22). Haynes' participation in the social order as a young man of his class made him often unconscious that "at the back of his mind unformulated, but nevertheless a steadily growing influence, was the desire to make a break with his monotonous past life, school, home and the drowsy book shop" (23).

In many ways, Haynes fits the model that Belinda Edmondson describes of the literary man, the West Indian colonial subject whose access to the social conventions of British culture comes through class status and engagement with the reading of English, particularly Victorian, literature. Although readers of *Minty Alley* never really gain access to much of what Haynes actually reads, the description of his life before his move to Mrs. Rouse's boarding house situates him within the tradition that Edmondson describes thus: "...in the West Indies, the middle class intellectual community which fashioned the terms for West Indian literature did not so much imitate English customs as reflect them; by virtue of their class their upbringing was in many ways fundamentally English- that is, the Englishness of the West Indian middle class was in many ways innate" (Edmondson, *Making Men* 46). Haynes meets the colonial model of Englishness that is at least closely tied to gender, if not race.

However, Haynes practices the customs of Englishness and West Indian middle class life in the presence of and with greatest influence from women in his life. Although his mother is a spectral figure who influences his other interactions with women, she stands as the source of Haynes's appreciation for reading. We learn that Haynes's mother was a headmistress and she had invested deeply in the colonial model of education that would breed in him a profession. She choreographs his life, and "she got a job for him in the only book shop in the town" (James, *Minty Alley* 22). She also suggests that his father was erudite and that Haynes had adopted his temperament. She did not see him fit for a law career. While his father worked with a more abstract type of learning, Haynes's mother had a pragmatic view about West Indian society in the early 20th century, understanding exactly what the benchmarks of success were for a young man who was limited by place and circumstance. "You are black, my boy. I want you to be independent, and in these little islands for a black man to be independent means he must have money or a profession. I know how your father suffered, and you are so much like him I tremble for you" (22). The passive and solitary nature of Haynes's personality seemed unfit for the social climate, and his mother's cautions make her an ideal reader of class and custom in a colonial system that indicts mobility instead of embracing it.

Haynes's housekeeper, Ella, another dominant character, supports and structures Haynes's performance of the gentleman scholar. As the manager of the home, she acts as Haynes's financial manager and advisor. Haynes holds two properties, including the one in which he lives and must let out. For a black man in the colonial moment, two homes represents a considerable amount of property. And Ella provides the source of security, despite her limited education. In fact, she self-consciously enacts her limitations in the

company of Mr. Haynes and “would have died rather than expose her writing and spelling to her master” (James, *Minty Alley* 155). Even while Ella, like his mother, serves as a matriarch figure in Haynes’s life, she views her success and social value as intrinsically bound to his and to the possibility that he can eventually leave the island.

Mrs. Rouse, another black woman character, functions as more than a matriarch in this text. She directs and manages her household and her businesses. She dominates in her professional capacity, even when she struggles financially, and manipulates and negotiates the messiness of her personal life through her performance of feeling associated with a white Western model of feminine fragility. During her many squabbles with her romantic partner, Mr. Benoit, she displays exaggerated affect with crying and swooning, only to emerge the next day completely focused on her baking and other culinary tasks. Neither Ella nor Mrs. Rouse requires sophisticated book learning to commandeer power in their respective domestic spaces. The domestic space might be thought to serve in contradistinction to the world of ideas and reading that Haynes brings with him to Minty Alley. In fact, once Haynes moves to the yard, the power struggle between Ella and Mrs. Rouse’s clan further marginalizes Haynes, whose response leads him to retreat anew to his reading.

James depicts numerous scenes of reading that draw our attention to important tenets of colonial life in the Caribbean. In one significant example, Ms. Atwell, a resident of the boarding house, seeks Haynes’s validation of her ability to participate in the “higher” activity of reading for leisure:

A sudden knock at the door startled them both. It was Ms. Atwell come to borrow a book to read.

“Mr. Haynes, the last one was good, a little high for me, but good. I is not a person of much education and I knows nothing about stories and so on. I used to be a great reader of novels in my day. That is a long time now. And novels isn’t serious books. Though some of them has good morals. But I pass through the Universal Spelling Book at school, Mr. Haynes, and when you pass through that, you knows something, you can take it from me. And I can tell you, Mr. Haynes, it was a real good book. AI [sic] and no mistake. High, high class. But how do men think of these things, Mr. Haynes? Education. That’s what it is. Education. If I had a child I would sacrifice anything to give him education. Thanks very much, Mr. Haynes. I’ll take every care of this one.” (James, *Minty Alley* 152)

Ms. Atwell’s excited expression clues the reader into a number of critical issues. First, literacy and education, particularly for women, limited themselves to the necessities required to survive. Also, the reader learns that higher learning and leisurely reading, the type mastered by Mr. Haynes, constitutes a masculine right of passage¹⁴ with a mythical quality (“how do men think of these things?”). Ms. Atwell genders her hypothetical child as male to emphasize this idea. Additionally, the distinction made by Miss Atwell between “novels” and “serious books” illustrates the derision of leisurely or pleasurable experiences associated with reading. One should read for edification and class status, not for entertainment or amusement. The many implications of this scene, especially its

function as another interruption into Haynes' personal space, suggest that James's critique of Englishness lies in the ways that West Indian women disrupt, complicate or destabilize colonial orthodoxy signified in reading and formal education. The women of the boarding house – Maisie the licentious adolescent; Philomen, the awkward cook; Mrs. Rouse, the melodramatic woman scorned – all provide invited or unsolicited diversions from his classical formation.

The other male character in the novel, Benoit, who operates as the antithesis of Haynes, provides another kind of interruption to Haynes's engagement with reading. Benoit dismisses Haynes in their first meeting, "'You do a lot of reading, I see,' he said, looking at the books. 'Do you like books?'" said Haynes. 'No time for that, man. Since I leave school I ain't open a book'" (James, *Minty Alley* 30). The pragmatic use of reading for edification and not for leisure receives reinforcement again in this scene, as Benoit's comments highlight Haynes' ignorance of or disrespect for the everyday West Indian's social customs.

Benoit, a womanizer who depends on charm and women for his social status and economic livelihood, positions himself at the center of all the activities that occur at No. 2, while Haynes remains at the margins. Benoit's sexually illicit behavior and the women's response to his affair with the nurse suggest that he functions according to the expectations of his class, the womanizer figure as embodied in the black peasant man. Haynes' experiences with women have always situated him as the subordinate rather than the authority. Up to this stage, he has only been an authority in the world of books. Benoit attempts to reverse the social order of Haynes' life by chastising him for remaining at the periphery of the life of the yard: "but you are a funny fellow. You only

reading books the whole day. A young man like you. Man, when I was your age, by the time one was out another was in. You have a nice little batchie here where girls can pass through the back without nobody seeing them. What's wrong? You sick?" (James, *Minty Alley* 79). Alluding to illness of a sexual nature and using the adjective "funny" that is a derogatory euphemism for homosexuality in the region, Benoit's illustrates his presumptions that black masculinity is intrinsically tied to sexuality. In fact, his references to the nurse as "the white woman" purport an association of her blind generosity and sexual accessibility with a fragility that historically situates the white woman as the subject of this black male dominance. However, Benoit's apparent ignorance parades as a performance in this conversation with Haynes. His access to reading makes him capable of debate with Haynes about his textual choices:

"These books you always reading," he picked up one and looked at the title. "About science! Ah! You read about science. Then you have books by de Laurence?"

This de Laurence was an American writer on magic and psychic science, whose books had some vogue in the islands.

"No," said Haynes. "It isn't that sort of science. That book is about birds and animals and electricity and so on."

Benoit put it back on the bed.

"A man with your intelligence, if you read books on science you would do well. See now, about two o'clock, all the spirits of the air passing up and

down. And if you know what to do you can compel them and make them do what you like.” (James, *Minty Alley* 79)

Benoit’s blurring of the lines between verifiable research-based science and “magic and psychic science” as professional possibility instantiates one way that James critiques modes of colonial self-making projects in the empire. Benoit’s misreading and juxtaposition of the two studies call into question Haynes’s formal education that makes him the ideal British subject at that time. The disciplinary structures of his education render him naïve about the ways in which myth and fact are conflated textually to produce colonial mimics not quite English but able to replicate its desired structures outside of England.¹⁵ Only with female intervention does Haynes imagine an alternate masculine identity in this space, however flawed.

The interesting turn in *Minty Alley* is Haynes’s abandonment of reading as a form of leisure. He seems to fall for Benoit’s line of argument about how to be a man. He no longer finds utility or experiences pleasure in the exercise that sets him apart from the yard community. James’s references to books and reading dwindle as the rising action between Benoit and Mrs. Rouse over his affair becomes more intense and more public. Haynes seems to trade in the reading of texts for the reading of culture. Yet even while his ambivalent participation in the activities of the boarding home constitutes a source of frustration, he refuses to leave until the most necessary hour. He returns to the act of reading only when he becomes suspicious of the women who dominate the home space and his seemingly flawed notion of masculinity, thereby compromising his perceived social standing.

The trope of reading allows Caribbean writers to dismantle a colonial epistemological archive that sacrifices identity politics for the project of British culture - of constructing Englishness in oneself, and of replicating it in the public sphere. James's depictions of the yard space directly confront these common understandings of Englishness in the colonial moment. His representation of reading sets the tone for the preoccupation with acts of reading that comes to define twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean works.

The Tradition Continues

Similarly, V.S. Naipaul's preoccupation with readers figures prominently in his early works. *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Mimic Men* and *A House for Mr. Biswas* all feature important scenes of reading. From as early as Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House* to Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending* to as recent as Shani Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea* and Patricia Powell's *The Fullness of Everything*, scenes of reading have been recurring stages for the performance of social life in the Caribbean and its diaspora. The 1970s and 1980s produced a wave of literature either from or depicting the West Indies, but even then, political affairs in the newly independent region left little time or interest in engendering a literary culture or major reading campaigns. In fact, because of the nature of the West Indian nation formation at the time, any encouragement of the act of reading was to promote literacy. The genre of the *Bildungsroman*, which became popular in Caribbean and other postcolonial literatures, has also generated sites for the study of such reading practices. Colonial education lends itself well to the investment in reading since recitation and mimicry furnished essential tools for molding colonial subjects.

Novels such as Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Audre Lorde's *Zami* share in this investment. In the intersection between women's writing, the *Bildungsroman*, and the use of reading in uncovering West Indian identity, novelists ask complex questions: who is impacted by the imposition of colonial literature on girls' education? How is the Caribbean woman reading act different from the Caribbean man reading? How do Caribbean subjects articulate difference from the mold of colonial formation that most likely resembles a character in a Victorian novel?

The persistence of this interaction between text and reader lends a convincing example of how encounters with Caribbean literature both cause and affect the constantly changing geographical and cultural dimensions of the term "Caribbean." The range of relationships between "Caribbean texts" and "Caribbean readers" – terms that, like the region, require constant re-definition – illustrate how the borders of these definitions expand or restrict. Caribbean literary scholars have mostly engaged questions of audience and reception as tangential aspects of larger political and social concerns that frame West Indian experience and its literary representations. Much of the current scholarship attempts to navigate the multiple overlapping, and sometimes competing, definitions of "Caribbean," as illustrated specifically by the expanding definition of "Caribbean literature." Through various methodological lenses, including historical, ethnic and linguistic approaches, critics such as Antonio Benitez-Rojo (*The Repeating Island*), J. Michael Dash (*The Other America*), Shalini Puri (*The Caribbean Postcolonial*) and Silvio Torres-Saillant (*Caribbean Poetics*) emphasize the socio-political registers out of which Caribbean texts emerge. The literary analyses provided in these studies address the

works of the earlier generation of Caribbean writers, whose identity as West Indian is understood as stable or fixed, even though these writers lived and wrote abroad. Yet, attention to the ways in which the political aims of these works influence their own reception and help shape definitions of the Caribbean experience, as well as definitions of Caribbean literature, remains mostly absent.

Leah Reade Rosenberg's monograph, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007) unravels the entanglements between desires for nationhood and desires for cultural legitimacy by highlighting how authors express their nationalist agendas in fiction. Her work begins in a nineteenth century study of nationalist practices and sets the groundwork for other important works that move beyond her investment in the political registers of Caribbean writing. Associating the peak of Caribbean literary ascension with authors such as George Lamming, Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul and others, Rosenberg argues for an inextricable link between political achievement and cultural mastery: "Under colonialism, writing literature was at root part of an argument for Caribbean political rights, because both British and West Indian intellectuals regarded literature as evidence of a people's cultural legitimacy and political competence. After independence, the ability to produce national literature became the basis for claiming the right to determine national culture. As a result, canon formation has been and is likely to remain political" (Rosenberg 3). In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming suggests that his generation's literary production was a new and welcome revolutionary moment for West Indians, since it signaled the production of the novel form by a peasant class (38). While he centralizes the efforts at writing by West Indian men, he identifies a lack in readership but does not seek adequately to address efforts to build a homegrown

audience. My response to George Lamming's concerns about the peculiar situation of Caribbean writers producing literature and culture in exile at the mid-twentieth century acknowledges Rosenberg's goal to "stop taking the truth of Lamming's novelty for granted and to redefine that tradition in West Indian imaginative writing" (Rosenberg 207), to identify a tradition existing in narrative form and in lived experience before and alongside the peak of the mid-twentieth century exile writers. Rosenberg wants to assert the value of writing forms that also contributed to the political aims of Caribbean nationalism. However, by also identifying cultures of reading to which these authors belonged before their writing careers, such aims will be additionally clarified.

Alison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), "a historiography of Caribbean literary history and criticism," attempts to reverse the relationship between literature and culture by asking, "...what it is we read when we approach Caribbean literature, how it is that we read it, and what critical, ideological and historical pressures may have shaped our choices and approaches" (1). Donnell's study significantly posits that the regeneration of any major canon of work, particularly one so strongly motivated by political change, always depends on how it shapes experience after its production. Moreover, by looking at the dissemination and criticism of Caribbean literature, she contends with the debates surrounding definitions of the Caribbean and its literatures. She argues that some critics view "the Caribbean as a cultural idea, rather than an actual region, a dislocated, mobile, hybrid, space attractive to the demands of postcolonial theory and its alliances to migrant subjectivities and writings" (Donnell 3). She also counters other critics who relegate the work of culture to the categories of performance and the popular, which are usually outside of the domain of the literary.

Donnell sees this debate as a symptom of an inattention to literariness – particularly to aesthetics and the affective relationship a reader has with a text – as well as the uniquely “overseas” nature of Caribbean literature as a body of work, i.e., literature about the region is being written outside the region. Donnell’s concerns afford an appropriate point of entry to explore the ways in which the distance of the writers from the region displaces or alienates the readers who have the most tangible relationship to their representations. Is the writer’s search for a true West Indian reader counterproductive, then, if she (Kincaid, for example) keeps writing to and for “absolute strangers?”

But the most recent critical intervention that sheds light on these questions about class and representation remains Belinda Edmondson’s *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (2009). Taking up a similar challenge to the binaries between literary and popular culture as Alison Donnell, Edmondson inserts the idea of the middlebrow into a discourse of Caribbean culture that has been traditionally read through the binaries of elite and peasant. Additionally, *Caribbean Middlebrow* also participates in conversations about cultural consumption and popular culture. Critics such as Janice Radway¹⁶ and Chris Bongie¹⁷ have set up significant theoretical foundations for a discussion on reception and cultural consumption in which Edmondson couches her reading of the Caribbean’s middle-class history, and whose work prove useful in the reading of contemporary Diasporic reception culture. In the context of Caribbean literary studies, though, Edmondson resolves the apparent dichotomy in Donnell’s critiques and conclusions; a categorical difference, mostly classed, exists between “cultural” work (identified with peasantry) and “literary” work (identified with elitism). Edmondson attempts a project that “combines the literary with the performative” (6). Her thesis is

that alternative forms of cultural production are at work, aside from what she classifies as highbrow literature (those “historical” men), and these forms may build a national and regional identity that may or may not be tied to the colonial history of slave and peasant labor. Artifacts such as pageants, calypso music, and romance novels alert us to commitments to upward mobility in the West Indies. Reading is only one of the ways that Edmondson demonstrates the leisurely assertions of a black middle class - either to politicize or depoliticize Caribbean identity. Taking many cues from her assertions, my work explores reading across class boundaries that may or may not be invested in either racial authenticity or cultural modernity. Taken together with Donnell’s contributions, her definitions of middlebrow or aspirational cultures are useful. These two critics dismantle a critically limited binary at the core of literary studies debates in the region - who owns culture, who has the right to express it, who has access to consume it. The culture of reading can serve as a response to these questions, demonstrating that symbiosis in producing and consuming culture across class and race defines the Caribbean literary tradition. Reader response as a critical paradigm for Caribbean literary discourse has yet to be adequately undertaken. This project invests thoroughly in uncovering the mechanisms through which the category of the postcolonial emerges in Caribbean literary history, a task that critics like Rosenberg, Donnell and Edmondson have only recognized as necessary but have not really approached.

Readership is at the core of what Edmondson refers to as “the cultural conundrum of the modern Caribbean: the competing desires for authentic culture, middle-class status and global appeal” (*Caribbean Middlebrow* 5). Edmondson specifically taps into a body of literature - middlebrow writing in the form of popular and locally distributed

paperbacks - to illustrate a local cosmopolitanism characterizing the middle class. She is right to identify that colonial education created a sense of intellectual privilege in Caribbean subjects without the cultural artifacts to enact that privilege – “black, educated, propertyless” (12). While she focuses on cultural artifacts outside of the literary, I make a claim for the depth and breadth of cultural artifacts garnered firstly and primarily through acts of reading - both in and outside the world of texts. The materiality of the book object and other reading materials - newspapers, pamphlets, etc. - make manifest the kinds of cultural entitlement and ownership long inherent in the black and brown communities of the West Indies. In fact, a strong reading and book ownership culture influenced other cultural forms such as calypso and pageant performance that Edmondson uses as evidence. By reading canonical and contemporary fiction alongside reception of these bodies of work, this dissertation illustrates that through the act of reading, characters, writers and reading publics must renegotiate their class positions and national identification at home and abroad.

Edmondson's and Donnell's works create the categorical imperative to find new critical methods to approach canonical texts of the region and to destabilize the seeming disparities between canonical and popular literatures. Canonical Caribbean literature – or the work Edmondson classifies as highbrow – became popular largely through its circulation in academic and critical spaces in the West Indies and, additionally, in service of agendas of multiculturalism in metropolitan centers of the West. Although the subject matter of much of the earlier publications represented the peasant classes of the islands in a politically anti-colonial sentiment, that “the folk novel is essentially an intellectual invention, about the folk but not of them” (*Caribbean Middlebrow* 33). Even the authors

of these novels, because of their educational and migratory privilege, essentially alienated themselves from the material they produced. As a result, Caribbean fiction and some authors by extension, because frequently othered by a population of readers who had neither the experience nor the consciousness to derive pleasure from the writing they encountered. Paradoxically, this population of readers, whose responses to Caribbean texts, allowed for the emergence of a canon despite its relative newness. More importantly, its establishment as what John Guillory calls a counter-canon – a body of work defined by its resistance to the dominant and oppressive Western canon that has either left out or misrepresented “minor” works and experiences – situated Caribbean literature within a broader discourse of postcolonial literatures that directly engaged and re-imagined the relationships between emerging nations and the imperial powers of the West.¹⁸ Guillory’s contribution to the ethics of canon formation¹⁹ speaks to the designation of otherness that necessarily identifies Caribbean texts. The establishment of canons entails a selection made by a body of readers who claim an institutional authority not only to assess the quality of a text but also to teach its merits and failures in any given social context. Questioning the relationship between canonicity and citizenship and investigating the issue of authenticity and its influence on the literary culture of the region promote a new understanding of the nexus of relationships incurred by and occurring in Caribbean texts. To what extent must an author claim West Indian affiliation or belonging in order to be included in the Caribbean canon? And in what ways must this author accept or deny a specific kind of “Caribbean audience” as grounds for this inclusion?

Guillory's analysis of canon formation assumes a class-based social group with the resources and intellect to make choices of taste. In later works, he distinguishes between lay and professional reading practices, arguing for their "relative incommensurability" and insinuating that lay readers cannot or do not engage with a text beyond an "immediacy of consumption" (Guillory 43). His judgment that reading for self-improvement constitutes an activity exclusive of a serious contribution to political objectives and therefore relegated to the category of lay reading, takes as a given that professional readings produce socially productive modes of textual interaction of a different configuration. Rather, Caribbean readers subvert the dichotomies of lay and professional readership and disrupt the imposed distinctions between canonical and non-canonical texts. Further, the act of reading mitigates this difference between the canonical and non-canonical. In fact, by encountering both literary and popular texts, lay and professional readers engage in similar maneuvers. In many ways, the structure and intent of colonial education instilled in Caribbean readers the discipline and vigilance that characterize the professional practice of reading, according to Guillory's definitions.

The production of a literary canon in Caribbean literature and the institutionalization of that body of work in literary criticism had to emerge from a professional readership. However, what some academic communities (particularly outside of the region) missed in that reading was the nuanced relationship between reader and text through which other meanings of the Caribbean emerge. The ways in which certain reading practices have been born out of a Western literary tradition necessarily work against readings of non-Western literatures. For instance, distinguishing qualities materialize within the Caribbean reader, whose literary encounter may not be filtered

through an experience of migration or an understanding of Diaspora that may bear strongly on the production of the work. Consequently, this “untraveled” reader may receive the world presented in the novel as foreign and unfamiliar to an extent that prevents the transformation from work to text.²⁰

By investigating the influence of education, migration and expanding definitions of Caribbean and Diaspora on the definition of Caribbean literature itself, the production of Caribbean literature as a cultural institution becomes traceable, particularly through a focus on readers and acts of reading. The circulation of Caribbean literature through these sites of reading in various Caribbean spaces complicates the ways in which Caribbean literature has come to be synonymous with Caribbean identity in critical discourse. By combining theories of canon formation, reader response, and post-structuralism with major intellectual concerns of Caribbean literary history, an investigation into the act of reading, in its various iterations, can help to explicate the instability and mutability of the Caribbean space.

In the shadows of this investigation lies the looming question of the place/role of literacy in using reading as a theoretical framework. Why, in a region that is predominantly working class, historically peasant, and plagued with illiteracy, should/would a scholar privilege reading as an epistemic lens? Various representations attempt to reconcile the history and culture of illiteracy with an educationally privileged class in search of national progress. Many instances of character-readers engaging in public readings of literary and cultural texts reinforce that reading may not be exclusionary or individual but an inclusive and collective endeavor.

The investigation of readers and reading has expanded since structuralism, and the role of the reader became a widespread mode of inquiry with the acceptance of reader response theory in the 1980s. Poststructuralist arguments have sought to articulate meaning from within the text – through the relationships between signs and signifiers in the creation of language. Poststructuralist critics also consider how interactions between text and reader perform certain social and political functions in themselves. Roland Barthes, for example, approaches the idea of reading and reception by seeking out affective relationships between text and reader. He argues for two separate responses to textual encounters, pleasure and bliss: the first he describes as “the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and is linked to a comfortable practice of reading” and the other as “the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, ... unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language” (*The Pleasure of the Text* 14). This terminology frames the current discussion of the ways in which the act of reading generates affect in the reader who is West Indian or in a reader of a Caribbean text. It also helps explicate the processes through which affective response gets translated into an intellectual or professional definition of Caribbean identity. Barthes’ theses provide a framework for reading the distinct West Indian identities that emerge from reading works on the Caribbean experience. His distinctions between pleasure and bliss are particularly useful to investigate how acts of reading assist Caribbean subjects in distinguishing their colonial identity from their West Indian identity. How does a character in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* or V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* come to learn that the

thoughts and feelings associated with his or her reading of British historical or literary texts informs his or her decisions about being part of a home community?²¹ I use Barthes' analysis to posit that pleasure (associated with euphoria, comfort and identification with culture) and bliss (associated with loss, subversion, discomfort and crisis with language) operate contrapuntally for Caribbean readers (*The Pleasure of the Text* 13-15). There is no before and after in the rhythm of reading for the colonial or postcolonial West Indian. A West Indian reader who has acquired language through imperial structures must simultaneously process the intellectual registers of language and the structures of feeling that frequently exist in a different and often contradictory sphere. In order to derive meaning from reading, characters in the Caribbean novels I study must constantly balance love and hate, acceptance and resentment, identification and dis-identification with the contents of their reading and thus, according to Barthes, becoming the rare kind of reader/writer who can "combat *both* ideological repression and libidinal repression" (Barthes 35) in engagements with literature and culture.

Certainly, the influence of critics such as Barthes on this project warrant acknowledgement of the strong place of affect in constructing a theory of Caribbean reading culture. Grounded in psychoanalysis and philosophy, and developed abundantly in cultural studies discourse of the late twentieth to twenty-first centuries, affect theory offers additional vocabulary to think through the ways that readers attach themselves to kinds of representations. Citing philosopher Baruch Spinoza's hypothesis, Michael Hardt explains the critical relationship between thinking and feeling in the seminal essay collection *The Affective Turn*:

In his [Spinoza's] terms, affects can be actions, that is, determined by internal causes, or passions, determined by external causes. On one side we have reason, actions of the mind, along with actions of the body, which one might call provocatively corporeal reason; on the other side are the passions both of the mind and the body. The perspective of the affects does not assume that reason and passion are the same, but rather poses them together on a continuum. (Hardt x)

From such a viewpoint, it is reasonable to associate the act of reading with what critics like Hardt call affective labor, the type of work with immediate social implications in which “the body and mind are simultaneously engaged, and that similarly, reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed together” (xi). I mean to categorize reading within the work of health care workers or flight attendants (Hardt's examples) to continue to make a case for the intellectual labor produced in cultures of reading as I see taking place in Caribbean literary representation and reception. As the editors of *The Affective Turn* make clear,

the shift in thought... might itself be described as marking an intensification of self-reflexivity (processes turning back on themselves to act on themselves) in information/ communication systems, including the human body; in archiving machines, including all forms of media technologies and human memory; in capital flows, including the circulation of value through human labor and technology; and in biopolitical networks of disciplining, surveillance and control. (Clough 3)

Affective thought or response is engaged with discourses of war or trauma and affect theory has seen its peak in the post-9/11 era. The bodily and/or human responses to thinking and feeling are useful in a Caribbean context because colonialism's trauma is a recurring loop through which West Indians must constantly experience their lives. The novels examined in this dissertation offer strong evidence for such responses, as protagonists' acts of reading lead not only to intellectual changes in self-making, but also to physical and material changes in bodies and spaces. Take, for example, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* as a novel that presents the main character's physical illness in response to the intellectual trauma she encounters in her reading of colonial texts. Affect, then, is constantly a source of intellectual and social production for the Caribbean reader.

While such analyses of reading culture have been understudied for the Caribbean, other literary fields provide strong precedence for studying readership. Criticism focusing on the presence of the reader in the literary experience has flourished across literary periods and fields, but figures quite prominently in 19th century discourse. Critics have tried to locate the place of the reader within texts as well as in the external audience of fiction. Victorian literature, particularly with its penchant for direct address ("Reader, I married him" is one of the most famous lines in literary history), works consistently with implied readers in mind and uses Western classics intertextuality to reflect the centrality of reading and edification to the cultural might of the British Empire. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* exemplifies such a novel; that it has direct relevance to West Indian cultural identity implicates it within the context of British imperialism. Garrett Stewart's monograph, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British*

Fiction, covers an expansive range of reading scenarios including authors' or narrators' direct addresses to an audience (as evidenced in the title of his book *Dear Reader*), as well as reading practices of these novels that changed the ways in which identity and culture become conceptualized in the 19th century.

Minority literature, particularly within the African American tradition, has also returned to the role of the reader in producing social acumen, for many of the same reasons that the reader proliferates in West Indian literary representation. Elizabeth McHenry's *Forgotten Readers* accounts for reading publics that have been often left out of the categories of reception – African Americans about and for whom the literature of that community was created. McHenry's analysis begins with the anxieties within US culture about a literate black populace. The insistence on literacy and literariness within African American communities from the 19th into the 20th centuries signifies a need to turn to informal venues of literacy and education in order to construct a holistic view of African American literary traditions in the United States. In other words, McHenry's project engages the blending of lay and professional reading practices and histories in a parallel sense as for West Indian literature in this dissertation.²² While her work finds much of its evidence in working-class and former slave culture to redeem a heterogeneous view of the literary in the black United States, my project proposes that, historically, the class divisions in Anglophone Caribbean reading practices are not so strongly delineated. Again, the primary difference between these two geographies of slavery occurred with the method of normalizing black bodies. While Caribbean bodies were normalized in the classroom, African American bodies were normalized on the plantation and were mostly denied access to the classroom. Elizabeth McHenry's work

seeks to advocate for the positive products of reading's affective labor in US racial discourse. Her study follows in a line of African American and nineteenth century Americanist scholars invested in the cross-sections of literacy, domesticity, gender and race. These include Carla Peterson's monograph *The Determined Reader* (1987) and Kate Flint's groundbreaking analysis, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (1993).

The influence of the figure of the reader in the Caribbean context does not result from coincidence. West Indian authors have adopted and adapted tropes and narratives of the Victorian era as a way to demonstrate mastery of European formal elements. The peak of colonial practices during the Victorian era combined with the didactic use of that cultural moment in the colonies only made it inevitable that intertextuality and rewriting would become part of the fabric of Caribbean literature. The literary history of the Anglophone Caribbean reflects, in no uncertain terms, a preoccupation with and desire to respond to the knowledge of oneself and of others as prescribed in European works. Let it be superfluous to cite the textual examples through which writers such as Derek Walcott, Jean Rhys and Pauline Melville have addressed how Europe has imagined the Caribbean region and why their work necessarily responds with an alternate image, a "correct" image of the Caribbean experience. Yet the authors do more than correct old narratives. They critique the authority in European narratives by engaging how Caribbean people receive these images of empire and colonialism.

The dissertation's first chapter "Reading England, Reading England Away," considers the formation of West Indian identity as distinct from British identity and British colonial sensibility under colonialism. I use the early novels of V.S. Naipaul (*The Mystic Masseur*, 1957) and Jamaica Kincaid (*Annie John*, 1985), two canonical authors

who render the figure of the reader in many of their works. I claim that protagonists use their understanding and interpretation of the literature they read to question their place in their environments and to challenge the authority of “History” as represented in the books they read. Annie John’s acerbic response to reading about Christopher Columbus in her history textbook is one such example. The writers’ engagements with acts of reading in their novels emphasize the role of the artist and the intellectual in catalyzing political and social change. This chapter argues that reading colonial texts causes an anxiety in the West Indian reader presented in these novels, that which Jacques Derrida refers to as archive fever. Readers in these novels respond to this anxiety with attempts to destroy or refashion the borrowed colonial knowledge into a more familiar ontology.

I continue to explore the figure of the character-as-reader in the following chapter, “Reading through Race and Gender” to clarify how gender and race function as meaning-making signifiers in relationships between texts and readers. Jonathan Culler has argued that the contribution of feminist discourse to literary criticism resides in its success in using female subjectivity as a factor in reader response. Such an approach highlights the male-centered readings previously and generally applied to literary works, especially in analyses of female characters. Similarly, we can identify and interrogate these absences or misreadings in West Indian novels by analyzing how characters and narrators identify and understand ethnicity, race, class, or gender in their reading. How might the intersections or tensions between Caribbean identity and racial identity produce new or perpetuate dominant definitions about the Caribbean space? I analyze Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s *The Orchid House* (1953) and Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* (1984). These novels depict citizen-subjects who are or become foreign within the Caribbean space and must

use reading to explain or escape this status. Foreignness not only haunts the individual characters but also defines and limits their ability to navigate communities that often deal with collective displacement. The protagonists then have multiple investments in seeking out a definition of or justification for their place in history. Their search often occurs within master narratives of European and U.S. discourse, which may provide answers that sometimes conflict with their lived experiences. The protagonists of these novels use reading to achieve legitimacy within the geographic borders of the nation when the ideological borders keep them alienated.

My project then moves to focus on actual readers of Caribbean literature within the diaspora. I investigate the relationship between the popular and professional dissemination and criticism of Caribbean literature. “Migrating Bodies, Migrating Texts,” addresses the effects of migration on both the readers and writers of Caribbean literature by focusing on the production of fiction and the creation of tailored readerships in the metropolitan center and locus of West Indian migration, England. By analyzing the virtual uses of Andrea Levy’s 2004 novel, *Small Island*, I argue that digital or virtual spaces work ideally for constructing new ideas about multicultural identity in an age of migration and globalization. *Small Island*’s dissemination through digital means also serves the purpose of creating reading publics – both academic and popular – that can expand definitions of Caribbean literature and extend the reach of Caribbean history and literature beyond postcolonial studies. But the main goal of this chapter is to juxtapose *Small Island* with earlier Caribbean migration narratives, such as Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954) and Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), to ask an important question: what is different about the reader of these texts that makes Levy’s novel more

“representative” of Caribbean migration and British multiculturalism than the others? I suggest that Levy’s work can reflect either a celebratory process by relying heavily on intertextuality, hypertextuality and repetition, or a dangerously essential reading practice that eschews the foundational and politically charged aspects of Caribbean literary history.

In the concluding chapter “Reading and Responsibility,” I examine selected reviews of Caribbean fiction of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, published in middlebrow venues including *The New York Times* book review (among others) to reveal a perplexing correlation between particularly resistant representations of Caribbean identity and nationhood and the inclusion of such representations into metropolitan reading canons. I analyze Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Brother* (1997) as a work that reflects on the relationship between authors and their audience and on her position as reader, an exercise in ethical readership. Kincaid provides a strong critique of these intellectual venues and suggests that they limit both a writer and a reader’s relationship to the literary experience. Kincaid stands as one example, among others I cite in this chapter, of an artist who understands the ethical engagement with representation as a responsibility bearing political resonance beyond the world of literature. Using her claims as a point of departure, I offer a critique of the role of academic and middlebrow literary reviews in text-making, self-making, and nation-making related to the Caribbean and Caribbean literature.

My dissertation, then, has an implicit two-part structure and flows from literary analysis to praxis in the study of reception. The chapters that focus on representations of readers examine how the lack of an indigenous audience gets transformed creatively into

idealized or refracted notions of readership and audience. The second part of the project reveals the lived experience of readers and connects a contemporary diasporic reading audience invested in identity politics with an audience of leisure invested in pleasure or aesthetics. Migration and transnational exchanges facilitate opportunities for the public to discover or rediscover the history of the region (that may or may not be centered on colonialism) and ask us to reconsider the ways in which the affect of personal reading practices bears on professional interpretations and literary criticism. Additionally, by focusing on the reading practices of lay readership, critics may learn new methodological approaches to understanding and teaching literature of the Caribbean, thereby transforming ways to conceptualize the reading of the Caribbean and its diverse cultures.

Chapter Two
Reading England, Reading England Away: Imagining Colonial and Postcolonial Readers

We have had to live with a large and self-delighted middle class, who have never understood their function. One cannot accuse an illiterate man of avoiding books, but one wonders what is to be done with people who regard education as something to have, but not to use. The creation of this reading public whose elements already exist is a job which remains to be done. The absence of that public, the refusal of a whole class to respond to an activity which is not honoured by money: it is this dense and gritting atmosphere that helped to murder Roger Mais. ... For whom, then, do we write?

Our duty is to find ways of changing the root and perspectives of that background, of dismantling the accumulated myth, both cultural and political, which an inherited and critical way of seeing has now reinforced. And our biggest weapon, our greatest and safest chance lies in education: education among the young; for it is my feeling that two-thirds of the parents are beyond redemption.

George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* is almost neurotic in its treatment of the relationship between writers working in the Caribbean region and the assumed or desired readers for whom they mean to produce their work. Page after page of Lamming's treatise either explains the process of alienation that creative writers undergo in the region or delineates the historical strategies and loci of power that have engendered alienation from creativity in the first place. I begin with two substantial quotes from *Pleasures* because Lamming's assessment and admonitions warrant thoughtful consideration and a viable response. The political and educational restrictions that the middle class of the West Indies endorsed did not yield positive economic and political results for the region after independence. Middle-class politicians and intellectuals would soon learn that national development was stunted without universalizing access to education and encouraging a curious and intellectually engaged population. Members of the elite community, who dared to cross class lines to connect education to political

progress, seemed to have only one option: to flee to England to earn a living rather than stay at home and write to the people who needed to hear their language. This is precisely the dilemma that Lamming wants to resolve.

I draw out a number of inferences from Lamming's words above, which serve as the premise for my argument. First, middle-class life in the West Indies in the mid-twentieth century endorsed rather than critiqued the colonial tendency toward social hierarchy and educational privilege. Consequently, people of all classes in West Indian communities valued the materiality of books and education and treated learning as acquisition of property in the same vein as land and money, while they placed little emphasis on how to use the skills garnered through this education. Moreover, the absence of a national and regional reading public motivated a monumental blindness towards the colonial past, which inhibits the progress of any national anti-colonial project. Importantly, Lamming also suggests that a turn to process of acquiring knowledge rather than the final product of education must happen in order to rectify this blindness. Additionally, a critical self-consciousness in education and in the relationship between writers' processes of producing work and readers' reception of the work becomes imperative. Such a change will lead to correcting the myths embedded in the historical narrative of every West Indian individual. This is Lamming's hope when he asks, "For whom, then, do we write?" This chapter attempts to mollify these anxieties by showing that the neurosis about reception is a collective concern among the Caribbean literati and elucidates how writers have attempted to respond to Lamming's question.

In an effort to expound on Gayatri Spivak's observation that "the reading of literature can directly supplement the writing of history with suspicious ease" (205), I

analyze how acts of reading have been used in Caribbean fiction to draw out various definitions of colonial, postcolonial, Caribbean or West Indian identity. V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* particularly, novels that are iconic in the postcolonial canon, reveal that reading allows characters to identify and transgress the registers and boundaries of colonial institutions. Although the idea of resistance often becomes associated with assimilative and middlebrow cultural practices that may align closely with colonial epistemic structures of race, gender or class, the acts of reading depicted in Caribbean literature can be read critically as acts of resistance. Although critical analyses of these works already offer readings centered on resistance to empire, their authors, Kincaid and Naipaul, famously present ambivalent and often contrary relationships to the Caribbean literary tradition and they occupy an important place within the mainstream academic world²³. Their ambivalence as writers offers us a distinct reading of their novels within the postcolonial canon but also points to a critique of the audiences that they envision. I conclude with a brief consideration of the suitability of these novels for the full range of their readerships, focusing on the representations of each novel's protagonists and how their interactions with texts indicate negotiations with empire and nation. While these novels have universal appeal in their thematic treatment of empire, nation, and exile, the role of reading in each narrative provides a unique exposé of Caribbean life and its foundations in colonial mastery of the written word. Taken together, these novels articulate an investment in storing, cataloging and rewriting literature to secure an intellectual history and literary tradition that reflects a Caribbean actively seeking autonomy from colonial representations.²⁴

The Mystic Masseur and *Annie John* illustrate the West Indian author's desires for the ideal reader. In her absence, writers must construct or create this ideal reader within their narratives in the colonial and postcolonial moments. This imagined Caribbean reader, who is a reflection of their own reading practices and desire for an audience, is situated at the juncture of educational achievement and social or individual development. The ways in which characters in Caribbean novels encounter texts position them at once as critic and captivated audience. The protagonists employ reading practices situated at the border between lay and professional practices and that continuously engage the world of affect to negotiate the frequently oppositional worlds of politics and pedagogy. Reading as a trope characterizes a defiant West Indian aesthetic. Such defiance makes evident the effects of the colonial enterprise and subsequent anti-colonial sentiment. One of the distinctions made in the literary encounters presented in these texts is that between reading as a social signifier and reading as a necessary practical life skill. In many cases, social status depends entirely on the acquisition of that practical reading skill. Thus, literacy, as represented in the act of reading, becomes the only material vehicle through which to access material social standing. If the protagonist of Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* uses his ability to read and interpret texts to gain social standing and cross social boundaries, then the heroine of Kincaid's *Annie John* works to resist social and historical categories of ownership and belonging by manipulating the social currency of reading. The suspicion that Spivak alludes to -- inherent in the symbiosis of reading literature and recording history -- lies, then, in the hermeneutic practices of each protagonist. Though the characters in the two novels are differently situated in terms of the novels' production and representations of differing political circumstances, Annie's and Ganesh's reading

practices lead the reader to similar ends in the respective novels because the place of literature (the English book, particularly²⁵) as an agent of status has not shifted. Thus, the constructing of an archive of reading practices from the colonial era into the era of postcolonial independence reveals an almost stagnant position of the Caribbean subject relative to the British Empire. I would agree with Homi Bhabha's evaluation of Naipaul's (and, I argue, Kincaid's) intent "to transform the despair of postcolonial history into an appeal for the autonomy of art" (*The Location of Culture* 152). Naipaul argues elsewhere²⁶ that a creative tradition had not already existed for the Caribbean at the time he authored his early novels. However, West Indian writers' articulation of literary autonomy and claims to having established an aesthetic tradition are evident in the repetition of the distinct trope of reading and literary interpretation.

Naipaul and Kincaid, via their debut novels, present critical perspectives on Caribbean life and how reading has framed not only individual perceptions of self and other, but also national transitions from colonial to postcolonial status. In many ways, critics have identified in Naipaul and Kincaid's stories elements of the biographical or at least personal relationships to their homelands and their own coming-of-age experiences. But on strictly literary terms, these works signify an important early trope for Caribbean writers, one that discounts predominant readings of twentieth-century Caribbean fiction as intrinsically political or ethnographic work. The trope of reading in these novels points to an aesthetic approach to the tradition's intellectual development, one that creates a metacritical discourse of writing and reading practices in the field of Caribbean studies. By calling attention to the ways in which colonial and postcolonial subjects read in the Caribbean, both authors present evidence for a "reader as critic" category. The

experiences of Ganesh Ramsumair and Annie John are indicative of reading practices that often conflate the characteristics or qualities of lay and professional reading and place them in ethical engagements, sometimes ethical dilemmas, with texts. Strongest evidence for a relationship between the reader roles of lay and professional readers appears in the process of reading for Kincaid's character-reader, while this evidence emerges in the consequences or effects of reading acts in Naipaul's work.

To sustain this argument, I adopt Jacques Derrida's development of the notion of the archive and his concerns with what he calls "archive fever" to understand the function of reading in producing meaning²⁷. Derrida posits, "Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives" (18). He suggests that meaning -- the union between the words in a text and a reader's exercise of reading these words -- is equally relative to the valences of power within which this literary encounter takes place. Insofar as Annie John reads in her classroom on her island, or Ganesh Ramsumair reads about Hindu religion, British politics or medical works in Fuente Grove, Trinidad, their understanding of their worlds and their texts will continue to be limited by the repeating structures of power governing their daily lives -- education and politics respectively. These two novels depict a vested interest in tracing the intellectual memory of the Caribbean self, either by endorsing or resisting this colonial archive, or doing both at the same time. While in *Annie John* the fever or desire in the archival impulse emerges as textual violence meant to destroy or renounce imperial knowledge, *The Mystic Masseur's* feverish impulse lies in the act of creation, in the actual scripting and construction of composite knowledge(s) that acquiesce to imperialism. Both forms of archive fever signify a response to the trauma of colonialism and a cathectic project to discover what

“has presumably been lost or ... has been kept secret” (Rapaport 69) of the Caribbean individual’s identity.

Cataloging the Self-Made Man in Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur*

V.S. Naipaul offers support for the complexity of readership and audience in the Caribbean region. He writes in his literary memoir, *Literary Occasions*, that the culture of owning books and reading books were activities associated with class status and the mimicry of colonial British behavior, but were not intended to create an affective experience. Speaking of the English school stories he encountered in primary school, he claims,

I couldn’t see the point of these artificial excitements, or the point of detective novels (a lot of reading with a certain amount of misdirection, for a little bit of puzzle). And when, not knowing much about new reputations, I tried plain English novels from the public library, too many questions got in the way – about the reality of the people, the artificiality of the narrative method, the purpose of the whole set-up thing, the end reward for me. (10)

Naipaul’s retrospection situates him as an average West Indian reader attempting to make sense of the material he faces. Naipaul further illustrates the defeat of this ambivalent encounter: “I couldn’t truly call myself a reader. I never had the capacity to lose myself in a book; like my father, I could only read in little bits” (11). Naipaul grows up to lose

himself in the writing of books about the West Indies, but his commitment to the project of finding an indigenous audience and identification with the region's literary tradition diminishes as his career progresses. In his earlier novels, however, one can see the act of reading as a way to imaginatively compensate for the void in the structure of West Indian literature.

Published in 1957, Naipaul's first novel *The Mystic Masseur* traces the growth of an adolescent Indian boy, Ganesh Ramsumair, in Trinidad who matures into a spiritual leader in the Indian community and navigates the Trinidadian political scene through the circuit of reading and self-education. Following a merely adequate completion of secondary school and brief employment as a teacher, Ganesh acquires part of an encyclopedia collection from a white man in Trinidad, Mr. Stewart, which opens a world of knowledge and sparks his interest in reading. Ganesh's education in Port of Spain and his interest in reading garner him the security of authority and legitimacy in the largely rural communities of Fourways and later Fuente Grove where he thrives as a mystic. The mystic's increasing popularity in the community contributes to his interest in writing and he publishes many books on random subjects, including the digestive system and constipation, subjects that function as metaphors for his consumption of knowledge and ultimate inability to produce or reproduce knowledge in that Caribbean space. His writing leads to a political career and his second move to the city and the novel ends when Ganesh leaves Trinidad. By then he has changed his name to G. Ramsay Muir and he appears to disavow self-education and the mystic life completely, even recalling his publications from print. Ganesh's emergence in Britain as a statesman comes at the cost of a complete erasure of his life in Trinidad, including an erasure of how he read to

educate himself. The consequences or effects of reading acts in *The Mystic Masseur* offer strong evidence for a contrapuntal relationship between the reader as a critic and the reader as a citizen.

Few writers from the Caribbean have managed to revere texts, readers, and intertextuality in their writing more than V.S. Naipaul. And none of his works explores the nuances of textual encounters more than *The Mystic Masseur*. Even his more popular novel, *The Mimic Men*, which critics focus on for “the attention that this novel in particular pays to writing as a means of creating order and identity” (Halloran 122), does not clearly engage with the process or effects of the reading experience. In *The Mystic Masseur*, Naipaul uses the idea of the mystic to respond to the region’s colonial expectations of knowledge formation. Critical to establishing the mystic identity are the ways in which perception engenders or deters intellectual production. Importantly, Ganesh, the mystic, makes a transformation into a political life, a life in which he is expected to directly shape the postcolonial nation. His work as a reader, a writer, and a perceived intellectual remains crucial to this national identity. Thus, the ethical nature of his reading acts holds a central place in his articulation of citizenship and of Trinidad’s independence.

We meet Ganesh in Queens Royal College in Port of Spain where he is attending secondary school, or college as it was called at that time. The narrator characterizes his experience there as one of displacement, citing that “he was always the oldest boy in his class, with some boys even three or four years younger than himself” (Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* 9). Ganesh’s educational delay resulted from a lack of resources in Fourways, signified by the fact that his father took five years to raise the money for his

son's tuition. The boy's experience in high school came with all the other forms of displacement and mockery associated with poverty, including his overly formal Indian attire amid other students dressed in casual Western clothes. In the culture of Trinidad, marked by a stigma of inferiority attached to Indian immigrants, Ganesh's inadequacies force him out of a traditional path to knowledge, even at the most pedigreed colonial school in the country. His limitations become more obvious when juxtaposed with the strengths of Indarsingh, a schoolmate who is younger but much more academically advanced. Indarsingh typified the perfect colonial subject whose coming-of-age embraced the mission of imperial expansion. The narrator describes this mission: "At sixteen Indarsingh was making long speeches in the Literary Society Debates, reciting verses of his own at Recitation Contests, and he always won the Impromptu Speeches Contests" (*The Mystic Masseur* 12). Indarsingh had mastered the interest and investment in the English book, had been properly indoctrinated with imperial knowledge through his recitations, and he was able to perform and participate in British culture with spontaneous prompting. The grammatical uncertainty in the narrator's introduction of Ganesh, "Later he was to be famous and honoured throughout the South Caribbean" (1), as if it may or may not have turned out that way, is absent from the clarity in Indarsingh's characterization: "He was a brilliant boy and everybody who knew him said he would be a great man" (12). Such an acculturation wins Indarsingh a scholarship to England. Ganesh, however, recognizes his second place status next to his friend and in some ways, seems to spend his life in Fuente Grove trying to match Indarsingh's success.

His desire to become a new person able to overcome that displacement begins in that adolescent period: "Ganesh never lost his awkwardness. He was so ashamed of his

Indian name that for a while he spread a story that he was really called Gareth” (10-11). Ganesh’s identity crisis resolves itself not through a permanent name change but by transforming its meaning via a world of books. We see this change of identity solidified in the novel’s ending with Ganesh’s complete rejection and denial of his Indian heritage by structured transformation of his name. His father, whose enthusiasm to send Ganesh to traditional college was only exceeded by his financial investment in the endeavor, becomes equally excited about the possibilities that Ganesh might become a Brahmin. The temptation of his community to send him to Benares in India reflects the investment by the Indian community of Trinidad in staying connected to an ethnic heritage rather than the incipient national community. Implicit in this association is the conflation of those two territories, for Ganesh has to be reminded, “You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad” (Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* 11). From a young age, Ganesh seems to be confused about his place in Trinidad and his national allegiances, and he seeks answers in an eclectic and confused reading practice.

Ganesh’s experience with reading and education at Queen’s College echo back to him once he becomes a teacher in the national education system and learns his role as an educator, according to the headmaster of the rural school where he works: “Mr. Ramsumair, I don’t know what views you have about educating the young, but I want to let you know right away, before we even start, that the purpose of this school is to form, not to inform. Everything is planned” (*The Mystic Masseur* 14). George Lamming confirms this mission in the literary genealogy of colonial enterprise: “The problem of learning is now firmly stated. Education, meaning the possession of the Word – which was in the beginning or not at all – is the tool which Prospero has tried on the

irredeemable nature of his savage and deformed slave [Caliban]" (*Pleasures of Exile* 190). The strategy of civilizing, as depicted in the cultural archive of *The Tempest* narrative, is thus reified by being intrinsically tied to language and the "Word." Reading becomes the means through which all deformed (or misinformed) students must pass to take true colonial shape. This attitude may seem less about the actual process of reading and might simply be a commentary on the models of colonial education at play in the pre-World War II period. However, the colonial mantra becomes the methodology of Ganesh's work as a mystic and later as a politician. Ganesh does not inform his community of what he reads at any point. He gives vague summaries, when necessary, but never engages in public or overt explanation of his literary encounters. Rather, he allows his neighbors to observe him as he performs the acts of reading. Although Ganesh belongs to the community, his success most closely resembles the colonial civilizing mission through the "Word" that Lamming associates with the model of *The Tempest*. By seeing the mystic transformed through this knowledge, the community must also be transformed. First, it becomes transformed into a group of believers in knowledge, and then the group's members become followers of Ganesh.

Ganesh's most famous case as a mystic (as recorded by the narrator) presents a significant example. A boy's family consults with Ganesh to clear demons from the child who has been "possessed" since the accidental death of his brother. What seems to be divine retribution to the spiritual authorities all over the island strikes Ganesh as mere hallucination. The most important moment of reading in this scene occurs in the description of Ganesh's first meeting with the family. His engagement with the boy's mother wins her confidence. The material presence of books and the mystic's

performance of readership mesmerize her, even though she cannot verify whether the exorcist has read, is reading or consuming any of this book knowledge at the time of their encounter: “To the woman he said, ‘Come into the study.’ The word had the desired effect. ‘But take off your shoes here in the verandah first.’ Respect turned to awe. And when the woman brushed through the Nottingham lace curtains into the study and saw all the books, she looked abject” (*The Mystic Masseur* 115). The ownership of a study in this period marks one’s class and colonial stature. As such, this woman, who was likely from another rural area, could place faith in the evidence of Ganesh’s knowledge. For why else would a man in a small place like Fuente Grove own and collect all these books if not to consume all the knowledge within?

The inconsistency of Ganesh’s rural location in the novel, Fuente Grove, with his middle-class, almost cosmopolitan, rise to success deliberately contradict each other and render the notion of the unhomely – as theorized by Homi Bhabha – a consequence of Trinidad’s colonial transactions. This unhomely identity already exists on two registers: Ganesh is a colonial subject displaced by having to adhere to British cultural authority, and he is also an Indian in a predominantly black country, with no long-term historical ties to the land or the culture. In a gesture that highlights a third type of unhomeliness, Naipaul chooses to divert the intellectual locus of the nation from the city center and move it to the rural environment of the marginalized Indian people in Trinidad. We can use this placement to interrogate categories of home and place and their relationship to reading, also central themes for analyzing Naipaul’s most recognized work, *A House for Mr. Biswas*. According to Bhabha, “the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political

existence” (Bhabha 144). Fragmentation hides behind the unhomely identity and Ganesh demonstrates this quality in his self-making through his splitting of different bodies of knowledge – Hindu spirituality, philosophy, politics, and British history, for example. Fuente Grove situates Ganesh’s alienation from mainstream Trinidad cultural and political life. Yet, his self-education in that place allows him to read his way into other possible worlds where he may feel at home.

By having Ganesh reject the formal experience of colonial education (he is a less than excellent student and later a non-conformist teacher) and negotiate colonialism via the East rather than the West, Naipaul may be distancing himself artistically from the Caribbean literary tradition that he accuses of having no home, no origin, and, therefore, no creativity. But it suggests more strongly a gesture to create a home for Ganesh through phenotypic and spiritual identification with colonial India in a way he cannot with the predominantly Afro-Trinidadian mainstream or with the white British authority figures who Afro-Trinidadians emulate. But his move to England in the end still leaves the reader without closure, unable to place Ganesh in a particular space or home. I agree with Divya Sood’s assessment that the work of the novel intends “to show that straddling two identities yields nothing but confusion and that it is imperative that the Trinidadian Indian embrace one although it will result in the renunciation of the other” (Sood 100). Able to create a persona that fits a model of an intellectual, Ganesh seems to have no real allegiance to any or to all parts of his identity. It then becomes easy for him to use his name as an anagram in various settings throughout his life, specifically in his final transformation: “linguistically, Ganesh’s [sic] rearranges the letters of his name to show how he can somersault between his Indian name and his acquired British identity” (100).

This acquisition of Britishness does not come traditionally through the English book, which makes the reader unsure of Mr. Muir's future in England. Can he translate the abstract ideas about colonial India practiced in Fuente Grove into the reality of the London and Oxford cityscapes? Indeed, this non-traditional path to education and enlightenment seems to make Ganesh's success in England doubtful.

Ganesh's self-education in the countryside poses a paradox that turns the act of reading into a spectacle, and at several moments in the plot Ganesh becomes a spectacle or deliberately creates a performance around the act of reading. One example is Ramlogan's excessive pretence of illiteracy in order to get Ganesh to read the newspaper aloud to him. Ramlogan's comments translate the act of reading into a moment of enlightenment, literally and symbolically:

'This reading, sahib, is a great great thing,' Ramlogan once said. 'Just think. You take up this paper that to me just look like a dirty sheet with all sort of black mark and scrawl all over the place' – he gave a little self-deprecating laugh – 'you take this up and – eh! Eh! – before I even have time to scratch my back, man, I hear you reading from it and making a lot of sense with it. A great thing, sahib.' (*The Mystic Masseur* 24)

Ramlogan's deference to Ganesh in this way represents obviously a selfish act intended to secure a marriage for his daughter, but the performance also means to appeal to Ganesh's classed aspirations. The acts of "mark and scrawl" that Ramlogan sees in the printing of texts repeats in his metaphor of equality with the "scratch" on his back. The

language of this dialogue registers the imbalance of power, education and literacy that characterizes the transactions between these two men. Additionally, the scene signifies an attempt to make the reading moment a community endeavor. Ganesh becomes the medium through which this community of Fourways learns history, culture and politics. His act of reading equalizes the community and gives everyone a sense of accomplishment for having participated, via the act of listening, in the important affairs of the nation.²⁸ Similarly, Ganesh uses his performance of reading to create comfort for his massaging clients as we witness with the grieving “possessed” boy in an earlier example. His comforting presence asserts itself when he convinces the boy (who claims to see a hovering dark cloud) to trust him just by virtue of what the boy can see in the room:

‘It just can’t touch you with me around. I have powers over these things, you know. Look around at all these books in this room, and look at those writings on the wall and all the pictures and everything. These things help me get the power I have and cloud afraid these things. So don’t frighten.’

(The Mystic Masseur 118)

Ganesh exploits the community’s trust in the materiality of books to heal. Even if he successfully drives away this boy’s externalized demons, his manipulation of the ignorance and awe of his client acts as usurpation akin to the formal structures of elitism and discrimination present in colonial education.²⁹ Yet later on, the narrator implies that Ganesh’s manipulation of the book objects is not a ruse, that he does actually know the

material in these works and, therefore, does have the power to affect members of his community in these significant ways: “You never felt that he was a fake and you couldn’t deny his literacy or learning – not with all those books. And he hadn’t only book learning. He could talk on almost any subject. For instance, he had views about Hitler and knew how the war could be ended in two weeks” (128). The question then becomes: Is Ganesh’s real knowledge drawn from selfish reading enough for this community and nation? Should he hold all the power carried in this reading?

In some instances Naipaul suggests, I think satirically, that the process of reading for all people not only disturbs the political and economic status quo but also causes a disruption of ethnic and class identity in Trinidad. Ganesh’s ambivalence and eventual choices frequently support this position, but another of his benefactors, Beharry, provides strongest evidence for this commentary in the novel. Beharry reflects on his own reading practices, in which, according to his wife, “I ain’t know him to him read one book to the end yet, and still he ain’t happy unless he reading four five book at the same time” (Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* 59). He suggests, when he says, “I telling you, man. This reading is a dangerous thing” (60), that engaging in reading practices when one comes from a lower class or social position or does not have formal education (as Ganesh has had), can be dangerous for the individual’s acceptance of his place in the nation and therefore harmful to the entire community. Because Beharry understands this danger, he feels honored to gift his books to Ganesh: “The boy brought the books and Beharry passed them one by one to Ganesh: *Napoleon’s Book of Fate*, a school edition of *Eothen* which had lost its covers, three issues of the Booker’s Drug Stores *Almanac*, the *Gita* and the *Ramayana*” (58).³⁰ Again, Ganesh becomes the recipient of all means of knowledge

and thus the owner of intellectual property in his community. This endowment, embedded in the mistrust of universal education, reflects the colonial project of “form, not inform” indicative of the social and political transactions of the war era. Beharry’s skepticism about something that he already knows to be fruitful and valuable lines up with Belinda Edmondson’s discussions about the category of the aspirational that characterizes modern Caribbean middlebrow culture. Edmondson asserts, “What people read reflects not just who they are (in terms of socioeconomic status) but who they wish to be” (*Caribbean Middlebrow* 10). Surely, we see Ganesh make this aspirational move throughout the text. His reading choices reflect his desire to be the colonial philosopher-politician. Beharry’s gifts to him reflect Beharry’s own aspirations to be the Hindu philosopher and mystic.

One of the strengths of the novel is Naipaul’s presentation of literary encounters through the lives of a peasant class barely literate enough to respond adequately or appropriately to the textual material presented to them. Instead, we see a class of people whose trust in the idea of knowledge and its potential can become their greatest asset as a community but a danger to individual citizenship in an era of colonial oppression. From the first page, we learn that “later he [who] was to be famous and honoured throughout the South Caribbean; he was to be a hero of the people and, after that, a British representative at Lake Success” (*The Mystic Masseur* 1). Our immediate introduction to Ganesh by way of the end of his journey in Trinidad situates this novel as a quintessential narrative of the self-made man. Ganesh begins as a youth commanding respect and admiration in his local community. He quickly rises to the stature of an honorable man of ideas mainly through his private and public performances of the act of reading. But

Ganesh's career change to politics and his geographical distance from the rural community raise concerns and doubts about the efficacy of his reading practices.

Ganesh's move to Port of Spain from Fuente Grove signals an important narrative shift. The abruptness of the decision disorients the reader and leads her to question whether at this point in the story Ganesh can maintain control of his decisions and his future political life. His own uncertainty about the move foreshadows the detached character of the final scene when we learn, "I wish the whole thing did never happen," Ganesh said with such bitterness. "I wish I did never become a mystic!" (198). His apparent regret is ameliorated only by his dramatic bouts of inaction in the legislative exercises when he decidedly walks out of proceedings instead of contributing ideas, which his perceived knowledge should make him equipped to do. In the city space, Ganesh can no longer perform knowledge and must explicate his knowledge. His failure to make his reading and learning useful in practical ways or to reveal to the community the contents of his acts of reading, leads to his political demise. The scene before he appears in England recounts Ganesh's appearance at a union rally where his career as a writer comes to a mocking halt. Ganesh's speech was bound up in abstractions and the crowd not only dismisses him, but also heckles his book projects: *What God Told Me* and *Profitable Evacuation* become a source of constant embarrassment, and the incommensurability of the Hindu mystic life with the colonial British life becomes absolute. He must make a choice. By the novel's end, Mr. G. Ramsay Muir responds "coldly" to the narrator with a correction of his name. He does not respond to or acknowledge the narrator's appeal to "Pundit Ganesh."

We can think of *The Mystic Masseur* as a framed novel: the limited omniscient narrator recounts Ganesh's story by reflecting on the mystic's autobiography, *The Years of Guilt*. The narrator begins several chapters by quoting from Ganesh's work, usually a moment of reflection for the pundit in the autobiography itself. This quote serves as a gateway into particular moments of Ganesh's life as highlighted in the autobiography. The unnamed narrator invokes the first person voice to reflect on his own coming-of-age as a product of the generation in which Ganesh becomes famous. We observe, through his commentary on the events of Ganesh's life, that the narrator learns his own history of Trinidad – Hinduism, Indian politics and local colonial politics, relationships to old and new empires, education and migration – by reading and interpreting the life of Ganesh Ramsumair. The novel's narrative structure confirms the drive to create a working memory of Caribbean identity, whether it is in the active creation of Ganesh's critical works and autobiography or through the close critical reading of these works by an anonymous reader/ narrator. I would argue, then, that the narrator's reading of *The Years of Guilt* offers readers of *The Mystic Masseur* a view of the making of Trinidad at the mid- 20th century point. *The Mystic Masseur* provides multiple readable texts at once: historical novel, history text on Trinidad, literary criticism of a writer's oeuvre and literary and political biography of the self-made man. In fact, the narrator notes, "I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times; and there may be people who will welcome this imperfect account of the man Ganesh Ramsumair, masseur, mystic, and since 1953, M.B.E." (*The Mystic Masseur* 11). Within the "inside" narrative, the various kinds and moments of reading that Ganesh performs function as either accidental didacticism, deliberate misreading, or misleading interpretations of

events. In all instances, a constant tension between mysticism and intellectualism suggests Naipaul's own ambivalence about the place of the writer, and by extension the reader and the text, in constructing postcolonial and Caribbean identity.

This battle between mysticism and intellectualism illustrates Naipaul's investment in an Enlightenment project. He is not interested in the kind of West Indian reader that George Lamming asks for in *The Pleasures of Exile*. He assumes the British colonial project as understood through the project of the Enlightenment. Caribbean literary criticism will show that he and Lamming will continue to be at odds on the relationships between artists and their audience in the region. Lamming scathingly responds to Naipaul's critique that the West Indies lacked the creative imagination to develop a viable literary tradition that had global reach and influence, particularly because of his disdain for West Indian daily life. Naipaul claims, according to Lamming, "he could not endure the West Indian community because it was philistine" (30). In *Pleasures*, Lamming's response is equally acerbic when he scolds Naipaul, "I reject this attitude; and when it comes from a colonial who is nervous both in and away from his native country, I interpret it as a simple confession of the man's inadequacy – inadequacy which must be rationalized since the man himself has come to accept it" (*Pleasures of Exile* 30). Naipaul has not wavered much in his position to this date and the ending of *The Mystic Masseur* reflects the beginnings of his distant relationship to Caribbean literature. Lamming's characterization of Naipaul as "nervous" is not without merit, for anxiety as a theme dominates many of Naipaul's early novels concerned with navigating the Caribbean space. That anxiety, the kind that Derrida associates with the desire to archive,

appears in *The Mystic Masseur*, especially in the choices Ganesh must negotiate in his personal and public life.

Ganesh abandons his aspirations toward traditional British intellectualism for an amorphous self-education that is a hybrid of Indian colonial, Hindu religion and rural Indo-Trinidadian culture through the figure of the masseur. Yet he must eventually sacrifice this self-learning for the traditional knowledge even though this hybrid education is the cause of his success. Divya Sood agrees in her assertion, “it is of great importance that Ganesh publishes his autobiography on the brink of Indian independence and we can metaphorically see *The Years of Guilt* as a political statement that questions identity in terms of nationality and guilt. After all, why the years of guilt and whose guilt and at whose wrongdoing?” (Sood 97). Until Ganesh is able to determine his place in relation to the texts he reads and in relation to the world of the novel, the answers to these questions remain indiscernible.

Poverty and illiteracy frame Ganesh’s development from a peasant Indian boy who is out of place in the city to a respected politician whose desire is to move to England such that it is important to address the history of Indians and Hinduism in a pre-World War II context. In the colonial West Indies, the peasant class was left out of educational privilege, and in most of the colonies, the system through which a peasant could attain education was ordered, expensive and deliberately exclusionary. A system of exams ensured that those who acquired appropriate colonial education would have the chance to attend high school and pursue secondary education. The lack of financial means to afford this basic colonial education impeded those of the farming class from overcoming these systemic hurdles. The East Indian community in Trinidad was most

affected by this problem. East Indians came as indentured servants who worked primarily as agricultural laborers and produced significant profits for the national economy. Consequently, investments in their formal education were not only limited but also discouraged since the sugar industry would be negatively affected by any upward mobility of the manual laborers. Eric Williams notes,

The alibi in Trinidad and British Guiana was the objection of the East Indians to the education of their womenfolk.... The real explanation was the requirements of the sugar industry. In 1926 a committee of the Trinidad Legislative Council considered the restriction of hours of labour. One planter said in evidence: 'Give them some education in the way of reading and writing, but no more. Even then I would say educate only the bright ones; not the whole mass. If you educate the whole mass of the agricultural population, you will be deliberately ruining the whole country...' (Williams 456)

Even though the agricultural community has less visibility in the setting of *The Mystic Masseur*, two elements of this commentary remain true in the 1940s when the narrative takes place. First, the education of women was limited and discouraged in that community, as we see with characters like Leela, Ganesh's wife, and Beharry's wife, Suruj Mooma, who frequently discredit their own opinions and educational achievement. Second, the selection of the "bright ones" worked against this community but also against predominantly black communities as well. Such evidence explains why the village of

Fuente Grove invested so much emotionally and financially in Ganesh's initial venture to attend college in Port of Spain.

Naipaul himself acknowledges this harsh process in his own educational history: "The fifth standard was the 'exhibition' class and was important to the reputation of the school. The exhibitions,³¹ given by the government, were to the island's secondary schools. To win an exhibition was to pay no secondary school fees at all and to get free books right through. It was also to win a kind of fame for oneself and one's school" (*Literary Occasions* 4). Naipaul's geographical and educational background in Trinidad highlights the distinctions for Indo-Trinidadians coming from colonial India who already were at a disadvantage in terms of settlement and civil rights in Trinidad. He adds, when talking about his education, "[w]hen my father got a job on the local paper we went to live in the city. It was only twelve miles away, but it was like going to another country. Our little rural Indian world, the disintegrating world of a remembered India, was left behind. I never returned to it; lost touch with the language; never saw another *Ramlila*" (8). Naipaul fictionalizes in *Mystic Masseur* a similar cultural landscape that he recognized in his father's life (and later in Naipaul's own), a man whose only education was through self-teaching and reading and who eventually became a journalist. His father's reading of British canonical texts as well as Indian canonical texts attests to a unique socialization into and out of Caribbean colonialism, one that we can chart through the example of Ganesh. Similarly, this gradual abandonment of and exile from the Indian and Hindu community present a critical issue in the novel's representation of colonial identity formation. In a sense, the man whom we are left with at the end of *The Mystic Masseur* takes on this persona in Naipaul's other works, specifically *The Mimic Men*. By

the time we get to a character like Ralph Singh, disillusionment has become a national attitude for people of Indian descent and little or no room exists for developing an identity that makes the colonialist project and the nationalist project commensurable.

Throughout Ganesh's transformation, Naipaul describes moments of misreading to highlight the imperfections and limitations of colonial life that are additionally veiled in race and class inequality. Reading gives Ganesh the tools he needs to prey sufficiently on the community's limited access to knowledge and its consequent misreadings of his knowledge. Aisha Khan describes the role of the pandit, or religious and spiritual leader of Indo-Caribbean communities, as a paradoxical combination of mystery and knowledge. The ascetic aspirations of spiritual leaders like Ganesh seem to contradict the aspirations towards education. She observes, "It takes knowledge on a philosophical level to garner authority and respect and to be effective" (Khan 166). Yet, this knowledge gets bound up in a silent distrust of the role of the pandit as a trickster: "class, education, generation and the forms of knowledge they represent are couched in the meaning of tradition, shaping ideas about Indo-Trinidadian identity in a racially, culturally, and religiously mixed milieu" (180). For Ganesh Ramsumair, his ability to perform knowledge through the act or enactment of reading seems to balance the mystery and suspicion that may be tied to the Indo-Trinidadian practices of massaging and spiritual healing. Only the novel's narrator seems to maintain a silent mistrust of this combination at moments, but Ganesh's mastery of both worlds also sways him.

Furthermore, the narrator's observations and his general presence in the act of storytelling change the tone and content that actual readers receive of Trinidad's historical, social and political landscape. This anonymous narrator becomes historian and

archivist of the era and in his own way, becomes Ganesh's biographer. The ending of the novel suggests that Ganesh did not authorize this biography. Actual readers of *The Mystic Masseur* must make decisions about the validity, reliability and bias of the anonymous biography. What is this narrator's investment in preserving the story of Ganesh, and why does he not reveal his own attitudes towards reading and books as a way for us to understand his role and/or investment? The literary biography presented through the narrator's voice reveals a subtle indictment of Ganesh's choices to manipulate perceptions for his own ends and later to denounce the identity that brought him further success. Implied readers of the biography find themselves having to make choices between intellectual aspirations and alignments with strong ethnic or social identities. The ability to have both seems impossible, or at best, a novelty in this novel.

While Ganesh has to pick an identity in the world of the text, the narrator, implied readers and actual readers of the novel can freely absorb or affiliate with the multiple narratives and shifting identities presented through the narrative of Ganesh's life. In *The Mystic Masseur*, the narrator provides us with what Derrida calls the *exergue*, which "serves to stock in anticipation and to prearchive a lexicon which, from there on, ought to lay down the law and *give the order*, even if this means contenting itself with naming the problem, that is, the subject" (Derrida 12). An *exergue* is literally an engraving marked on the underside of a coin, beneath the original imprint or emblem. The narrator's role should provide us with the language through which we must understand Ganesh Ramsumair. His commentary is the first kind of engraving on Ganesh's archive. By framing his reading of Ganesh's life through the mystic's autobiography *The Years of Guilt*, the narrator directs readers to a number of origins or commencements in the

Derridean sense. One is his own experience as a client of the mystic; another is his understanding of the transformed British Executive member as a university student, and a third is Ganesh's autobiography. Each book that Ganesh writes marks anew his archive. Each book relates a period in his life and reveals his reading practices at that time. The narrator then becomes another exergue in the packaging of *The Mystic Masseur*. He functions as the archon, the arbiter of order and place in the cataloging of Ganesh Ramsumair's life. Especially in light of Ganesh's recalling of his books from publication, this narrator does not merely create the place where the archive is stored, he becomes an exergue himself, a site of Ganesh's personal and institutional history. The narrative in *The Mystic Masseur* creates a new place to store "this so-called live memory" (Derrida 16).

Even the protagonist's name can be read as another repository, one tied to the Indian heritage that influences the novel. Naipaul deliberately names his protagonist to invoke the mythical history associated with reading and writing in Indian and Hindu culture. The name Ganesh derives from the god Ganesa, also referred to as Ganapati. Associated with the power to remove obstacles, the god Ganesa's most notable association is with wisdom, particularly as the repository of Scriptural words. This deified figure, represented in the elephant head which symbolizes memory and keen judgment, remains so significant to Indian literary culture that "all sacrifices and religious ceremonies, all serious compositions in writing and all worldly affairs of importance are begun by pious Hindus with an invocation to Ganesa: ... Few books are begun without the words 'Salutation to Ganesa'" (Wilkins 324). Ganesh's representation in *The Mystic Masseur* frames him as an expert in all categories outlined by the mythology. He is a

spiritual leader, a producer of literary knowledge, and later a global political representative of his nation. Ganesh becomes a displaced and bastardized Trinidadian version of the Indian deity as he bastardizes the knowledge of Indian culture to make it palatable in this uncanny space. A lesser-known association of the Hindu mythic figure further validates the ironic symbolism of the protagonist's name. Ganesa suggests entrepreneurial prosperity and "is always described as being very corpulent; and pictures or images of him are seen over the doors of most shopkeepers" (Wilkins 324). Not surprisingly, Ganesh's two main supporters and benefactors, Ramlogan and Beharry, place much merit in his visits to their shops and invest so dearly in his education and political life respectively. Beharry especially benefits from the business that the mystic profession brings to Fuente Grove and he capitalizes on the expansion of goods and services that Ganesh's spiritual work requires. Ganesh's name destines him to this responsibility for storing and disseminating knowledge. He does, in fact, become the colonial archivist, and his house, the colonial library in Fuente Grove. His charge as archivist becomes to manage ethically the knowledge he receives as the ethical reader of this community.

In addition to Ganesh's positioning as ethical archivist, the narrative structure of the novel further supports the idea that artistic autonomy must come through responsible readership. The anonymous narrator of *The Mystic Masseur* works most importantly as a close reader, reviewer and critic of Ganesh Ramsumair's *The Years of Guilt*. The ways in which he occupies these respective roles point us to another host of interpretations about his encounters with Ganesh's works. We meet this narrator as a client of Ganesh in the mystic's early career, which draws our attention to the part of Ganesh's life grounded in

the spiritual and not necessarily in the intellectual life as we might expect. Yet like all the other clients, this narrator's faith in the spiritual capabilities of the masseur comes from the presence of this intellectual property in Ganesh's home: "After seeing all those books in Ganesh's hut I was ready to believe in him and quite prepared to take his mixture. And I respected him even more when he gave my mother a little booklet, saying 'Take it. I giving it to you free although it cost me a lot to write and print it'" (*The Mystic Masseur* 6-7). The work was Ganesh's first publication, and the narrator admits, "I never read Ganesh's booklet, *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*; and although I had to take his terrible mixture three times a day (I refused to have it in my food), I held no ill-will toward him. On the contrary, I often thought with a good deal of puzzled interest about the little man locked away with all those fifteen hundred books in the hot and dull village of Fuente Grove" (7). At such points of reflection by the narrator, readers must wonder about the authenticity of Ganesh's reading practices and of the narrator's reading practices as well. Does Ganesh actually read as closely and intently as his community believes, or is he merely a performer? The narrator's "puzzled interest" suggests this doubt and I argue that his explication of Ganesh's autobiography attempts to resolve the uncertainty for himself and the people of Trinidad.

The framing of chapters with quotations from *The Years of Guilt* serves to situate this novel in a fictional category of the literary biography. The narrator's goal in this project is to resolve his own bewilderment with the books and their incongruous presence with the man who owns them. As we see him present excerpts from the autobiography, he reflects on his own reading and whether that mystic period in Ganesh's life is represented accurately, or at least according to Trinidad's official or colloquial histories.

For example, when we are introduced to Ramlogan, the most pivotal influence in Ganesh's life, the narrator quotes from the autobiography in this way:

'I suppose,' Ganesh wrote in *The Years of Guilt*, 'I had always, from the first day I stepped into Shri Ramlogan's shop, considered it as settled that I was going to marry his daughter. I never questioned it. It seemed preordained.'

What happened was this." (*The Mystic Masseur* 35)

An actual reader of *The Mystic Masseur* is left to consider how the process of reading occurs for this narrator and what elements of that reading are being translated or transmitted to the readers who will surely never be able to verify the contents of *The Years of Guilt*. The certainty expressed in the statement "What happened was this" may generate the assumption that the narrator is repeating, paraphrasing or summarizing contents of the autobiography that he finds useful for the readers of his account. Ideally then, his account, some sort of abridged version, may have a completely different audience from Ganesh's original work. Additionally, given that Ganesh ceased publication of his autobiography, this narrator may see his role as recovering or preserving in written form the legacy of an influential man. In light of the novel's ending, the identity presented in Ganesh's written works (not just the autobiography) seems to dissipate gradually and then disappear once the mystic reaches British shores. As the witness to this transformation, the narrator understands the value in archiving Ganesh's life, which will probably be remembered primarily through oral storytelling

forms such as *The Niggergram*³², mentioned several times in the novel. The narrator writes as the only person in the novel with knowledge of Ganesh's disavowal and the only one with the knowledge to reconstruct the life of Ganesh in written form. Because Ganesh no longer exists in an embodied form, absence of documentation of his life will force him to become a mythic or folkloric figure. The narrator's account secures Ganesh's position as an embodied figure in the important timeline of Trinidad's political history.

The final scene of the novel elucidates the archive fever or desire at play in the construction of a colonial archive. First, while Ganesh has absorbed the temperature and temperament of his new environment, we now understand that his transformation is not seamless. In fact, in the structure of the novel, that shift comes abruptly and marked by trauma. He has to evacuate completely a self-built institution of Indo-Trinidadian mysticism in order to fully achieve the kind of success he saw embodied in Indarsingh in his school days, "a greatness beyond ambition" (*The Mystic Masseur* 12). The despair at this story's close suggests that two types of archive fever are at work for Ganesh. The desire that first drives the mystic identity has to be buried or erased in order for Ganesh to fulfill the alternate desire for colonial identity. One kind of archive seems to be sacrificed at the expense of the other. So while Naipaul confirms Derrida's proposition that destruction of one memory paves the way to regenerate new archives, the novel by way of Ganesh fails to provide a site for the archive to be in contestation or resistance with itself. Ganesh denies the critical reader embodied in the narrator at the end of the novel with no room for resistance in the construction of a colonial identity for this former mystic masseur.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*: Reading England Away

In *The Mystic Masseur*, V.S. Naipaul draws our attention to the ways in which books as objects serve the same didactic and political functions as reading itself. In fact, the materiality of reading and knowledge forms the disguise for important moments of misreading or lack of reading within the text. Naipaul's use of the book in this way illustrates the paradoxes of colonial education before independence in Trinidad and suggests that this structure robbed citizens of their rights to a national identity. Jamaica Kincaid also shows interest in the relationships between colonial legacy and knowledge production or intellectual property in much of her writing. More specifically, several of Kincaid's creative choices point to an exposé of and a desire to respond to the kinds of intellectual robbery that we see presented in *The Mystic Masseur*.

Kincaid's controversial essay, *A Small Place*, a piece on neo-colonial corruption and the ills of mass tourism in Antigua, quite self-consciously articulates the colonial specters that continue to pervade the contemporary Caribbean. Her most poignant figure of the death and debt of colonial knowledge is the public library, an old building whose decrepit remnants symbolize the failure of Antiguan to master literacy and "escape the [poor] reality of their lives" (*A Small Place* 19). The library moves from the old building to a store located in a commercial district. Her contrast of the new temporary library with the old colonial one presents the ambivalent location of the narrator, between past and present, tourist and native: "I was standing on Market Street in front of the library. The library! But why is the library on Market Street? I had asked myself. ... The Earthquake damaged the old library, has a new library not been built?" (41-42). The narrator

confesses to her own relationship to the library as the origin of her material and intellectual mastery of the English language. She claims it as the only thing she can own from the British who robbed her of an alternative culture. Her astonishment at the commercial treatment of knowledge consumption and production in the independent Antigua indicates a symptom of postcolonial loss at the heart of my own queries about the role of reading in Caribbean society.

The image of the irreparable colonial library also memorializes severed ties between the West Indies and England, a union the author suggests as an ultimate form of (mis)recognition: the library highlights the distinctions between “people like me” and “people like you.” Her detailed explanation to the tourist, the “people like you,” is as much her own attempt to reconcile her ambivalence about home as it is to highlight the cultural absences that result from decolonization and national identity formation:

Oh, you might be saying to yourself, Why is she so undone about the library, why does she think this is a good example of corruption, of things gone bad? But if you saw the old library, situated as it was, in a big, old wooden building painted a shade of yellow that is beautiful to people like me, with its wide veranda, its big, always open windows its rows and rows of shelves filled with books, its beautiful wooden tables and chairs for sitting and reading... the beauty of us sitting there like communicants at an altar, taking in, again and again, the fairy tale of how we met you, your right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are and always will be; if you could

see all of that in just one glimpse, you would see why my heart breaks for the dung heap that now passes for a library in Antigua. (*A Small Place* 42-43)

The narrator's description of the library space as sacred testifies to its integral place in the infrastructure of colonial Antiguan life. But her mourning of its ruin derives not from the loss of colonial life, but for the absence of a new sacred space in the wake of this building's destruction. Readers who may view Kincaid's acerbic commentary on Antigua as an act of national betrayal may disagree with the implication that the failure of the independent Antiguan government to provide resources for literacy and intellectualism marks a sign of corruption and presents a central cause of "the bad post-colonial education the young librarians received" (43). The suggestion that colonial education might be an invaluable asset to seize from the British seems unforgivable to such readers. Yet, Kincaid's simultaneous accusation of British theft underwritten by the sacred acts of writing and reading constitutes a defining trope in her work. She views language, literature and intellectual knowledge as the debt of colonialism owed to those whose access to knowledge and wealth remains limited to the books in the store-front library, "in cardboard boxes in a room, gathering mildew, or dust, or ruin" (43). And Kincaid's project as an author and thinker is to actively work herself, and by extension the post-colonial West Indian, out of this unhomely and decrepit intellectual space.

Kincaid scholars frequently discuss the implications of her writing in the context of her individual relationship with the Caribbean space as a writer in exile. As Belinda Edmondson argues, "the connection between Kincaid's concern with European canonical discourse and her politics vis-à-vis the Caribbean are tied in both subtle and unsubtle

ways to the meaning of literary authority, as represented by the history of the discourse of exile, in Caribbeanist discourse” (“Jamaica Kincaid and the Genealogy of Exile” 73).

While I am not so interested in Kincaid’s personal politics here, I do believe that her investment in “the human condition” as she knows it³³ relates to the larger intellectual concern of literary production that can be resolved by exploring how audiences receive texts, how the characters in West Indian novels use literature as a form of exile from the Caribbean and how the desires of the foreign or desires to create commensurability between the foreign (Europe) and the domestic (West Indies) can force a transplanting of self and identity. Edmondson justifiably sees that Kincaid’s “fictive and non-fictive references to ‘highbrow’ or canonical European/American texts effectively clear a space that replaces the image of the labourer with that of the reader and producer of texts” (79). Yet while Edmondson proposes exile as the impetus for “the construction of the modern Caribbean self,” I am concerned with the process of that construction—which I investigate in the act of reading. While even Kincaid’s early short stories reveal this investment, her novels provide the strongest evidence for such a preoccupation with reading.

Annie John is Jamaica Kincaid’s first novel, often associated with the author’s own coming of age. Books frame the interactions between characters, and reading becomes a lens through which Annie, the protagonist, articulates her anxieties about her place in postcolonial Antigua. In this novel, the act of reading takes three important forms: public, private, and parodic. In each of these forms, the character-reader, usually but not always Annie, engages in an immediate rewriting (or re-imagining) of the text. As the narrator, Annie always stands as the privileged reader because actual readers must read the cited literature through her eyes, words, and opinions. Her position as narrator

gives her the voice and agency to re-script and re-tell each of these narratives according to her adolescent West Indian interpretation. Annie's adolescence and its associated emotional and intellectual contradictions function as an allegory for the ruptures between the mother country and the new nation.

The novel begins with a reference to death, a gesture to the disavowal of colonial origins, as represented by the mother and the mother country, which are intricately rendered through another image of the library, the physical residence of the colonial archive. Her first identification with death is with a girl her own age: "At my school it was all we could talk about.: 'Did you know the humpbacked girl?' I remembered once standing behind her in the library" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 10). Annie's memory of the dead humpbacked girl, especially in the library space, feeds Kincaid's agenda to situate British literary history as belonging to the past. The library opens a defining space that distinguishes the colonial past from the postcolonial future, much in the way that the dead girl of her own age marks the difference between her shadowed and sheltered childhood and a future adolescence defined by a rupture from her mother.

The first important scene of reading occurs in the setting of colonial education.³⁴ I consider this moment a private reading for which a public response exists. Miss Nelson, Annie's teacher, asks for an essay of reflection from her students on the first day of the new term. While Annie works on her own project, she takes special interest in Miss Nelson's desk reading. She says, "All this Miss Nelson must have seen and heard, but she didn't say anything – only kept reading her book: an elaborately illustrated edition of *The Tempest*, as later, passing by her desk, I saw" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 39). Kincaid's decision to use *The Tempest* as the first direct reference of literary inheritance proves

interesting. Shakespeare's work has often been associated with early modern definitions of the New World reflecting inherent prejudice about perceived dangers in and of that space. The story of *The Tempest* has often defined the Caribbean region geographically and climatologically. But it also and more importantly introduces the figure of Caliban who pervades and haunts the representations of racialized bodies in the region. Yet the story of Caliban, which has been re-written by postcolonial writers is one premised on debt and ownership: who owns this land and its knowledges? If colonialism is a gift, then can the colonized resist it and the colonizer? George Lamming dismantles *The Tempest* in his analysis of the writer in the Caribbean. He confirms this defensive and defiant posture that is popular in postcolonial understandings of this play when he says,

Prospero has given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, and unknown history of future intentions. The gift of Language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way. ... Therefore, all of Caliban's future – for future is the very name for possibilities – must derive from Prospero's experiment which is also his risk. (Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile* 109)

Although Annie never actually reads *The Tempest* within the novel, the ways in which she responds to what she reads and the introduction of literary encounters with that play draw our attention to the Caliban-like nature of her rejection of authority and authorship. The issue of language at the center of Prospero's colonizing and civilizing mission of

Caliban forms the ideal backdrop for Annie's own quest for self-knowledge and cultural placement through the mastery of language. That Annie encounters the story of Caliban, especially in an illustrated version meant to give the reader a visual of what the New World should be, further establishes the discourse of debt, ownership, and mastery that Kincaid initiates. And because Miss Nelson's reading of the story occurs during an exercise on autobiography and storytelling, Annie's writing of her own narrative and her subsequent public reading of her story to the class directly respond to Miss Nelson's private reading of the gross misrepresentation of the Caribbean.

Annie reads her story aloud to the class. In addition to this public act, Kincaid's readers engage in a private reading of the story in the text. Actual readers can then compare Annie's story to Miss Nelson's reading of Caliban. Moreover, in a gesture that suggests Kincaid's continued investment in legitimizing the West Indian through reading and writing, Miss Nelson lends authority to Annie's public response: "Miss Nelson said that she would like to borrow what I had written to read for herself, and that it would be placed on the shelf with the books that made up our own class library, so that it would be available to any girl who wanted to read it" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 41). The teacher's approval of Annie's story out of the entire class suggests that Annie's autobiographical essay represented an identifiable and universal experience that merited its canonization alongside *The Tempest* and other such works in that classroom.

Turning to Annie's amateur narrative might be helpful here to complicate issues of how the act of reading operates centrally in the creation of the artist and in the artist's desire for audience. Kincaid engages the ways in which the colonized and formerly colonized embrace art within and/or beyond the colonial structures, by using creativity to

replace the prescribed colonial format of elocution and performance. The main characters of Annie's plot are, of course, herself and her mother, and a professional reader might read their intricate dance as Kincaid's attempt to reimagine the Caliban-Sycorax image, thus modifying *The Tempest* archive in her text and Caribbean literary history. The fairy tale image of Annie and her mother at play on the beach of a secluded island seems to recreate the "before the storm" moments that might give subjectivity to the Caliban figure whose motherless life cast him as without value. Even the moment that Annie identifies as the rupture in her idyllic relationship with her mother resonates with Prospero's arrival: "One day, in the midst of watching my mother swim and dive, I heard a commotion far out at sea. It was three ships going by and they were filled with people. They must have been celebrating something, for the ships would blow their horn and the people would cheer in response" (43). Those who must listen to Annie's rendition may not be able to empathize with this feeling of adolescent abandonment unless they have access to the registers of feeling associated with Caliban's subject position in *The Tempest* narrative. Annie's desire to respond to the images in that story aligns with Kincaid's and other writers' agendas to revise dominant and offensive representations.

Miss Nelson becomes the only professional reader of Annie's story and assumes responsibility for its canonization of sorts. To situate Annie's work among the classic British texts that attempt to define Miss Nelson, herself a colonial subject, is to replace colonial mastery with postcolonial agency. Miss Nelson's participation in the acts of reading and storing of knowledge in the classroom returns us to the concept of the archive and points to a postcolonial project to reconfigure the contents of imperial knowledge. She exists as an "external substrate" in the sense that she embodies a site

outside of the text in which Annie must store and restore this writing effort, a story that might otherwise be lost to the colonial institutional project of “form not inform.” Her public validation of Annie’s work makes her a postcolonial functionary who resists, first by modeling engagement with texts like *The Tempest* that prompt hermeneutic resistance. She also resists by actively replacing the colonial archive with one postcolonial autobiography at a time. Her “silent vocation,” according to Derrida, “is to burn the archive and to incite amnesia, the thing refuting the economic principle of the archive, aiming to ruin the archive as accumulation and capitalization of memory on some substrate and in some place” (Derrida 15). By allowing Annie to write her own narrative and have it stand among published texts, Miss Nelson participates in the erasure of colonial formation in exchange for self-actualization in the act of writing and reading the new text.

The contrast between Annie’s public reading and Miss Nelson’s private acts of reading parallels how Annie is herself formed and informed simultaneously by the public and private spheres. The public space of performance and formal education reinforces the matriarchal power of mimicry – her elocution of works aloud always betrays her knowledge of British literature and history, and her mimicry of her mother signifies the perfect colonial copy. They share a look, they share their experiences, and they share a name. Yet, private acts of reading speak to resistance characteristic of national rebellion depicted in the text through the symbol of the teenager. Once Annie becomes aware of her adolescence, and once her mother rejects the adolescent in her daughter, her reading practices also become more transgressive and divorced from the world of her mother. One such instance occurs in Annie’s textual encounter with Christopher Columbus.

As with most of Annie's textual encounters, her introduction to Columbus begins in the classroom, in a private reading inspired by her meditation on her social role in relation to other girls at school or in her social world in Antigua. In one particular scene, Annie wanders through her required textbook reading of *A History of the West Indies*, the education system's ultimate guide to teaching her about herself through England. In the scene where she meets Christopher Columbus, her reading of the pictures and symbols that the text provides inspires her to interpret and re-script the story of Columbus' success in the New World, a story that her textbooks had taught her "was all history, it was all in the past, and everybody behaved differently now" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 76). The language and tone of the scene give the impression that Annie, the narrator, reads aloud to the reader, that she describes in detail the picture that we cannot see as if in an act of oral storytelling:

In this picture, Columbus was seated in the bottom of a ship. He was wearing the usual three-quarter trousers and a shirt with enormous sleeves, both the trousers and shirt made of maroon-colored velvet. His hat, which was cocked up on one side of his head, had a gold feather in it, and his black shoes had huge gold buckles. His hands and feet were bound up in chains, and he was sitting there staring off into space, looking quite dejected and miserable. The picture had as a title "Columbus in Chains," printed at the bottom of the page. (*Annie John* 77)

Annie's interpretation and critique of this picture reveal her desire to communicate the irony of authority and knowledge garnered through the written word in the imposing classroom setting. In this way, she assumes a stance of a professional reader, conveying to her implied reader the tone with which she wants this reading to be received. Inasmuch as it is the character's private reading in that moment, it also enacts the narrator's public professional engagement with the communal practice of reading and interpreting that is also disciplinary, "governed by conventions of interpretation and protocols of research" (Guillory 31). Annie uses the protocols of her formal colonial training in British history and culture to defy the textual authority of this image. Annie's subsequent analysis of this scene, which she reads to the implied reader, is again embedded in conflicts of authority and authorship, as filtered through her relationship with her mother. Mimicking her mother's defiance of her mother's father, she crosses off the caption "Columbus in Chains" with her pen and literally inscribes her own narrative onto this portrait: "The Old Man Can No Longer Get Up and Go" (78). This palimpsestic reworking of her textbook's rendering of history represents Annie's ultimate reader response, what Wolfgang Iser refers to as consistency-building. She has created meaning from her own past experience and mirrored it onto the textual elements presented to her. Her reading is "inextricably bound up with subjective factors, and above all, [her] habitual orientations" (*Act of Reading* 18). The combination of these elements forces an interpretation that provides her with expectations more closely resembling her lived experience. Yet, Iser warns against consistency-building as a primary hermeneutic practice, for the very reasons that we see Annie John struggling between what she is supposed to know and what she believes to be true. He advises that the decisions in such a reader response can "thus be made to appear

as if they were all regulated by one and the same norm” (18). So even if Annie can articulate her dissatisfaction with the superior image of Columbus in the textbook, her frame of reference for reading this text continues to be the colonial discursive paradigm. Hence it is possible, even if she is unfamiliar with the landscape, to imagine what he was saying and doing in his moment of capture and imprisonment. As much as Annie can create a postcolonial archive that vilifies Columbus, the tools she uses to authorize this new history remain the same tools that the colonialists used to authorize the knowledge as printed in the textbook. It seems that the form of archiving remains the same, and only the content changes. This scene serves as one example of Annie’s participation in the process of ideation, which Iser regards as the vehicle for the bifurcation of the self in the act of reading. His position is that “when we appropriate an alien experience foregrounded in the text, we simultaneously background our own experiences. In assimilating the other, we alienate part of ourselves” (Holub 91). But Annie’s simultaneous reading and interpretation, in which she must make a decision about this Columbus figure, has consequences beyond the world of the text and extends to the reception of the novel itself.

Another critical issue emerges from Annie’s mockery of Christopher Columbus through this parodic reading. Kincaid draws in her ideal reader and makes her complicit in this act of defiance against empire and conquest. The author confirms Garrett Stewart’s suspicions that “in reading about characters reading, decoding, responding, interpreting, you encounter in this curious textual fold the superimposition of your own hermeneutic practice upon that of the characters” (15). A reader of *Annie John* who meets this scene will be prompted to form an opinion and take a side, to decide if Annie’s

judgment here seems appropriate: “What just desserts, I thought, for I did not like Columbus. How I loved this picture – to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low, seated at the bottom of a boat just watching things go by” (Kincaid, *Annie John* 77-78). The reader, who has not seen this textbook, read its prose, or viewed the image, must participate in this judgment. To like Columbus suggests an affront in some way to Annie’s reading. However, to agree with Annie’s selective interpretation and defacement of the text may be an agreement with the politics of Kincaid’s novel. Annie is the privileged reader of this historical textbook and actual readers of *Annie John* must rely on her ethical choices of interpretation to make their own textual judgments.

I continue to discuss the “Columbus in Chains” scene in the context of Kincaid’s project to dismantle the colonial archive. Annie’s commentary reveals her death drive, a desire to destroy, according to Derrida, incited by and enacted through anger and violence. Annie John’s defacing of the history textbook in that manner maps a violent act to erase from her memory and the memory of the physical text itself that which has been consigned³⁵ into confused minds like hers through the project of colonial education. Yet, the name Columbus and its associated signifiers can never be erased from cultural memory. That is the paradox of this resistance. Annie John would not exist as a postcolonial subject if Columbus had not sailed the ocean and “discovered” her island. And the repetitions of Columbus’ signifiers in her daily life, including the Wordsworth poem she must recite, are not exactly erasable. In fact, Kincaid’s employment of these very allusions problematizes the project of erasure at stake in this action. No complete erasure can occur, only a transformation into something else, which Derrida would agree is the function of this “desire” or archive fever.

As we move further into the novel, we may realize that the response to Annie's violation of this historic image proves equally significant to the place of literary encounters in the Caribbean experience. After getting caught by her teacher and "not even hanging [her] head in remorse" (Kincaid, *Annie John* 82), Annie is punished by the school's principal, made to "copy Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton, and to have it done a week from that day" (82). *Paradise Lost* may well be considered the most intertextual of works in literary history, responding to the ultimate textual authority in the modern world, the Bible³⁶. The act of copying lines from the text, in an attempt to discipline and correct rebellion against literary and historical hegemony, is one way that Kincaid invokes the notion of mimicry in order to critique it. The act of mimicry does not result in reforming Annie's behavior or opinions about Columbus. Rather, she escapes from the imposition of this educational rigidity by finding comfort at home, where "it would be a while before my mother and father heard of my bad deeds" (83) and the return of domestic rigidity, a stand-in for colonial rigidity, would be delayed.

Annie's mimicry of her mother's behavior, in the Columbus scene and others, does not signify mimicry of imperial structures in any way. Kincaid resists the impulse to speak back directly to the empire, I would argue. Instead, what she does critique through Annie's parodic acts of reading is the way in which the colonized perform mimicry as the only way to speak to empire. Critics such as Chris Bonjie³⁷ have categorized Kincaid as part of the postcolonial structure that responds to empire only through assimilative practices that appease middlebrow culture and negate a lowbrow readership or audience. Yet, Annie's parodic enunciations challenge this thesis, as Kincaid allows her characters and readers to engage disdainfully from the categories of the middlebrow and elite. One

important example materializes in the way in which Annie co-opts the European fairy tales for a new kind of storytelling:

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

(Kincaid, *Annie John* 86)

This parodical re-scripting of fairy tales with no helpless subject to be rescued, but only a self-sufficient protagonist who willfully refuses the status quo, serves two functions: one, Annie exercises her teenage desire for agency and rejects the refiguration of her mother in that imagery – this heroine has an evil step-parent or no parents at all. The mother and all its associate metaphors are either evil or absent. The other function is that Kincaid dislocates the traditional fairy tale narrative structure, allowing Annie to find a space for herself within the narrative of Empire, one that is not marked by the white, fragile image of femininity but one cloaked in resistance and dominance. And the history of her subject position from colonialism and slavery provides the impetus to “heap more suffering” on that image, thereby making her ability to write a newer, happier ending even more dramatic in its rejection of the European fairy tale girl. Additionally, Annie demonstrates

the vigilance that John Guillory qualifies as a symptom of professional reading. In that reading, she “stands back from the pleasure of reading, not in order to cancel out this pleasure, but in order necessarily to be wary of it, so that the experience of reading does not begin and end in the pleasure of consumption, but gives rise to a certain sustained reflection” (Guillory 31). Although Annie’s lay or affective responses to reading remain clear in the novel, at the moments where she rewrites or re-imagines these narratives, we can see her as a character who functions at the margins of the lay and professional spheres.

However, Annie’s fantasy is only that – a figment of her imagination – and her ability to read, re-read and re-script does not occlude the reality of her small world. She recognizes that “I was not in a book. I was always just sitting there with the thimble that weighed worlds fastened deep inside me, the sun beating down on me” (Kincaid, *Annie* 86). Confined by the physicality of her landscape, the tropical climate, and the constraints of her position as a newly adolescent West Indian girl, Annie’s role as a reader, both of fairy tales and of her limited mobility, can only be liberating within certain boundaries.

So far, I have examined the ways in which Annie manipulates her embodiment as a disciplined subject in her social location to intellectually challenge scenes of power by reading, writing or imagining. As if in a response to her limitations in her spatial and social location, Annie transgresses the boundaries of colonial disciplinary formation, both at home and at school, through her long period of illness. Annie falls ill and has to miss months of school and interaction with the outdoors. As mentioned earlier, this period stands in for her violation of domestic rigidity as epitomized by her mother, who is a

stand-in for all oppressive structures in the novel. In her bedridden state she is immovable, lying “at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself” (Derrida 57). So even as “The Long Rain” period serves as a defiance of the routine to which her mother subjects her, and even as she disturbs her mother’s own routine by becoming the center of the household rather than the margin, she still experiences this loss of her agency as defined in her acts of reading. Not only could she not physically lift books to read, but she also couldn’t participate in conversations that affected her own life. She laments, “They spoke to each other. I couldn’t hear what it was that they said, but I could see the words leave their mouths. The words traveled through the air toward me, but just as they reached my ears they would fall to the floor” (Kincaid, *Annie John* 109). The loss of language during the illness prompts a desire to escape even stronger than that offered in her previous imaginary escapes to Belgium, for example. Annie is invoking the “mal” in Derrida’s archive fever. Even after she mocks Columbus and re-imagines the damsel in distress in European fairy tales, the ending of the novel suggests that her illness makes their origin the only home she might find. She suffers from “a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive. ... No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no “*mal-de*” can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d’archive*” (Derrida 57). Annie John stays in a constant state of desire for her postcolonial origin via the circuit of colonial reading. Her illness signifies that she is a resistant reader who is inevitably unable to resist this origin. As a result, she must migrate in order to participate in the culture of Empire. Yet, she remains a subject who embodies this contradiction.

The ending of the novel reemphasizes the symbols of loss and debt through the image of the library that began the narrative and also reinforces the paradoxes we see throughout the novel. Annie is about to leave for England, a young woman transformed by puberty, educational achievement, and severe illness. With the strongest desire to separate herself from her mother, she must confront all that is valuable to her at the moment – intellect and exile – by confronting the ways in which her desires are inherited and fostered in that maternal relationship. As she packs to leave for England, Annie must use her mother's trunk to store memories of her past that she leaves behind. Yet that trunk is her mother's own symbol of exile which she carried as she fled from her parents in Dominica. At this time, Annie also acknowledges the inheritance of her desire for books in her mother's habits:

My mother had been a member of the library long before I was born. And since she took me everywhere with her when I was quite little, when she went to the library she took me along there too. I would sit in her lap very quietly as she read books that she did not want to take home with her. I could not read the words yet, but just the way they looked on the page was interesting to me. (*Annie John* 142)

Her acknowledgement of this inheritance is significant because it situates her mother as a reader herself, a role that Annie or Kincaid have rarely engaged throughout the novel. This attribution of intellectualism to the image of the West Indian mother is in keeping with Belinda Edmondson's argument about destabilizing notions of the laborer in the

Caribbean as fixed, a role we have seen Mrs. John occupy at many points in the novel, even though the labor is domestic.

Moreover, Annie's decision to leave behind a relic of that experience with her mother and her mother country Antigua is symbolic and complicated: "One of the things I had put away in my mother's old trunk in which she kept all my childhood things was my library card. At that moment, I owed sevenpence in overdue fees" (143). First, the abandonment of her mother through the library card might be read as Kincaid's commentary on abandoning the legitimacy and hegemony of European canonical methods of education and knowledge production. The irony is that Annie leaves this card behind to move to England, and, we may all assume, that the product gained from this library card is not easily returnable. Annie cannot return the intellectual gift from colonial education; its return can only be a symbolic act. She will continue to read books. But the power of the scene lies in her small adolescent gesture of taking without paying for this intellect. Her stealing of books is a reverse metaphor for the thefts that the process of colonialism has effected on the people of Antigua.

The ending of *Annie John* points, more importantly, to the ambivalent and feverish impulse of destruction and loss at the impetus for a postcolonial institutional memory. Annie has destroyed her indebtedness to the library, and she severs ties with her mother in her trip to England. She firmly states her resistance to England by saying, "I did not want to go to England, I did not want to be a nurse," while in the same moment acknowledging that she has no place in Antigua: "But I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood" (*Annie John* 130). Within the desire to accumulate knowledge and to self-

generate a new body of literature in *Annie John*, we see a tension between the content of the archive and the colonial power that authorizes archiving as a means of self-actualization. Annie may be able to interrogate imperial literature and produce alternate meanings, but she cannot escape the lexicon from which she creates this meaning. Annie's move to England secures her identity as a critical resistant reader who cannot resist. Yet, Kincaid reminds readers at the end of the novel of *The Tempest* discourse recurring in the text. After her illness and by her journey to England, we can suppose that Annie has made the transformation from a Caliban figure, enslaved within and by the gift of another's language, into an Ariel figure. According to George Lamming, "Ariel has been emancipated into the status of a privileged servant. ... Ariel is on the inside. He knows and serves his master's intentions and his methods are free from any scruples" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 99). Although Annie's move to England makes her beholden in some way to the "master," the ethics of her reading practices demonstrate her freedom from the intellectual obligations to British knowledge. Lamming reads the Ariel character as "a lackey," but reading Annie John's reimagining of the play through the context of archive fever, I would suggest that Ariel's characterization as "the perfect and unspeakable secret police" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 99) points to the potential for another level of transformation. Although we know nothing of her life in England, Annie's secrecy and her self-policing of her body and her actions throughout the novel give evidence that she has become aware of her power to conquer the Prosperos in texts and in her lived experience.

Thirty Years in Conversation: The Project of Responsible Reading

Naipaul and Kincaid exemplify a tradition's desire for what Spivak refers to as an "epistemic makeover" (Spivak 2006), which accounts for and rebuilds the intellectual memory of the region by replicating the process through which colonial accession and postcolonial resistance occur. By juxtaposing two texts written and set more than thirty years apart, I demonstrate that beyond the prevalence of the canonical reading motif in each text, the project of an ideal readership is yet to be achieved. Mining *The Mystic Masseur* and *Annie John* for the process and product of the act of reading extrapolates the methodology and epistemology of Caribbean literature's attempt at artistic legitimacy through coming-of-age narratives. This fraught literary corpus allegorizes the nation-building projects of the West Indies in the trajectory of psycho-social development of the reader as critic who is always a character of privilege, giving sight or insight into texts we cannot see but must understand. Again and again, novel after novel, we see the familiar journey of self-discovery modeled by Ganesh in Trinidad and Annie in Antigua, examples repeated and re-presented as a binary relationship inherent to a responsible reader. A responsible reader must be an affected reader, one whose personal choices are determinable by his or her encounter with a text. Yet, he or she is simultaneously the professional and critical voice who calls the community of readers inside the text and outside the novel to interpretation and response, based on the critical reading he or she produces. Both Annie and Ganesh participate in interpretive communities that critique the nation as a whole, even while the act of reading fosters their self-awareness as a product of that whole.

The form of the two novels as Caribbean coming-of-age stories or *Bildungsromane* elucidates the importance of reading to the nation-building project. The notion of national *Bildung*, as discussed by Pheng Cheah, concerns the process by which “universal ideals are incarnated in the daily practices of a collective’s individual members” (4). What kinds of ideals, we may then ask, are incarnated in the reading acts illustrated in *The Mystic Masseur*, and how are they different from those in *Annie John*? The answer helps us understand the differing national projects at stake for these authors but also historicizes these works as a product of national *Bildung*. The influence of reading in *Bildung* is different in these two novels, especially during the most formative moments in the classroom. Annie John’s active reading and interaction with texts in the classroom allows us to make direct correlations between her development of self-awareness as a postcolonial subject and her growing engagement with literature as a critical resistant reader. The complicity of *Annie John*’s readers in this engagement is unavoidable as she articulates elements of the work and subsequently deconstructs them, offering her own close reading. The role of the reader of *The Mystic Masseur*, however, seems unclear as no such moments allow the reader to dissect Ganesh’s experience. One short chapter, “Pupil and Teacher,” accounts for the entirety of Ganesh’s formal education and even his work as a teacher of the formal educational model. Readers are not privy to the work that Ganesh reads as a student in Queen’s College. The only image we get of him in a classroom setting is the observation that “‘That Ganesh boy is a real crammer,’ the boys laughed; but Ganesh never became more than a mediocre student” (*The Mystic Masseur* 11). The act of cramming these unidentified books does not translate into comprehension of the material and subsequent excellence. The mystery or

secrecy that characterizes his early education and adolescent development makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to understand his later role in national politics. Actual readers never see an affective response from Ganesh so we cannot imagine that his political turn exemplifies a person truly invested in the nation because he understands himself as an integral part of that community. Such a character must be a “protagonist whose formation or *Bildung* parallels and symbolizes that of the emergent nation because he is its first patriot and ideal citizen” (Cheah 239). The transparency of Annie’s reading acts viewed in contradistinction to Ganesh’s obfuscation of reading indicates the marked difference in this thirty-year progression from the colonial to the postcolonial. Self-reflexive reading is both a cause and effect of postcolonial identity formation. Yet, neither Ganesh nor Annie really assumes this ideal citizen position, since their emigration complicates any patriot status they may have occupied.

The differing tones in the novels’ endings suggest contradicting outcomes for each nation. Annie’s willingness to transfer her postcolonial project of reading, describing and inscribing British texts and their interpretations, even as she must exist in England, makes it possible for her individual self-improvement to remain parallel to the nationalist project of postcolonial Antigua. Ganesh, on the other hand, leaves his reading in Trinidad in order to replace it with something new and yet unknown in England. By the end of the novel, it seems that he has even attempted to forget what should be the irremovable archive in his memory – all the texts he has read through his life as a mystic. This act of forgetting ruptures the often-theorized harmony between the individual and the nation. Ganesh has renounced his citizenship and his patriotism as expressed in responsible readership. Further, the ending of *The Mystic Masseur* points to Naipaul’s

denunciation of what Cheah calls the “artificial continuity between *Bildung* and the bildungsroman” (241). Naipaul rejects the notion that this one person or part must stand in for and work on behalf of the whole. The individuality implied in his writing of the Ganesh character is a symptom of his disconnection from a literary tradition in the Caribbean. Although Kincaid’s torn relationship with the Caribbean marks the end of *Annie John* – Annie does not want to go but knows that she needs to leave – the evidence of her reading practices makes her a willing participant in national time. Through the act of reading and writing from England, she may continue to catalog and reconstruct the Caribbean archive and provide a lived representation of postcoloniality that colors the British landscape.

While Naipaul and Kincaid provide commentary on the state of the Caribbean nation as they see it, their novels provide us with an opportunity to discuss the relationship between responsible readership or ethical hermeneutics and the making of the postcolonial nation. The act of reading functions as a way to reconstruct and then dismantle the “palimpsestic narrative of imperialism” (Shetty and Bellamy 27). The *Bildung* model makes sense for Caribbean authors’ archival projects and investments in national autonomy because the nation-building project is theoretically something yet to be achieved. As such, Caribbean authors can only understand the imagined world of an autonomous nation by borrowing from concepts and experiences of individual agency and self-actualizations. If it is true that the nation is built on knowledge, and from knowledge comes accumulation and interpretation in the act of reading, and that the responsible reader initiates or furthers this process, then my close readings in this chapter support the idea that the desire to archive an intellectual memory as presented within

texts is intrinsic to the project of nation building. Accordingly, readers' performances in the act of reading determine the trajectory of the nation. Moreover, the fractured relationship between individual development and national progress returns us to an archive fever consistently at work in Caribbean literary texts.

Critics may contest whether the civilizing process of colonial education constitutes a trauma that functions in a way that produces archive fever. For how is it that the building of colonial libraries and the provision of British history, language and culture through recitation and repetition are not a gift of knowledge? Both authors offer evidence for this lasting trauma, a trauma emphasized mostly in the endings by the emigration of the responsible reader. The failure to stay at home to read, as depicted in both novels, emphasizes the Derridean problem of the shared lexicon between colonial accounts and Caribbean literature's archival projects towards self-actualization. In other words, the creation desire (Ganesh) or destruction desire (Annie) that motivates reading as an epistemic mechanism is always already built on the "accumulation and capitalization of memory" (Derrida 15) embedded in colonial hegemony. We may want, as Spivak suggests³⁸, to make a shift out of modernity and into antiquity to identify a subject formation – in reading or other tropes – that elides the original archival violence of colonialism itself.

Later, I will consider how we might look forward rather than backward, as Spivak wants, to eliminate the tension between the need for a privileged and authorized archivist and the ideal of egalitarianism implicit in postcolonial resistance projects. I will consider how concepts of Diaspora, particularly reading and classifying Caribbean literature in the Diaspora, may or may not occupy the middle space between these goals. My more

immediate goal, however, is to deconstruct the 'reader as critic' category within other Caribbean novels in order to clarify how self-making and nation-making are influenced by discursive formations bearing on reader response. In the following chapter, I offer an alternative method to identify Lamming's ideal reader, focusing on how the agency of reading fractures within social institutionalized concepts, especially race and gender.

Chapter Three
Reading through Race and Gender: Texts and Bodies in Conflicted Colonial Spaces

“To change or not to change? That is the question which has already set up an atmosphere of change in Prospero. It is the question he has encountered by surprise, the question he must breathe forever. It surrounds him everywhere. In every conscious act, it beckons him; it orders him forward; it urges him to enter the unknown territory of a life which can no longer be excluded. Colonized by his own ambition, Prospero’s role is now completely reversed. Prospero is once again face to face with what is urgent and near-impossible. And he is terrified.”

-George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

“If, however, we are driven by a nostalgia for lost origins, we too run the risk of effacing the ‘native’ and stepping forth as ‘the real Caliban,’ of forgetting that he is a name in a play, an inaccessible blankness circumscribed by an interpretable history: claiming to be Caliban legitimizes the very individualism that we must persistently attempt to undermine from within.”

-Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

In the previous chapter, I read *The Mystic Masseur* and *Annie John* as examples of a preoccupation with and resistance to colonial epistemology. As such, my analysis paid close attention to the ideological effects of acts of reading on colonial subjectivity. Essentially, the desire highlighted in these novels revealed symptoms primarily at work in the life of the mind. In *Mystic Masseur* and *Annie John*, archive fever functions as an exercise of destruction that must erase an old colonial history but continue to participate in it. In these novels, the *Bildungsroman* remains integral to the creation of a new intellectual archive that constitutes individual and national identity after political independence. West Indian writers, by their very construction of novels of education and their close attention to scenes privileging acts of reading contribute to postcolonial revisions of Caribbean epistemology. However, reiterations of *The Tempest* narrative have helped us understand how the mastery of language merely provides Caliban figures – oppressed or colonized subjects – with a voice to resist but not necessarily a means to escape imperial attitudes and gestures. George Lamming observes that the process of psychological and intellectual enlightenment achieved by colonial subjects constitutes an

immediate threat to those who directly benefit from maintaining imperial power. Yet Gayatri Spivak warns that the metaphors of power relations inscribed in *The Tempest* narrative might be dangerous ways to offer literary and cultural critiques to imperialism. Both colonized and colonizer search for origins to validate their legitimacy and authority. But critics of imperialism must be careful not to become continually trapped in the lexicon of a colonial archive that only solidifies the Manichean Prospero-Caliban binary.

I use Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House* (1957) and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) to continue to explicate regional literary concerns about history and the ordering of knowledge in the twentieth-century Caribbean that attempts to complicate the strict discursive logic of colonial historiography, if not completely escape it. How can authors represent the nuances of epistemic systems in West Indian self-making and nation making without attempting to speak for characters who cannot or refuse to speak? Cliff and Allfrey begin by positing that imperial quests for origin are flawed in their racial and patriarchal rendering of colonial history. In these novels, reading initiates a means through which West Indian subjects articulate rootedness and belonging in a space that frequently characterizes their presence and their bodies as marginal to or transcendent of the norms of the dominant social space. Jacques Derrida's concept of archive fever³⁹ remains relevant to my analysis, especially as he distinguishes between an object of archival value and its substrate. He suggests that each object, remembered in a library or museum, for example, has a material or surface (metaphorical or physical) on which its histories are inscribed: "It accumulates so many sedimented archives, some of which are written right on the epidermis of a body proper, others on the substrate of an 'exterior' body" (Derrida 19). In the examples of character-readers in *Abeng* and *The Orchid*

House, this exterior body manifests not just in a text but in the reader as well, each reader's body bringing a new archive through the reader's process of meaning-making.⁴⁰

The mapping of texts, narratives and identities onto the physical bodies of the characters I study in this chapter illustrates how the trope of reading not only dismantles a colonial archive, but also operates as a lens through which to identify displaced or misplaced histories.

Allfrey and Cliff tackle the nuances of racial classification in the West Indies by drawing attention to the failure of strict categories of blood and lineage to account for all people who participate in the social dynamics that constitutes West Indianness. The two authors present this critique through their focus on women protagonists who contend with issues of race and color while also seeking legitimacy for their contributions within the home, family or nation, all historically dominated by patriarchy. Additionally, literary encounters serve as substitutes for the protagonists' occupation of and performance in conflicted spaces, either physical or social. Allfrey's and Cliff's novels are narrative representations of the major principles of heterotopias, as defined by Michel Foucault. Foucault asserts in "Of Other Spaces" (1967) that compared to the obsession with temporal ontology in the nineteenth century that privileges history, the twentieth century is dominated by an awareness of spatial ontology. Conflation of the secular and the sacred in appropriations of space still exist as a result of the West's ordering of events in earlier centuries in the name of a civilizing mission. Foucault defines the ensuing and inevitable relations between secular and sacred, between ideas and bodies, as heterotopology. Unlike utopias that are imagined, perfected spaces – mapped but never real – society is organized according to a set of relational and relatable spaces called

heterotopias. He argues, “We do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (Foucault 23). Instead, the sites of social exchange that twentieth-century Western society occupies consist of key principles that illustrate the simultaneity, juxtaposition and relationality characterizing a postmodern society. Such intertwined spatial interactions constantly shift, expand or distort the contents and contexts of bodies of knowledge, or substrates, on which to store knowledge and history. In *Abeng* and *The Orchid House*, spatial shifts in the characters’ lives lead to frequently distorted senses of place and identity. The main characters must work to escape or transcend the stories inscribed on their bodies, intellectually and physically, as they move from place to place. Alternately, reading functions as a mode of production through which these characters use the literature they read as substrates for new or revised histories about their belonging in the Caribbean space.

Both in the form and content of their novels, Allfrey and Cliff demonstrate a preoccupation with place and relationships between spaces. Their emphasis on spatial dynamics privileges the woman as the center of ordering knowledge and power in an imminent postcolonial society. Acts of reading and scenes of reading, as presented in the novels, also constitute heterotopic spaces through which the protagonists and other characters orient themselves to the physical landscapes and to West Indian culture. Acts of reading become bridges between the domestic space (the home or the house) and the public or political space. Moreover, reading sometimes acts in lieu of these spaces,

replacing the discordant realities with an idyllic alternative or middle space. Reading gives the characters a language to articulate racial or sexist entrapment or oppression and serves as a means through which they navigate spaces more closely resembling a concept of home (homeliness) or inclusion for them.

The plots of *The Orchid House* and *Abeng* are both set against a backdrop of an intense political climate reified by the racial division of power prescribed during colonialism. By the early to mid-twentieth century, Dominica and Jamaica respectively comprised an overwhelming recently freed black peasant population with few opportunities for paid labor, a rising black and mixed race middle class, a dwindling elite, mostly white planter class, and strong friction with Britain as negotiations for national independence began.⁴¹ The daily activities of social and political life on these islands were already resistant to white hegemony and privileged a black-centered experience well before Afro-Caribbean literary advancement in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the centrality of black identity would come to dominate the early conversations about an emergent literary establishment.

One of the tensions in West Indian literature, as Belinda Edmondson acknowledges, is that “aesthetic theories of ‘West Indianness,’ while they have rated a work according to its degree of ‘blackness,’ are particularly contradictory when it comes to theorizing a harmony between the race of the author and the ‘race’ of the writing” (“Race, Tradition” 115). The dominant Afro-Caribbean literary tradition, represented by theorists such as Kamau Braithwaite, “privileges marginal status – ‘us all’ presumably refers to West Indians, and in particular nonwhite West Indians, since the ‘white’ experience is understood to be at the center of the discourse, and, paradoxically, invisible

because it is the present absent against which the structure defines itself” (“Race, Tradition” 116). Literature by white West Indian men in the twentieth century is limited, and even more so when thinking about representations of a folk culture.⁴² Women of European descent or mixed race, however, have been prompted to write about the spectral presence of a seemingly invisible center, the white planter class, moved to margins of society in the later part of the nineteenth century. One of the aims of this chapter is to use representations of reading as a way to reconcile the anti-colonial revolutionary model of Caribbean discourse with postmodern representations of post-colonial Caribbean identity. Edmondson also argues elsewhere that female writers of the twentieth-century Caribbean were burdened by a strong male and British tradition of writing.⁴³ The intersections of female writing and West Indianness did not inhere in any kind of education or socialization for the female population in the Caribbean. Thus, another goal of this chapter is to call attention to the ways in which gendered structures of feeling and thinking are displaced or intercepted by alternate notions of womanhood and/or feminism represented in the literature that the characters of *Abeng* and *The Orchid House* encounter. Consequently, reading, in the context of these two novels, violates codes of gentility and intellectual achievement for women, as prescribed in the imperial social order.⁴⁴

I discussed in an earlier chapter how the protagonist of Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* is characterized as a thinker more than as an emotional adolescent girl. Her role as narrator provides us with interiority and subjectivity that situate her, at least, in an engagement with the oppressive forces of colonialism that seek to confine her. Her age, race and gender are always implied, if not explicitly stated, in her hermeneutic

engagements and in her social exchanges. Although *Abeng* is written and published around the same time, Clare Savage is presented as object, a gendered and racialized focus of colonial scrutiny. This novel calls attention to the forces of oppression that are linked not just to intellectual mastery and domination, but more importantly to discourses of abuse enacted on physical bodies in the colonial space. In the same vein, Allfrey's consideration of race and gender in *The Orchid House* juxtaposes black and white bodies in a female-dominated home, one in which men are either black and powerless, insane, or childlike. In these novels, the ambivalent nostalgia for lost or forgotten colonial or Eurocentric origins is frequently countered with representations of revolutionary politics. With the rise of a black merchant and middle class with financial stability and a waning white planter class deeply in debt and hanging on to social power through color, property and ceremony comes the disappearance of the white or mixed race female whose role in the home or in the society has almost no value. Allfrey's depictions of the white daughters of that dying class through their financial and political agency moves to retain a place for this generation in the definition of and participation in West Indian society.⁴⁵

Scenes of reading illuminate the many similarities in the aesthetic and political work of both novels, and Allfrey's writing in the contemporary moment of the issues in her plot provides justification and precedence for Cliff's narrative argument about the place of race and gender in defining national identity when the nation is still emergent. These two texts challenge the trend in Caribbean literary criticism to define the tradition "as an identity politics rooted in race, color, class and anti-colonialism" (O'Driscoll 59) that Sally O'Driscoll argues is too often inappropriately mapped onto the author's identity rather than on the textual representations.⁴⁶ Cliff's and Allfrey's engagements

with reading reposition them as critiques of colonial epistemological narratives and clear participants in a spatial politics of the region that delegitimize the authorial identity's place in this claim.

The act of reading is a mode of embodiment for the characters in these novels, allowing them to inscribe political and historical narratives onto their bodies, which then permanently bond them to their place in West Indian communities despite efforts to negate their legitimacy. Their attempts to carve out a space of belonging in the region where people reject them reprises Foucault's assertions about spatial logic in the twentieth century: "that of knowing whether there will be enough space for men [sic] in the world – a problem that is certainly quite important – but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation [decolonization] in order to achieve a given end [independence]" (Foucault 23). The racial and gendered tenets of colonial nationalism pose significant threats to incorporating the white female body into Afro-Caribbean culture. The women in *The Orchid House* and *Abeng*, in a sense, work as curators of a postcolonial Caribbean archive invested in tying both the scars and victories of colonial history to the spaces and bodies of the region. Reading becomes a way to recuperate the loss of value, speech and action excavated in both colonialist and nationalist projects.

Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House*: In Search of a Lost Place

Although critics have frequently grouped white writers of the Caribbean region as separate from Afro-Caribbean aesthetics that comprise West Indianness, Phyllis Shand

Allfrey falls outside of that categorization because of her interesting relationship with West Indian decolonization and labor politics. Allfrey was one of the members of the West Indian Federation and the Dominica Labour Party, and she was on friendly terms with progressive Afro-Caribbean scholars and writers such as C.L.R. James and Kamau Brathwaite (Paravisini-Gebert, *Phyllis Shand Allfrey* 226). Allfrey's biographer, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argues that the flawed classification of Allfrey's only published novel, *The Orchid House*, as a "nostalgic paean to a colonial world gone by" ("Introduction" vii) has had deleterious implications for Caribbean literary history. Surely, the canonical marginalization of her novel primarily based on Allfrey's race and her representations of whites keeps the author's complex discussions of West Indian race and gender "always relegated to the margins of West Indian fiction, to that still uncharted territory of colonial texts" (vii). As a result, Allfrey's work – her poetry and her novel – remain understudied, although Paravisini's biography and criticism of the novel have done much to correct dominant readings of her work during the 1950s and 1960s when the novel was first published.

The highly autobiographical novel is set on Allfrey's home island of Dominica and examines the life of a white family grappling with the island's changing social and political orders. The story reads entirely through the voice of the deeply loyal black nanny, Lally. The plot begins in the early 1900s when the protagonists, the three sisters Stella, Joan and Natalie, are young girls learning to live without a father who is away at war. We learn that their maternal grandfather is a doctor who has settled from England, and although the father's genealogy is never explicitly described, the narrator alludes to his family's settler status as well. As such, the girls are indeed "white" in relation to the

increasingly black and Creole population of the island. The second part of the book narrates the girls' return to the island as adults around the time of World War II and recounts their attempts to restore their place in the home country through interactions with their family members, with blacks and creoles of the community, and with political and religious leaders who influence the decisions of the nation. The novel ends with the women's departure from the island and a resolve on Lally's part to turn her attention to her own life and to separate herself from the family she had grown to love as she waits for death.

Frequently discussed in conjunction with the work of her compatriot and literary counterpart Jean Rhys, Allfrey's writing focuses more strongly on the Caribbean and the West Indian political scene than all of Rhys' oeuvre, including *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While Rhys privileges the individual psychological experience of whites in the West Indies, her representation of the social and political climate presents as merely a spectral backdrop to the characters' negotiations of space and culture in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.⁴⁷ Contrarily, in *The Orchid House*, Dominica's political climate foregrounds the narrative, influencing the characters' actions and emotional states, and driving the events of the plot.

In this novel, the relationship between the domestic and the foreign constitutes a dominant theme, represented through a number of binaries: black majority vs. white minority, women vs. men, literate vs. illiterate, indoor spaces vs. outdoor spaces, family vs. community. I argue that iterations of the foreignness of the sisters' race and gender according to these binaries are mediated through engagements with reading that are defined by the particular space of the house or home. As the novel's title suggests, the

house takes center stage in the plot. However, the orchid house, located on the family's country estate, is only one of the two domestic spaces through which the sisters acquire their personal and social identities. The house in the town, called Maison Rose, where the girls grow up, is the primary scene for reading in which we observe literary influences on their senses of self. Consequently, these literary influences extend to their involvement in the social and political scenes. The women get older and return with what appears to be an irrational and unrealistic desire to become rooted in this place that has marked them as foreign and resists accommodating them within its borders.

Allfrey's suggestion by the novel's end is that a changing cultural landscape is inevitable and necessary for the development of the predominantly black nation. Her position finds support in the fear and dread experienced by some of her characters, figures of authority in the old order who must concede to this reality. Thus, the acts of reading depicted in the novel clarify and inhabit a "sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation" (Foucault 24) of these characters' notions of the home and the nation, defined against what does or does not belong. Readers can identify a pattern in the scenes of reading, one that uses books as either a way to search for the morphology of the new social order or as a way to repair the fissures in the old.

As an agent of the intersections between reading and homes, the narrator of the story exists as the most important critic of the already decaying racial divide and the socio-political rigidity in Dominica. Lally is not originally from the island and had to learn the customs of Dominica as opposed to the white family that is rooted in that place. As such, the instability of the narrative voice in this novel proves very important, as it teeters between sympathy for the family and a critique of its behavior as the narrator

gradually pays more attention to the black community. At first, Lally absorbs the color ideology of the island and refers to Miss Stella as “the prettiest girl child I had ever seen” (Allfrey 4), revealing her inculcation into the colonial prescriptions of beauty tied to race. She also refers to the “danger of curly heads” in the Dominican society that indicates race mixture produces a class that garners less social status.

However, the black woman’s charge to articulate and interpret the knowledge and information in these white women’s lives counters the inverted discourse of racial power that Allfrey tries to set up throughout the novel. Lally notes, “Madam always used to say she was glad I was a book-taught, English-speaking Negress, who wouldn’t let bad words fall like the Zacariah family did, or even Christophine” (12). Her exaggerated performance of social protocols results in readers’ distorted perceptions of other characters in the novel. Because Lally is from Montserrat she remains outside the structure of public performance that blacks in this community share, even though she is black. The “bad words” that she recognizes as parts of speech for other black employees of the family in fact indicate the growing authority of the black and mixed race populations in the colonial setting. Lally’s resistance to the changes in linguistic and educational areas functions as the key ironic impulse of the novel and stands at the core of Allfrey’s agenda to create a more complex picture of the hazardous social effects of a racial caste system. Lally not only controls the information that readers receive of the plot’s event, but she also controls the information that other characters receive in the novel. For example, she mediates the correspondence for Madam while the Master is away at war: “I am thinking back to the time when the telegrams used to come in those war days, and when I took upon myself to open them first, so that if the worst one came I

could read it out to Madam” (Allfrey 10). Lally wants Madam to conform to a figure of fragile womanhood instead of the mother’s dominant persona in which she “always stood there so staunch and firm” (9). The nanny intercepts the communication not to be servile, but to be the arbiter of what constitutes good news and bad, what is important to the family and not. Her need to restore Madam to Victorian femininity by keeping news from her does not read as a transgression but as an entitlement. She must master the speech and knowledge of this family because she is, ideally, a part of it.

Allfrey complicates Lally’s mysterious or absent history and her lack of adaptation to the language and speech of other blacks by juxtaposing the sisters’ free and comfortable interaction with black people in their town community. Stella and Joan freely communicate with the black women in their community, buying their puppy from a dialect-speaking black woman, with neither of the parties expressing any doubt or mistrust in the exchange. In fact, it is from the white and Creole population of Dominica that the daughters experience alienation. Their family’s status in the “pure” white settler class leaves the daughters unable to participate in the inevitable integration that takes place on the island. Their education is a private matter, and they must be home-schooled in order to preserve the authenticity of a strong Eurocentric ethos. Stella senses the disadvantage when she complains, “I wish we were coloured and could go to the convent with all the coloured children” (14). The girls’ desire to be colored indicates their status as strictly outside of the Creole environment of the country, represented in a model of colonial education that they associate mostly with community rather than intellectual pursuit. Unlike their mixed and illegitimately conceived cousin Cornelia who attends the Convent with other mixed and middle-class black girls, Stella and Joan face restrictions

in the socialization that would help the entire family adjust more readily to the transformed political and material nature of the city. The aristocratic model of tutoring they experience further isolates them from the community with which they feel most comfortable.

The sisters still function as the bridge between the white class and the populous black middle and working classes despite their imposed alienation. Their continued attempts to find similarities with the blacks and coloreds embolden Allfrey's demonstration of a need to create an independent nation that incorporates all bodies borne of this place. One example is the relationship between the second sister, Joan and Baptiste, the son of one of the family's servants. As children, the two share a friendly bond through reading. Miss Joan frequently loans her books to Baptiste, which upsets and offends Lally. The nanny has invested in the strict boundaries of knowledge production that prohibits Joan from engaging in "high society" acts with a boy beneath her station. Joan and Baptiste's meetings cause further anxiety because of their location in "the dirty kitchen," which is not the place for the books that Miss Joan owns. For Lally, reading is a sacred act and books should be treated with the respect that people of Joan's class ought to demand from people like Baptiste. Lally's reaction to exchanges between Joan and Baptiste owes its intensity to the colonial division of power in which working class living spaces are not suitable for edification or erudition.

However, as a child in a predominantly black society whose members scorn and mock the white minority, Baptiste is not necessarily aware of such strict limitations on knowledge. What he does know of are the differences in taste between whites and blacks. He finds little pleasure or identification in the material that Joan loans him and asks her

for something “real” to read. Lally’s relationship to the white family makes her incapable of understanding Baptiste’s desire, reading his comment as an example of the “obnoxious” behavior common to blacks of the society. Her refusal to acknowledge a genuine friendship between the two children, her denial of the black boy’s right to learning and leisure, and her misreading of his intentions reinforce her intent to control the web of relationships within the white family and to preserve her status as judge and jury of what constitutes the nation and who should be included and excluded.

Lally again reinforces the girls’ isolation from the community, and an appetite for reading becomes the closest substitute they have for a real social life. Both Lally and their mother ensure that they are rooted in a tradition of reading, or at least the performance of a reading culture. The mother’s request that Lally “take them to the library” (Allfrey 15) is a frequent one since Madam uses the library to distance herself from her daughters when the realities of her family life are too much to bear. Lally gives some insight into the history of the library space:

Well we were heading for that library which the American millionaire had given to the islanders, and filled up with books of his own choice, but after a while Miss Rebecca who was put there to manage it, she took out a lot of the books and had them burnt or thrown in the sea, beginning with a gentleman called Tolstoy and running through all the German-sounding books during the war, and so on. But we never went there to bother about books. We went there because the library was built on the edge of the cliff, and from the library grounds you could see ships coming in, you could see horizonwards almost as far as Martinique on the left. (18)

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert explains the history of the actual library in Dominica that Allfrey fictionalizes, built with a donation from Andrew Carnegie. She cites the library's presence as not only a factor in promoting literacy, but also "the promotion of literary production in the early years of the twentieth century" (Allfrey 19) that would lead to writers like Rhys and Allfrey. In Allfrey's rendition of the library, Miss Rebecca, the librarian, exhibits Derrida's notion of archive fever here, serving as the destroyer of certain kinds of literary history and negating the financial power of Carnegie and his construction of a literary canon with "books of his own choice." Moreover, Lally admits that the library space was not merely for reading but for the girls to look into imaginary worlds in their view of the ocean. In this description, books and ships function as the same kind of heterotopia: "the ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, "dreams dry up" and a similar parallel can be made in the girls' lives. Books and reading open up livable spaces in imagined worlds when the physical world sets them as outcasts.

However, Lally's construction of the perfect world for the girls cannot be accomplished because the family unit itself is incomplete. In a place and time where whiteness was equated with a pristine family structure and a dominant male authority,⁴⁸ the sisters' greatest weakness is belonging to a home with an absent father. The Master, as he is called, is out of the country serving in the military during World War I. Stella, the eldest daughter, is particularly sensitive to the void left by her father in her mother's life. Her desire to restore or imagine romance in her parents' relationship draws a direct influence from her reading. She foresees the distance as permanent damage to her parents' relationship, citing that "I've read lots of stories... about a princely bridegroom

who had been to battle, and a princess waiting on a rock or in a turret, combing out her hair” (Allfrey 15). In the father’s absence, the girls are critical of his behavior because he seems more strongly held to moral and social codes than to the people in the daily home life. Even as a young girl, Stella was reading to facilitate her defiance of the impenetrable personality of her father and its effects on the female-centered home. She categorizes her mother as a damsel waiting to be rescued, and her impulse is to reject that model of femininity – these women can only exist in stories. Additionally, she bases the name of their pet dog on the temperament of the father once he returns to the island. To name the dog Flanders, a heroic name in Belgian war history, is only acceptable if “Daddy wants to talk about the war, and seems proud of how he rushed around shooting down Germans and Turks.” However, the dog’s name will be Flounders “if he is rather a wreck” (13). The children never actually name the dog. After observing the father’s depressed mood, Lally chooses to mediate between them and their father in the assignation of the name: “I spoke to him kindly and respectfully and I laid the little dog at his feet. I told him that the children had bought it for him. ‘Flanders they called it, sir,’ I said” (23). Lally reads the conversation between the daughters, and readers cannot be sure if this is not another instance of her attempts to control the information that members of the family can receive. In the end, the father drops the dog out of a window to its death. Flanders has to die because the father is not a war hero; he is a war casualty.

The father’s return to the home breeds discomfort, disrupting the mood created by the group of women who occupy the space. His re-entry into their town home at Maison Rose symbolizes the break in the racially motivated power structures of the society outside of the home, as illustrated in a scene of reading. Instead of participating in the

activities of the household such as tending to his wife or playing with the children, the Master reads silently to himself. Lally's observation of his book suggests the source of anxiety represented in this act:

There was his book on the table where he had put it down. His finger, thin and white, pressed on the page to keep the place. Because he was staring at me and then at the little dog, I shifted from one foot to the other and I fixed my eyes on the book. It was French, and I cannot read French, being an English Negress, though Christophine can. I saw the title, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, but it meant nothing to me. I saw the words where his fingers pressed, and though I could not understand them, the whole look of the print, the whole feeling of something foreign on the page, in the air, made me very unhappy. (Allfrey 23-24)

Marcel Proust's novel, translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*, is an exhaustive novel chronicling a man's process of creating a narrative as he stumbles in and out of fragmented memories. The relationship between the past and the present is critical to Proust's writing but Proust is also interested in representing the way in which memory allows access to a circuit to truth.⁴⁹ The father's reading of Proust's narrative reflects the mirrored themes of his own circumstance as a man who is displaced and trying to recreate a life through memory. Lally's reaction to this scene of reading also reveals his distance from the household. As a relatively educated black woman who can read to the children and read for Madam, she has always seen herself as a privileged member of the

Dominican society and of this household. The Master's insertion of a foreign language novel is an act that distances her from the home and one she considers an act of betrayal. She says, "There's English words, I thought, which might be said tonight, and the Master sits reading a French book like a guest in the Bellevue hotel" (Allfrey 24). She is suspicious of his presence in this world of women and of his failure to communicate, which restricts her access to knowledge and her control over the family. Later, she seeks a translation from Mamselle Bousquet, whose unrequited love for the Master finds satisfaction in her tutoring of his girls. She takes the book to the teacher and explains to the reader her need to translate this French title: "I had a reason for doing this. It was not only that I was inquisitive; but Mamselle Bousquet looked so unhappy, I wanted to comfort her. I knew that it was always important for Mamselle to know what Master was thinking and doing... She had to have a hero who breathed and was a booklover like herself" (36). As a witness to the strange love triangle between the Madam, Master, and Mamselle Bousquet, Lally understands the importance of giving this woman validation in the Master's life so she creates a scenario that gives herself power and assigns Mamselle Bousquet some respectability. The woman's attempted dismissal of Lally's educational acumen when she says "I doubt you would understand," even as she translates, places both women at the margins of this family unit and more distanced from the master. Lally confirms, "as I listened to her, the words of Mamselle Bousquet and Master's mind became more and more mysterious" (36). The indecipherable nature of Master's reading practices, along with his frail psychological state, limits the women in his life and shakily restores his authority as the dominant white male. As a result, Lally must find other ways

to maintain her authority in the domain and her perceived control over the other actions in the novel.

Lally can more readily manipulate the order of knowledge in the lives of the other female characters. She reads the young sisters' writing and, through her reading, exercises her power as a critic and authority in their lives. The girls write fictional tales that are imaginary confluences of the landscape and culture they live in and the foreign lifestyle that they have learned is most suitable for their class and race. The nanny reads Miss Joan's process story "How to Rear Sisizebs" and chooses to preserve it. However, she destroys another medievalist story of whiteness and chivalry entitled "Cedric's Charge." The black woman's admission that she "tore it up, and put HOW TO REAR SISIZEBS in [her] biscuit tin" (Allfrey 25) reinforces her control over information and knowledge production in what seems to be a world in which she is reverent and submissive. Her choice to keep a story about fireflies, an aspect of Dominica's flora and fauna, instead of one that privileges racial superiority and purity, partakes of Allfrey's engagement with progressive politics that centralizes the lived experience of West Indianness -- who West Indians are now rather than who they ought to be or have been. Also, the multiple functions of the biscuit tin point to Allfrey's awareness of spatial logic in determining power relations. Lally's desire to hide writing (ready for one kind of consumption) in a site meant for food being consumed is a rich image, offering readers a sense of Lally's desire to be the arbiter of knowledge. Joan may be the producer of knowledge, but ultimately Lally determines when and how it is stored and distributed. The metaphors of digestion and consumption that resonate in Ganesh's reading acts in *The Mystic Masseur* also apply here. Lally consumes and digests the products of Stella's

imagination. Her intellectual nourishment and her subsequent withholding of that nourishment to others in her world signify another kind of displacement of the white girls to the margins of a black-centered ideology.

Stella's ignorance of Lally's reading practices reveals even more about the power dynamics at play in *Maison Rose*. As a writer, Stella longs for an audience as well and finds a place of storage she calls the "posterity hole": "She used to write poetry and stuff her papers into it. In the evening [Lally] would come and remove her writings, and next morning she would say that they had been claimed by posterity" (Allfrey 24). All three girls use the posterity hole as a waiting-room for their ideal readers who would eventually emerge in generations to come. This act implies the girls' entitlement in that society, pointing to their confidence in immutability and in a legacy that they must and can leave behind. Lally's silent evacuation of the posterity hole disrupts this legacy, or at least, filters the kinds of stories available for future generations to find. Her moderation of their place of storage of protects against going "in search of lost days" (38) as their father continued to do as his depression worsens and he withdraws into himself.

A spatial change coincides with the narrative shift from the girl's childhood to their return to the island as adults. The topological move from the *Maison Rose* to the estate at *L'Aromatique*, where the orchid house is located, signifies the change of the white family's position at the top of the social hierarchy to the margins of the country's social and political activity. The location of the estate at the top of the hill symbolizes the attempt to continue to maintain that position of authority. However, Allfrey's description of the terrain conveys the difficulty for members of the home to access the town. The land itself becomes a barrier between the family and its awareness of what happens in the

black town. Another symbol of the family's marginality is the orchid house itself. It is not in the main residence, but in an adjacent house in which all the exchange of information and emotion takes place. But that adjacent house is also Lally's residence while she is at L'Aromatique. She occupies the house by herself, and everyone must come to that space for her conversation or a comfortable place to pass time. In this sense, it is simultaneously removed from and implicated within the borders of the nation.

Fewer scenes of reading appear in the novel's sections on the women's return. The intense economic needs of the family and political needs of the community relegate their acts of reading to an exercise in privilege that misses the material realities of the social class they are now forced to embrace. However, those that are present, in addition to the women's actions in light of their childhood reading, constitute Allfrey's reconciliation of their place between the foreign and the domestic, within or outside of the culture. Their repatriation is an attempt to incorporate the family back into the nation, a failed project that suggests the dilution of pure white culture and English custom in this place. Mamselle Bousquet's residence at L'Aromatique is one instance of this failed project. As a Creole woman who is invested in a French literary tradition, rather than a British one, her inclusion in this family dynamic mollifies the exodus that the white members of the home must face. But her presence registers as Allfrey's gesture to make class incorporation inevitable. Although Lally, embodying the voice of the old belief system of the Master and Madam, remains in denial about the political protests during which Baptiste and other blacks agitate for black workers' rights, Mamselle Bousquet's presence in the home demonstrates that the family has already succumbed to the amalgamation that the colonial encounter predicates. She lives as a co-wife to Madam,

serves as her confidante and companion as the Master becomes more mentally unstable and retreats from the life of the home. Mamselle Bousquet also adopts a unique role on the estate as the one who “chose the special books from the library for Master” (Allfrey 42). Her selection of his leisurely reading stimulates a method of restoring his sanity, of taking him out of “crisis” as she calls his shellshock. Reading, at this point in the master’s life, becomes another livable place in which he can possibly find healing, a sanatorium of sorts.

Mamselle’s move to L’Aromatique increases her commitment to the family, but it also diminishes her interest in French culture and in her own education. The teacher, who “had gone to Paris to finish her education,” was an avid reader of nineteenth-century French poetry and imposed her aspirations of the language and culture on the girls in their early education. Stella recalls her recitations of Baudelaire in the following scene:

“... I would hear you saying, *Les captifs ... agissent en vains leurs ailes impuissantes* – Baudelaire, do you remember?”

“Guy de Maupassant,” said Mamselle promptly and shortly, glancing sideways at Madam. “I don’t recollect reading you children any Baudelaire.”

“...Ah! How often that came into my head ... without thinking of this place! Oh, don’t you ever read those wonderful poems, ever again, these days?”

“I haven’t the temperament for poetry now. Before I retire, I recite my prayers and my rosary,” said Mamselle.” (60)

Stella reveals herself to recreate the landscape of Dominica in her imagination while she is away living in New York. Again, literature functions as a portal into an inaccessible real world, or an acceptable substitute for it. Stella's recollection of the Baudelaire poem, "Parfum exotique" is a gesture to the broken state of her family in the island's new political and social structure. More importantly, Mamselle admits to a passive submission of her failures in her rejection of poetry in her new role at L'Aromatique. Her claim to have given it up for the rosary signals she has no livable place of happiness, except in a spiritual world. Mamselle's attachment to a French literary tradition rather than a British one is also significant in this scene. Lally suggests that Mamselle Bousquet is of French origin, referring to French as "her own language" (Allfrey 36). Her travels to France for formal education and her subsequent move to teach French on the island can be attributed to another kind of desire for an alternate place of identification. Allusions to the French literary texts in the novel constitute Allfrey's deliberate invocation of the history of French occupation in the West Indies that contribute to the Creole society in which the characters of *The Orchid House* participate. The readings of Baudelaire and Proust, whose metaphors of pastness frame the characters' nostalgic sensibility, insert a history of the French's influence on attitudes about place in the novel's current political conflicts.

The remainder of the novel does not revolve much around acts of reading as much as it is influenced by the girls' realization that the acts of reading of their childhood provided no real solution to the problems of their lived experience, on the island or abroad. Stella's murder of her father's drug supplier Mr. Lilipoulala further alienates the family from the religious community represented by the strict figure of Father Toussaint. Joan's return makes her an idealist politician who thinks she can appropriately and

adequately speak on behalf of the black working class. She implicates Baptiste in this unionizing activity, but her ability to read literary and political books does not equip her with the signs to read the social landscape and the effects that her entitled actions would have for Baptiste, who is permanently tied to the island and has no resources to leave.⁵⁰ She unconsciously manipulates his own adherence to social hierarchy in his admiration for her and entrusts him with the education of her son, Ned. However, the failed unionizing project, intercepted by Father Toussaint, reveals that despite their idealism, Baptiste and Joan will continue to have a limited and limiting relationship under the social order of race and class. Although a less visible character, Natalie may be the only daughter who is realistic about the family's inability to function as part of the Dominican nation. She uses her money to buy her parents the estate at L'Aromatique, recognizing that as whites, their poverty would bring them more ridicule than wealth in that community. She also insists that the "silly worldly talk" (Allfrey 166) of the island is dangerous. Her wealth allows her to defy a need for rootedness as she says, "I'm here and I'm there – space means nothing to me" (167). She facilitates the women's exit from the island, and Lally admits "there's always a lot of sense in what Miss Natalie says" (178). By the end of the novel, Lally's belief in the incompatibility of the white family with this island is reinforced, but for different reasons than at the novel's beginning. Unlike her old view of the family's respectability, Lally recognizes that the origins and complicity of this family in creating the social mess that persists among the blacks makes the island incompatible to integration.

Lally's act of storytelling itself recuperates her knowledge of the island that had been sacrificed in her nourishment of this white family. She apologetically reflects that:

When you are working for white people whom you love, you can only think of those people and their wants, you hardly notice anything else. I did not even pay any attention to my own people, the black people, in those days, but now I am observing them and seeing what is happening to them. I am seeing how poor they are, and how the little babies have stomachs swollen with arrowroot and arms and legs spotted with disease. (Allfrey 7)

The pangs of regret in her tone counter the tone of her self-characterization during the girls' childhood in which she is frequently scornful of and distant from the blacks around her. Her atonement of sorts repeats itself at the end of the novel when she dismisses the family and says, "Then I turned to the holy book to teach Miss Joan that I, too, had my wider reaches beyond the family" (185). Even though she has misread her place in this family and her relationship to the black community for most of her life, Lally's reading of the Bible positions it as another kind of heterotopia, a transcendent and inevitable place to reside in which she can find redemption for her once-distorted view of this world.

Redefining Foreignness: Reading in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*

While Phyllis Shand Allfrey's work remains relatively unknown, Michelle Cliff is best known for her novels' depiction of the collision of nationalism, revolution and a distinct brand of feminism, disrupting normative social views of sexuality and race. Her most popular *No Telephone To Heaven* "explicitly thematizes revolutionary political action through a female protagonist" (Edmondson, *Making Men* 126). That female

protagonist, Clare Savage, begins her fictive journey in Cliff's first novel and the prequel to *No Telephone, Abeng*. Set in the late 1950s when Phyllis Allfrey is living, working and writing about the changing political climate, *Abeng* recounts a year in the life of the twelve-year-old, mixed race Clare, who learns life-changing histories about both sides of her family. While Michelle Cliff's first novel is often read in close conjunction with *No Telephone to Heaven*, and while the discourse of political revolution central to the plot of *No Telephone* undergirds much of the action in *Abeng*, I see many clear distinctions between these two novels. The Clare Savage of *Abeng* bears qualities worth discussing separately from the Clare Savage in the sequel. One of the most important forms of characterization that Cliff relies on in *Abeng* is intellect, a quality that ends up failing the Clare of *No Telephone* in important ways.⁵¹ Clare is an "epistemological paradox" in *Abeng*, especially to herself. Because of the borders she can cross, and also because of her stage of development (she is only twelve years old during the main action of the novel), her social and psychological development often takes shifting, unpredictable forms.

Unlike the characters in the novels I discussed in the previous chapter, Clare Savage does not use reading as a form of identification or misidentification with British citizenship or culture. Clare is constantly made aware of her difference from other people, a *buckra*. But the confusion of living as a "white" girl in Jamaica with roots in a black family with native Amerindian ties leads her to books as a way to resolve the confusion that Simon Gikandi has called a type of schizophrenia.⁵² According to Gikandi,

each of these symbolic spaces makes certain demands on her; they also represent certain ideological systems in contestation and underscore the set of differences which mark her life. When Clare tries to overcome the differences and divisions that define her world, she finds that the only avenue for this form of transcendence is the imaginary; but the imaginary also distances her from the historical contexts she has tried to master. (Gikandi 250).

Although I will also discuss the reading practices of other characters, my aim here is to show that for Clare, reading and books are associated with either a paternal white, maternal colored or alternate undefined legacy. The juxtaposition of home spaces with acts of reading emphasizes how marginal bodies escape the entrapment of the domestic by embracing the foreign. The social structures or institutions, defining either the domestic or the foreign category, change throughout the novel depending on Clare's geographical location or psychological state. However, the social effects of race and gender frequently destabilize definitions of what or who belongs to the foreign or the domestic.

In many ways, Annie John and Clare Savage may have crossed paths in the fictive crossroads of Caribbean girlhood. While both girls use reading as a method of transgression, Kincaid's representations of Annie are rooted in tracing ownership through a European discourse of knowledge and intellectualism. Cliff establishes an Africanist presence in the text. Annie John's pursuit of knowledge through reading is unbounded or more abstract. While she acknowledges the limitations of physicality, she chooses not to live by or through those limiting standards. Cliff's representation of Clare's reading

habits stresses the impossibility of escaping the physical body in any pursuit of intellectual freedom. The role of the limited omniscient narrator in the unique narrative structure is to account for the lack of Jamaican-African history in Clare's knowledge by providing this information to the reader of *Abeng*. Despite many points of similarity between *Annie John* and *Abeng*, the two authors position themselves at seemingly opposite ends of a canonical spectrum – highbrow and grassroots.

Abeng's presentation as a history textbook, or a kind of narrative history, immediately frames Clare as a reader of her family and national history via the lessons of the narrator. At the beginning of the novel, the story of the Savages reads as subordinate to, or a case study of, the history of Jamaica, given the family's relationship to the country's past of slavery and colonial domination. The narrator also inserts examples of Jamaica's black revolutionary history, privileging the heroes and concepts of rebellion that have become part of Jamaican cultural iconography. In her presentation of the revolutionary discourse, the narrator pairs instances of cultural signification with discussions of the geography and physicality of the Jamaican landscape. Any attempt at social belonging by the characters must be resolved through a battle with some element of the physical spaces they occupy or want to inhabit.

The novel begins with a declaration that "The island rose and sank. Twice. During periods in which history was recorded by indentations on rock and shell. This is the book about a time which followed on that time. As the island became a place where people lived. Indians. Africans. Europeans" (Cliff 3). Clare Savage, who is a descendant of all three groups, simply observes and studies of this historical progression for the first few chapters of the novel.⁵³ Additionally, readers' knowledge of her entrapment between

three kinds of spiritual or religious communities – the blanched Anglican elite, the Pentecostal Black church, and, later, her grandmother’s black feminist home-church – frames our understanding of her confinement as a child and a member of her class, while implicating Euro-Christian philosophy in colonial conquest and its ensuing social consequences. More importantly, the narrator’s explanations of Jamaica’s racial history and genealogy point necessarily to the racial and cultural makeup of Clare’s family. The perceived purity of her lineage and its damaging consequences on her young life highlight Cliff’s suggestion that Jamaica’s social and geographical makeup are incompatible with any notion of purity that works towards domination and exclusion of black or colored bodies. The conflicts in her physical environment present, simultaneously, the idea that racial authenticity, whether white or black, is a flawed concept when the formation of this regional culture is fully understood.

The symbol of the house is an important metaphor for the events in Clare’s life as well as the events in Jamaica’s history. Focusing on the role of the house and its relationship to Clare’s education warrants a consideration of Derrida’s definition of the archive as a space of residence and consignment. An archive is simultaneously a place that houses history (as in residence), but also a space in which history is created by the reading of signs in residence. In *Abeng*, houses or home spaces perform both functions simultaneously. Cliff aligns the symbol of the house with stages in individual and national development. Houses and homes become symbolic of stages in Clare’s development as a woman and as a person who comes to understand the colored part of her identity. Distinct home spaces exist. The great house of her father’s family represents the loss and the reliquary of a fallen legacy. Then, Miss Mattie’s house in St. Elizabeth

becomes a gateway to an alternate history – one that seems to be hidden from her on many levels – and a house in which she begins to understand her desire to understand or escape the confinement of her white world and the possibility of freedom in a black one. Miss Beatrice’s house stands as the home of the “benefactor” to whom Clare gets banished. This home brings the reader to the culmination of events in the novel that situates Clare as a woman in a house in which she must admit her racial makeup and officially become a woman.

Literary encounters in the novel cover multiple literary genres and periods and link closely to residential spaces that Clare occupies. First, Greek and Roman classics, as handed down through the Savage family, signify the Savage family’s stake in maintaining an appearance of pure white authority. Clare’s father keeps copies of these classics handed down from the grandfather who reads extensively. Clare herself ends up owning the family copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Moreover, within the context of her colonial education, Clare reads the staples of Victorian and Romantic literature, including Dickens, Wordsworth and others. Additionally, twentieth-century minority literature provides imaginative exploration and rebellion for Clare and other characters, and reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* becomes Clare’s most important textual engagement in the novel. The reading of classics done by the Savage men stands in contradistinction to Clare’s progressive reading. Other characters who read actually provide important support for the symbiotic relationships between the act of reading and identity politics tied to a physical place. The relationship between reading and the home has three main categories in the novel. Clare’s connection and identification with her father is defined by a reading practice that is classical and canonical. Her desire to connect with her mother

emerges through a resistant, what might be considered foreign, literary interest. By the end of the novel, Clare's inability to bridge the gap between these two textual worlds is effected through an intertextual engagement with Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Gayatri Spivak reads Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a confrontation of the imperialist and feminist politics of *Jane Eyre*. The Victorian narrative's image of "othered" female madness inextricably links itself to the physical unknowable and uninhabitable space of the West Indies. Rhys gives the landscape a face through her writing of Antoinette and through the voice of Christophine, while stripping the white male figure of legitimacy in the reversal of the imperialist soul-making project. Cliff, in turn, adopts Rhys' narrative and thematic concerns to re-constitute soul making according to a postcolonial logic. Cliff's rendering of Clare Savage in *Abeng* complicates a question of origin that she sees informing networks of power in West Indian society. By depicting Clare as curator of a new Jamaican history, Cliff herself functions as a curator of Caribbean literary history that repairs the wounds and gaps between Eurocentric history and Afrocentric culture. Cliff attempts to construct a history of Jamaica's physical landscape that pre-dates or is at least autonomous from colonial narratives of domination. Her narrative structure interrupts the distorted accounts of history represented by characters like Clare's father, Boy Savage.

Clare's father presents the first instance of an investment in reading in the novel. He embodies contradictions, invested as he is in the performance of propriety but with a not-so-secret licentious lifestyle outside his home. He appears a studied man to his daughter, one who can lecture with ease on philosophy or science. For example, his analysis of the earth's formation combines mythical and natural history, and his

understanding of the ancient world derives from his knowledge of Plato's *Timaeus* (Cliff 9). Boy Savage takes interest in the landscape and geography of Jamaica but remains invested in the cultural aspects of European inheritance. Mr. Savage wants to "buy into the past" (24) in a similar way that the narrator describes the contemporary tourist culture that has taken the place of colonial consumption of the Caribbean. Boy has an interesting mixed heritage, so he wants to groom his daughter to be the perfect colonial (not a colonial copy), to successfully perform a purist history of whiteness in Jamaica, a rather impossible feat she can never achieve. To this end, Cliff situates him in an interesting engagement with Western Classical literature. His investment in origins points to a desire to correct the impurity and transgressions in his own family history. The fact that he is "fascinated by myth and natural disaster" (9) suggests that his reading interests help him explain away the "imperfections" in his family history through a metaphorical battle with Jamaica's physicality. The source of Boy's anxiety about race comes from his great-grandfather, the last son in a family under rules of primogeniture, which meant he had no real inheritance. Boy clearly internalizes this inferiority complex and uses Clare as a way to recuperate the entitlement that his family should have had but never actually did. Clare becomes the subject of the tradition of primogeniture as prescribed by her father's family. Her personal time and conversations with her father intend to educate her in her proper history, through it is not clear whether he wants her to privilege the Jamaican life or the European life.

Michelle Cliff accounts for and works to correct the absence of slave history from Clare's own education as part of the Savage family through her narrative voice: "The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the

years a carefully contrived mythology was constructed, which they used to protect their identities. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted” (Cliff 29). In her sardonic description of the Savage life, Cliff emphasizes the use of literary knowledge as a way to offset the downward spiral of the family fortune and reputation. The Savage family’s desire to “forget about Africa” (30), either in their involvement in the slave trade, their profits from the use of slave labor, or their sexual transgressions and procreations through abuse of slave women, drives Boy to behave in the ways he does with Clare.

In addition to the Greco-Roman literary tradition, the Savages participate in another conversation of racial exceptionalism via their reading practices. The clan’s genealogical narrative is likened to that of the United States’s founding fathers, and the family’s role in Jamaican history compared to the success of these men in the American Revolution. Like other slave owners of the West Indies, Boy’s grandfather Jack participates in an intellectual discourse based on his reading of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson: “he thought along the lines of Jefferson and Franklin, the founding fathers of a free society of white men – both of these, Virginian and Yankee enlightened thinkers, had written letters and tracts warning about the danger to the white race once Black blood mingled with it” (38). The work of these authors surely contributes to the anxieties surrounding race mixing and a race war. Anxiety about race mixing becomes most evident in the Savage family’s obsession with genealogy throughout the novel, an interest that provides the foundation for the plot. The impulse in every Savage generation to write and repeat a pure story of the family legacy attempts to re-order the events of history, replacing blood legacy with literary and cultural legacy.⁵⁴

To be a Savage meant that one would have the privilege of writing the texts – literary, cultural, historical – that future generations would read. To be a Savage is to be a storyteller of an imagined history. On a more literal (literary) level, the tracing back of the family tree to a generous critic of *Paradise Lost* illustrates how members of the family deflected attention away from racial history and replaced it with literary or cultural ascension. The Savage family’s desire to authenticate its place in Jamaican social hierarchy by exerting racial purity and superiority goes far back in the family tree, with the example of Jack. The replacement of racial tensions and decaying power with literary achievement discloses itself when Jack returns to Jamaica and finds that the family plantation, including the great house, is losing money and falling apart. At this discovery, “Jack became disheartened when he contemplated what his life meant in terms of his future, and he established his life into a daily pattern: leatherbound copies of Ovid and Plato, beside crystal decanters of rum” (Cliff 31). Clare’s great-grandfather found comfort in the stories of the classic texts, presumably focused on ideal humanism, as a way either to help him plan for or escape a future of impending ruin. At the moment of his ruin when anger and temper have contributed to his demise, he likens himself to Achilles. Clare’s father believes in the world of the supernatural and has aligned himself with a distorted spirituality that has convinced him of his own exceptionalism, one that replaces the decadence of the family’s reputation in Jamaica over time. Re-imagining the Savage genealogy through the spiritual and intellectual also fosters his confidence, and he ensures that Clare understands white entitlement as her rightful inheritance as well. He entrusted her with these historical narratives because “she was a true Savage, he assured her. Her fate was sealed” (Cliff 45).

However, it is not just Boy's stories to his daughter that pique her interest and prompt her critical reading of herself and her family life. Her visit to the Runaway Bay Plantation, the Savage family's colonial property, brings many questions to the surface. At the time Clare and her father visit, Runaway Bay is in ruins, signaling the degradation of the family and explaining why "Mr. Savage was caught somewhere between the future and the past" (22). Clare's ruminations on the great house and its past carry over into her notions of England as learned through the world of reading: "Jamaica was the 'prizest' possession of the Crown, she had read in her history book" (36). A sign outside the property that says "Paradise Plantation" means to attract developers to buy the land, including the great house. This sign placed in front of the decrepit house juxtaposes the history of colonial occupation with its postcolonial equivalent, tourism, as we find out that the property will eventually be converted into a vacation resort. As Clare wanders through the house, her perception of the world and of her family history is transformed. She first observes the physical structure of the home, which "had seemed so small, Clare thought. Broken down. The house was not at all what she expected. It was as though she had wanted to be a time machine rather than a relic. A novel rather than an obituary" (36). The description of a novel as a livable space recurs in this scene when Clare's immediate textual association of this house is to Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. In the Dickens novel, the protagonist Pip has a similar reaction to the objects he encounters in the house of his benefactor, Miss Havisham. Left to navigate a room in the house on his own and in the dark, Pip becomes apprehensive as he recalls ghostly images that the objects in the room evoke (Dickens 55-56). Clare's characterization of the house as a relic parallels Pip's own analysis of Miss Havisham's home as a place where "waxwork

and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me” (56). Cliff’s intertextuality with *Great Expectations* reveals how Clare must confront the history of her race, heritage and her future alliance alongside her reading of this novel.

Her knowledge of England, as symbolized in this great house, evolved entirely through books – history or fiction – and underwent regulation in the colonial classroom. Her desire to live in the world of Pip with a benefactor premises itself on an image of England as vibrant, full of action and mystery. The house in which she stood (because it recalled the book she read with the deathly image) killed that vision, and, therefore, “She didn’t need the house, now she had seen it. If it burned only the stories she knew would be left” (Cliff 37). This visit limns a great moment of conflict for Clare, who cannot yet deal with the disappointment of her history (or her family’s) and chooses instead to keep the literary history of England rather than replace it with the stories of the white women and children in an aged picture she finds at the house: “She began to confuse the ladies on the paper with the women in her past. . . . Clare assumed that the women who lived in the great house were as white as the women on the paper” (33). Her conflation of the European women with the “white” women of her family ushers in confusion for Clare. She wants to believe in the whiteness of her family according to her father. But she remains perplexed and suspicious about the decline of the associated symbols of whiteness: they do not match the symbols as they appear in the great English novels. Clare is not sure whether to define her own whiteness according to fact, truth or fiction. She reads the historical accounts that exist in her paternal family suspiciously. After her visit to Runaway Bay, “She sometimes imagined that the walls of certain places were the records of those places – the events which happened there. More accurate than the stories

of the people who had lived within the walls” (Cliff 32). Clare’s inability to trust the stories suggests that she wishes to uncover an archive that does not replace or erase the sordid histories of Jamaica. She wants to unbury the past and lay it bare for her own comprehension.

An important example occurs when she and her father engage in a reading and discussion of Walter Scott’s 1819 novel *Ivanhoe*. Boy Savage’s racial and ethnic prejudices come through, and the truth forces Clare to question her father’s credibility as the historical and moral authority in her life. Additionally, this scene of reading Scott foregrounds or preempts Clare’s private reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. *Ivanhoe* symbolizes racist and sexist confinement, while *The Diary of Anne Frank* and other female narratives of the Holocaust function as narratives of escape and liberation. Her father’s Anglo-Saxon Christian stance and his implied stance as a Nazi sympathizer prompt Clare to question him in a way she had not done before. He had always been the source of the final answer to all sorts of confusion or contradictions resulting from her formal education. Clare sees Rebecca as the heroine of the narrative, but Boy’s belief in the concept of ethnic purity and genealogy leads him to the opposite conclusion. Because his reading of the Scott text is filtered through a racist lens, Boy is convinced that “Rebecca’s flaw is that she is Jewish – she is a beautiful flawed woman; and *Ivanhoe* is frustrated in his love for her. Of course she cannot help what she is” (72). Boy Savage’s observations about characters with tragic flaws will later apply to his own daughter, whose trace of white blood will be the constant source of failure and tragedy for her in Jamaican society. Boy’s literary analysis of *Ivanhoe* opens a wound for Clare as she becomes more certain in this conversation of her father’s failures to see humanity beyond

racial affiliation or even to acknowledge the “tragic flaw” of mixed blood in his daughter and in himself. Keeping the story of Anne Frank in the back of her mind, “Clare then became a visualizer rather than an analyzer of the Holocaust” (Cliff 76). She challenges Boy to become part of a novel’s fictional world in which he was to make a decision for or against Hitler’s commands, and “all she wanted was for her father to say that he wouldn’t be a coward and that he would be brave” (74). But his failure in that moment makes her not only doubt him but God and his ultimate authority.

The *Ivanhoe* scene not only marks a shift in Clare’s relationship with her father but also marks a narrative shift in the novel, one that moves readers from the Savage clan and home to the house and family history of her maternal line. Because Clare lived in a society in which “the worst thing to be – especially if you are a girl – is to be dark” (77), her interactions with girls of color in her Kingston school stayed limited. Going to her grandmother’s home in St. Elizabeth for the summer gave her the opportunity to be part of Jamaican society rather than above it, or at least to observe “real” Jamaican society even when she could not participate. The acts and scenes of reading associated with Clare’s exploration of her mother’s life and bloodline in Jamaica connect to this family home in St. Elizabeth either directly or indirectly. Cliff brilliantly relates Clare’s intellectual move through her reading and knowledge in order to arrive at the text of freedom and redemption in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I quote this long scene to draw the reader’s attention to this transformation of Clare’s alliances:

She knew *The Diary of Anne Frank*. She owned a paperback copy she had bought herself. It sat on the shelf over the bed, along with *The Last Days of Pompeii* and

Ivanhoe, given to her by her father; the copy of *Treasure Island* she had won at prize-giving at school – in her white eyelet dress and black patent leather shoes she shook the hand of the woman mayor of Kingston, a dark woman, who said, ‘This is a wonderful book’; *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, favorites of her mother; *Great Expectations*; Delisser’s *White Witch of Rose Hall*; and her great-grandfather’s copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which the gods transformed mortals into cattle, constellations, spiders, swans. Among this small collection was *The Diary of a Young Girl*, bent in at the spine, and partially hidden by the red leather of *Ivanhoe* and the brown cloth of *Treasure Island*. She was the daughter to whom books were given. (Cliff 68)

This significant scene orients the reader to the modes and exchange of knowledge production in Clare’s world. First, very little reference is made of Clare’s sister Jennie, a darker-skinned girl who does not inherit the intellectual estate of her family. This disinheritance is especially true of her father’s side of the family, seeing that Boy’s adherence to the logic of primogeniture and purity meant that his love for his daughter could not supersede her skin color or second-birth status. Also, the listing of works that Clare owns elucidates her entrapment between the tensions of her parents’ history, one of the oppressor and one of the oppressed. Her mother’s reading influences come from Victorian novels that, in Jamaica, form colonial education. Kitty Savage’s reading choices also show a penchant for the female hero figure. Her father’s (and great-grandfather’s) turn to the great classics speak to themes of greatness, power, ‘transforming mortals into cattle,’ just as through slavery and slave owners like the

Savages have dehumanized blacks in Jamaica in a way that makes the Savages 'greatness' seem natural or anointed. Additionally, the image of Narcissus, as presented in *Metamorphoses*, implies the mirror imagery of the Self as Other that ironically informs the Savage family's fashioning of identity. Only Clare self-reflexively searches for an Other in her selfhood. However, just as for Narcissus, the result of this recognition is not enlightenment but despair.⁵⁵

Moreover, Cliff emphasizes Clare's racial authority and social power with a financial act: "She owned a paperback copy she had bought herself." Clare's interests in reading becomes even further complicated by her purchasing power. She can buy her own books, an important gesture of privilege that is not represented even in a progressive or transgressive novel like *Annie John*, where Annie must borrow from the library. Clare's class and color change her ability to participate in activities of exchange and signal her elevated place in the social hierarchy. Purchasing books at twelve years old gives her the kind of autonomy associated with a masculine domain of cultivating the gentleman scholar. This purchasing power exists for Haynes in *Minty Alley* and Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur* but not for Annie in *Annie John*. Clare's class and color privilege manifest in her ability to buy books in the late 1950s. Although her father may be broke, she can still perform such a significant classed act, ensuring that blacks in her community will continue to define her wealth by her skin color.

The engagement with Anne Frank's diary sets up many other iterations of Clare's agency in the novel. The narrative voice of *Abeng* frequently limits readers' access to her thoughts, and even though she is the subject of discussion, she very rarely speaks herself. However, her reading and interpretation of Anne Frank's writing against other books she

reads and against the events of her own life illustrates how she negotiates her place in the domestic sphere even in a body that is somehow always foreign to any space she occupies. She reads *The Diary of Anne Frank* against the film version and makes what might be considered qualitative judgments about her comparative reading. She skips school to see the film, which symbolizes her abandonment of the colonial curriculum as an adequate educational model. Clare experiences a similar moment of awareness as does Annie John, who recognizes her growth and mortality through the symbol of death. Anne Frank becomes the gateway into that awareness for Clare (Cliff 68-69). The story of Anne Frank causes her to search for answers to her own history. Her reading of the book's cover indicates this change: "Clare recognized the sweetness in that face, although she never named it as such, and often when reading the diary she would shut the book, her forefinger marking the place, to stare at the face of the writer of the diary and wonder about her and what if she had lived, had survived, and why did they kill her?" (68). Anne Frank's diary is non-fiction and the autobiographical context of the book offers Clare identification with the girl-author, who was almost the same age. Reading the published diary produces more palpable fear and anxiety than her imaginative escapes to fictional worlds like that of *Great Expectations*. Her interaction with the cover brokers only one way in which Clare establishes the virtual dimensions of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This scene gives evidence, as Iser notes, that

The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect [her] own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be

different from [her] own... Thus, we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of [her]self in order to experience a reality which is different from her own. (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 57)

Also, the death of her classmate Claudia who dies of “cancer of the blood” is another association with death that draws Clare to Anne Frank’s diary. Claudia’s leukemia becomes an extended metaphor encompassing Clare’s relationship to the world and makes her equally at risk for social and physical death, especially when her maternal grandmother reminds her that “no one is too young to die” (Cliff 69).

Clare also reads the diary against another life-writing work of the Holocaust, *I Am Alive*, by Kitty Hart. This memoir is the holocaust survival story, unlike Anne Frank’s, that not only gives Clare a renewed hope in humanity but also leads her to re-evaluate her relationship with her mother. Clare becomes attracted to the book because the protagonist shares a first name with her mother, Kitty Savage. But this memoir also focuses on female agency, “women who when they were able looked out for one another” (76). Although she had the real pictures of Anne Frank and Kitty Hart as real life victims of the Holocaust, imagining the events of that horrible time were equally inventive for her. “Without thinking that these places were already inhabited with people the society had discarded, she filled her imagined camp with people like herself. People like her mother. People like Kitty Hart and Anne Frank. People, she told herself, who had no right to be there. In all of this she didn’t really think of the people who were actually there” (Cliff 76). Replacing the people in the Holocaust with characters from her own life re-scripts the narrative of that tragedy, both literary and literal. Clare’s re-peopling of the heroes of

the Holocaust with real women in her life appears to be her own reconfiguration of soul making. She repositions the woman as the center of the experience, making her simultaneously victim and heroine of the Holocaust through Anne and Kitty respectively.

Clare does not imagine herself residing in the fictitious setting of *Jane Eyre* as Annie does in *Annie John*. She identifies more closely with a contemporary, lived experience, which makes her an anti-colonial reader. She resists the registers of colonial discourse as she tries to work through the difference between the inaccessible events of her education and those that could possibly happen. Her critical interest in these memoirs revolves around the protagonists' relationships with their mothers. She associates Kitty Hart's survival with her mother's ability and willingness to protect her during the Holocaust, and as a result, suspects Anne Frank's mother who is passive in the Diary, a reflection of her passivity in her daughter's life. Clare also attempts to conflate her and Frank's cathexis between mother and daughter or to reconcile her own relationship with her mother through another important gesture from Anne Frank: "Kitty – the name of Clare's mother and one of her heroines – was the name that Anne Frank had given to her diary. As if in that attic hiding-place she was writing to a friend" (80). The name Kitty becomes the unifying element among these heroines. Kitty Savage clearly takes a secondary place to Boy in Clare's life. However, Clare's reading leads her to wonder whether her mother's actions or lack of action causes the absence of information she has about Kitty's racial family history. Thus, Clare's summer visit to Miss Mattie's house, her maternal grandmother, introduces her to a different experience of reading that garners her some sense of selfhood and racial identification.

Probably the most significant person in the St Elizabeth home space is Zoe, the girl who is Clare's best friend during her summers at St. Elizabeth. Zoe can be read in many ways as the realization of her fictive or desired heroines. Clare cannot engage in the aggressive or outdoor activities of her male cousins of the same age and remains confined to the interior of Miss Mattie's house where she falls subject to the gaze of black women. Zoe and Clare's friendship builds itself around their secret escapes – real and imagined – from this confinement that attacks them: "Secrecy was something they held between themselves. Enemies was an abstract term which they usually put no face to" (Cliff 94). They are the protagonists of their shared narrative, combining the stories of St. Catherine's School and Boy Savage with Zoe's stories from her school in St. Elizabeth to form the perfect hybrid of stories in which girls of all colors get everything they want. Even though Clare's class status limits their movement in St. Elizabeth, "they had childhood – they had make-believe. They had a landscape which was wild and real and filled with places in which their imaginations could move" (Cliff 95) and in which they could fight any faceless, nameless enemy and be victorious.

Their reading extends beyond fiction to newspapers and tabloids, connecting them to lived experiences of people in the world outside of Jamaica, in Europe and the United States (102). In one scene, the girls read two stories in a newspaper: the first one reports a chronic disease that only affected young girls, and the other reports on a five-year-old Peruvian girl who gives birth to a boy. Because the girls' reading practices are structured in a way that seeks to distinguish fact from fiction, they "did not doubt that the newspaper reported fact – and this particular fact terrified them" (Cliff 103). The inevitable association of these random occurrences with their own young bodies proves at

once a source of anxiety and desire for them. While the possibility that they could be afflicted with an irreversible disease seems real to them, they approach the reading of the pregnancy story with a vigilance meant to protect their own bodies from becoming pregnant. Neither Zoe nor Clare experiences menstruation yet, and “although the writer of the article reported that in ‘tropical countries’ girls menstruated earlier than in ‘temperate countries,’ ... they were skeptical about this statement of science. But they focused their attention on the presence or absence of monthlies in the life of a five-year-old girl; neither wanted to think about the exact method by which this little girl became pregnant” (103-4). Their consequent close reading of the news reports leads them to analyze the various types of violence and abuse that are enacted on the female body. In a move that signals their desire to dismantle the history of rape and incest that was a certainty in both their histories in Jamaica and to erase the possibility that either girl could be a victim of sexualized power held by men, “the only power they had was to burn the newspaper – and that is what they did” (104).⁵⁶ In *Abeng*, Cliff renders the female menstrual cycle as an epistemological exercise akin to the production of knowledge emerging from acts of reading. Clare reads about Anne Frank’s menstruation as a moment of self-awareness, “something she had achieved” (106), functioning in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* as a “milestone in her life.” Zoe is the one who teaches Clare the details of menstruation and reading their bodies becomes a way for them to “complete these feelings of change and growth” (107). Thus, the act of burning the article that casts a dark omen on what they both imagine seems “a beautiful thing” (106) destroys a narrative that oppresses the female body. The girls exchange it for a possible narrative that empowers the body. In this way, the girls destroy the potency of masculine

power and decide, as I discuss in a later example, to reclaim the domain of men in St. Elizabeth and not just in imagined worlds.

The gendered depictions of reading scenes figures as only part of Cliff's dismantling of the colonial archive through revolution as manifested in physical bodies. The racial commentary proves equally importantly and not just because of Clare's place between races. Characters who self-identify as black or colored resist the registers of the white-male hegemony of reading and intellectualism in the colonial space. Mr. Powell is one such character who represents a different black or colonial masculinity than that which we see in characters like Haynes or Ganesh. The schoolhouse in St. Elizabeth both Kitty Savage and Zoe attend is a structure built and maintained by Mr. Powell's family. The act of constructing a space for education wields significance in this black and "red" community; members understand the value of ideological resistance. Mr. Powell asserts authority in this educational community as he "preferred the title schoolmaster to teacher" (Cliff 83), and unlike the female instructors of Clare's school, St. Catherine's, he chooses to extensively modify the prescribed colonial curriculum sent to him from the Government office.

Instead of the rote lessons of history, reading and arithmetic of the city's schools, Powell engenders resistance through a focus on literary study. His emphasis on literature rejects in part the privileging of Victorian writing that dominates Caribbean reading practices in the early twentieth century. Having traveled to New York City and been exposed as both a visitor and a writer to the culture of the Harlem Renaissance, Powell replaces Tennyson, Keats and Wordsworth with Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. Inspired by these African American artists, he has the impulse to write his own works to

include his life in Jamaica. Instead of having students like Zoe recite just the Wordsworth “Daffodils” poem, “he gave them McKay’s poetry and Hughes’ poetry and Toomer’s poetry because he wanted them to know that there had been songs by Black men which were equal to songs by Englishmen” (Cliff 90). The schoolmaster’s circumvention of an English curriculum in exchange for an African American aesthetic speaks to the diasporic nature of the project of re-cataloging the black experience. As a man who had once imagined himself as a member of the Garvey movement when African descendants would arrive back in Africa, Mr. Powell foregoes his colonial responsibility in lieu of the promise of a transnational and transcultural exchange among blacks of the world. The poetry of the Harlem Renaissance ties these students in St. Elizabeth to a world of souls and rivers “they knew and should know” (90).⁵⁷

Additionally, the emphasis on black men in Powell’s pedagogy counters the presence of black women in his personal life. In his example, Cliff’s use of intertextuality attempts to create a new narrative model that destabilizes notions of white masculinity at the head of any literary hierarchy. She depicts a figure of Zora Neale Hurston in *Abeng* as a way to draw the woman to the center of the male-dominated black tradition of the Harlem Renaissance. Powell has an intimate relationship with “this Zora” who is a pioneer among her peers, venturing to Haiti to “study *vodun* when everyone knew that Haiti was just crawling with zombies and snakes and all manner of badness.” Moreover, “the woman could write like a dream” (86), making her not only the object of Powell’s affection, but a necessary black female model that operates in the background of Clare’s world and provides a counter-balance to her life structured according to white male authority and white female resistance.

Moreover, for his personal benefit, Powell also “decorated the walls of the room with his poems, printing them in black ink with his quill pen on the backs of the daffodils drawings he had been sent over the years” (Cliff 85), pictures that were sent by the Government to help rural Jamaican students visualize the subject of the famous nineteenth-century poem that they would be made to recite without merit. Such an inscription on the back of the flower photo implies a disregard and disrespect for colonial literary orthodoxy in favor of a cultural production that repositions black bodies as the discursive center. Mr. Powell’s quite deliberate and publicly resistant reading practice serves as a model for Clare’s own possible resistance to the modes of knowledge she has received. As Gikandi points out, “Clare seeks such powers of transgression, especially in her attempts to understand the extermination of the European Jews, but at every stage of her reading and rereading, she finds it difficult to figure out how such acts happened. Since her father has been the primary mediator of her historical experiences, he is posited as the barrier to understanding” (Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo* 248). The African American literary culture Clare absorbs through Mr. Powell and Zoe function as another form of destabilizing the consignment of the Classical archive that her father has provided her. To buy into a diasporic discourse, as her mother has silently, presents a problem for Boy’s history but an opportunity for accumulation for Clare. According to Derrida, the principle of gathering together in an archive is destabilized “any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate ... or partition, in an absolute manner” (Derrida 10). While Clare disrupts one narrative, however, she can witness and participate in the collection of another set of narratives.

Clare's relationship to Mr. Powell's instructions links to a poem that symbolizes the agency and centrality of the black woman in her life and in the history of both sides of her family, not the distant image or recitation of Wordsworth's "Daffodils." The rendering of the poem "Maroon Girl" by Walter Adolphe Roberts,⁵⁸ which Cliff reprints in the text of the novel (another act of cataloging its history among other histories) highlights a number of intersections between acts of reading, resistance and archiving through the figure of the black or colored female body. In the poem itself, Roberts depicts the island of Jamaica as a black woman: "She is a peasant, yet she is a queen./ She is Jamaica, poised against attack" (Cliff 91). The subject, Jamaica, takes the offensive against detractors, occupying both a place of authority and a place of relation. In Jamaica, the black woman defies the margin-center binary, always functioning at every critical level of nation-making.

Reciting the poem in the one-room schoolhouse was the greatest event for the community of St. Elizabeth. Every year, one student would be selected to recite this poem, in lieu of the Wordsworth poem that we see for other Caribbean schoolgirls in fiction – Clare, Annie John, and Kincaid's Lucy. Zoe's recitation of the poem occurs in front of the entire St. Elizabeth community, making the act of reading a communal activity meant to incorporate those members who may be illiterate and without the advantage of an education in the schoolhouse. She makes the poem accessible to all, and "they were taken by the poem. They could recognize the poet's images and words. They knew hibiscus, mountains, forests, orchids" (91), and they did not have to feel displaced in their own home space by a vision of a daffodil that would never grow in their gardens. Her rendition of "Maroon Girl" recalls Wolfgang Iser's notion of ideation in the act of

reading. The public engagement with the text situates her as archivist, restoring a history of greatness to a community that had been scarred by the oppression of poverty. When Zoe reads “Maroon Girl,” she becomes a kind of intellectual maroon girl herself: “Their minds now cast separate images of the Maroon Girl in the poem. They saw her naked or clothed, quiet or fierce – they saw her cinnamon, as the poet wrote; or imagined her skin the nutmeg color of Zoe, who had read the poem with ‘great seriousness’ and ‘great nobility’ as Mr. Powell had coached her” (Cliff 91). Members of the community, old and young, educated or not, can practice their individual and collective analyses of the poem. In this moment, Zoe acts as the agent of a different kind of interpretive community.⁵⁹ In Clare’s life thus far, she only silently experiences an escape into the world of literature, and her resistance stays mostly imagined or desired. Her alliance remains with the figure of the oppressed white woman, and even though she can identify with that woman’s plight, suffering is still far removed from Clare’s own circumstances. In contrast, Zoe has a voice verified and validated by the community and grounded in a tradition of black writers and local history. One point to note is that while the narrator observes how Zoe reads the poem aloud to the audience, there is no insight into Zoe’s interpretation of the poem. The narrator observes that “the people dispersed and the children left for summer” (91) as if to suggest that this moment of intellectual resistance is simply that, a moment. When Clare visits, readers get glimpses of Zoe’s inculcation into Mr. Powell’s discourse. However, the events between the two girls give pause to a strong reading of Zoe as the true Nanny persona of the Maroon Girl.

This communal act of reading and interpretation, however, transforms Kitty Freeman Savage, who has participated in the tradition just as Zoe has and now yearns to

share this experience with her daughter Clare. Kitty feels caught between her desire to give her daughters a life that transcends the racial and class ridicule that she wrestles with in her own life and her urge to attack the influence of whiteness produced in and by people like her husband Boy. Her internal conflict begins in her education in that schoolhouse. As an adult, “The only English that Kitty remembered from Mr. Powell’s school was that silly poem ‘Daffodils,’ about a flower she had never seen, which he had made them learn by heart, and one of the children had coloured a deep red – like a hibiscus. The red of a flame. Kitty had been the Maroon Girl at the school in her thirteenth year, and *that* was the poem she had taken to heart” (Cliff 129). Kitty’s comparative reading of the two poems signifies her sophisticated understanding of her place in Jamaican society. Kitty and other students restore the floral image to one more suited to the climate not so much in an act of direct transgression, but as a method of meaning-making, mapping their own world experience on the imprint of the text. In fact, unlike Mr. Powell, who simply ignores most of the colonial curriculum, Kitty has the dream of one day writing a new educational program for a postcolonial Jamaica. However, her failed dreams keep her in this liminal space where she thinks that the ignorance or blindness that comes with race and class privilege might be a way for her daughter to escape (129).

Kitty also dreams of being the female version of Mr. Powell, building a school of her own “on a piece of land Miss Mattie would give her” (129). That dream is interrupted by her love for and marriage to Boy Savage. Although she rationalizes the deferring of her dream by only blaming Boy’s disgust for the countryside, the interrupted goal of becoming the female schoolmaster who authorizes knowledge in St. Elizabeth directly

opposes her husband's goals of maintaining a white masculinist intellectual hegemony. Clare, however, holds her mother accountable for her project of constructing this school just as in her interrogation of Boy in his reading of *Ivanhoe*, and she is disappointed and betrayed by the idea that Kitty succumbed to the social expectations of gender: "People said she'd been serious about her dream. But that it was, after all, only a dream, and a good-looking girl like Kitty was better off married anyway" (Cliff 130). Kitty's failure to fulfill a promise to her then-unborn daughters leads Clare to seek out another place or person to which or whom she can attribute her sense of self. That person was Zoe, and the place was St. Elizabeth, which her mother had rejected in exchange for Kingston and the promise of New York City, where she first met Boy and abandoned her pursuit of a career.

It is important to establish how it becomes possible for Zoe and Clare to find a shared language and identity – however complicated – in St. Elizabeth. The lives of Kitty, Zoe and Clare intersect through Miss Mattie, Kitty's mother. Miss Mattie is the matriarch of the novel, a direct, living opponent of and resistant to the dead fathers and grandfathers of the Savage clan. Her family descends directly from maroon slaves, and the culture of oppression inflicted on blacks by families like the Savages remains real to her who "knew the slavery which had followed on emancipation" (141). Miss Mattie's ownership and management of her father's and husband's property, her maintenance of a family unit that includes her husband's illegitimate children, her benevolence and philanthropy to other black women like Zoe's mother, and her determination to "walk for nine miles whenever there was an election" (142) so she could cast her vote situate her as the ideal resistant figure of the novel. She defies the messiness of post-slavery sexual and

labor exploitation of women, in which her distant cousin could be a “white” overseer who whipped her on the cane fields. She actively participates in the making of the nation within the psychological, social and political spheres.⁶⁰ However, Miss Mattie’s success hinders Clare’s search for identification as she is doubly afflicted by the plague of privilege.

Although their friendship is real, Zoe initially feels obliged to be Clare’s companion. Her mother’s indebtedness to Miss Mattie makes this friendship slightly coercive and one in which Clare will always have all the power, whether or not she is aware. While Zoe is constantly confronted with this reality, Clare seems to refuse the hypothesis that Zoe co-exists always as her subordinate, a parallel to Tia and Antoinette’s relationship in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, until Tia rejects their union with a stone’s throw. Clare wants to treat St. Elizabeth as a home space in which she can access an authentic selfhood, but Zoe sees St. Elizabeth (including her house that is not really hers) as a space of entrapment. Zoe’s entrapment in her black body and in this house that her mother rents from Miss Mattie perpetually reminds her of the inability to escape the structures of ownership and the “unevenness of possession” (Cliff 121) that only benefited girls like Clare. Clare’s inability to bring her hermeneutic skills of reading books to her analysis of her relationship with Zoe is clear since “she did not realize that it was only she who moved across the lines of ownership – because she was Kitty’s daughter and Miss Mattie’s granddaughter” (121). Zoe’s reading and recitation of poems like “Maroon Girl” would be the only interventions she can make in a discourse that makes her race and gender assign her to a caste rather than to a movable class position.

A traumatic rupture marks Clare's movement from the St. Elizabeth home to another domestic space that engenders more reading and interpretation. Zoe and Clare's triumph in burning the news stories about young girls ignites Clare's sense of authority and the possibility that she too could participate in the affairs of men. In an attempt to kill a wild pig, as she had seen her male cousins do, Clare steals a gun and accidentally shoots and kills her grandmother's prized bull, against the strongest caution from Zoe who at this point knows blatantly of the difference between them- black and white, privileged and poor, owner and tenant, mobile and fixed. Although other critics have sufficiently studied this scene as a revolutionary moment for Clare and one that sets up a context of revolutionary action for the protagonist of Cliff's *No Telephone*,⁶¹ I am interested in the aftermath of the shooting. In this scene, Clare learns that she does not have a home or place in St. Elizabeth. She loses the alliance of Zoe and Miss Mattie who both read her actions as an exercise in entitlement. Clare has completely misread the social constructs that play out in St. Elizabeth and errantly thinks that the shooting of a pig would be merit for inclusion. Instead, "Miss Mattie had made a judgment – that Clare was only what she appeared to be; not of Miss Mattie at all, but of Boy's side of the family. The child has no sense of country. He should be the one to punish his daughter; the girl was his child after all" (Cliff 145). Mattie denies Clare a bloodline that is directly tied to a home space – "no sense of country" – and in doing so denies Clare the ultimate birthright, her mother Kitty, the link to Mattie and St. Elizabeth. Mattie's rejection of maternal genealogy provides the impetus for Clare's acts as a writer, rather than as the more familiar reader figure. In the absence of a companion and a mother, Clare turns to Kitty, her diary, and she writes "the first entries in it since writing about the movie and

Anne” (145). She cannot have commensurability with her mother’s life and her father’s life in the real world. She must return to the world of the imagination for a comfortable, livable middle space that, ultimately, cannot satisfy her.

The act of writing in exchange for reading does not mean that Clare is either additionally empowered or disadvantaged in relation to Zoe. Unlike Tia and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is no active rejection of one against the other. Rather, distance simply accumulates between them. Neither Zoe nor Clare escapes this summer experience as a privileged or “authentic” reader of literature or of social cues. Their primary desires to understand or explain their place in St. Elizabeth hinders their vision of what they can be as friends, as opposed to how they should perform as friends. One key scene solidifies my argument here. After the bull is shot and they make their way home, the narrator recalls Zoe’s words: “Okay, man; walk safe.” Zoe knew that this was goodbye – and she hoped that Clare could stick to her word and not mention her name. Clare did not know that this was a goodbye – that was another piece of difference that came between them” (Cliff 132). While some critics may read this scene as a moment of authenticity for Zoe, one that gives her clarity that Clare cannot access because of her white blood or entitlement, this ending scene signifies not difference but sameness. Clare and Zoe similarly understand, in that moment, their place in St. Elizabeth as fixed, empowering or limiting respectively. Clare desires to be fixed to her home and to Zoe and does not imagine abandonment as a consequence for her actions in that community. In fact, she assumes her role is fixed in a way Zoe’s is not since her primary concern in the aftermath is to lie at all costs to protect her friend’s name. Such a posture reveals a misreading of emplacement for Clare as well as Zoe, since Zoe’s “hope” in Clare’s

ability to protect her is also a misreading of her friendship. She denies the common ground that St. Elizabeth provides them both in exchange for the social conventions that they have thus far identified as ludicrous in their reading of literary texts.

The final domestic space that Clare occupies is the home of Mrs. Beatrice Phillips. For a person of his perceived social stature, Boy thinks that banishing her to a benefactor a la Dickens represents the appropriate course of action. Boy's disappointment is that he had given Clare the gift of reading to teach her to conform and now she may be in danger of only learning how to resist. Kitty's only active participation in this transaction is to advise Clare to take the path of least resistance to her enlightenment, telling the girl, "There are many many narrow-minded people in the world. You have to learn how to live among them" (Cliff 151). Kitty's words prepare Clare for her immediate situation but also point to her awareness that at this historical moment, it may be impossible for a girl of Clare's circumstances to escape the entrapment of her race and gender in the fraught Jamaican society. Cliff's description of Miss Beatrice's house suggests a nod to an old social order rather than a "real" part of the contemporary Jamaican landscape:

Clare could tell that the house was old and wooden, with a slightly peaked roof, and a wide latticed verandah, on which a pack of dogs moved back and forth. It was typical in outline of many of the houses in this part of Kingston, near to Halfway Tree. The older wealthy families had lived here, until they had begun to move upwards into Barbican and the hills

overlooking the harbor – only a few, like Mrs. Phillips, stayed on, as shopkeepers, civil servants and teachers moved in and around them. (154)

Miss Beatrice belongs to a social minority – those who despised the upward mobility of the black population and resented its presence but could not afford to escape “into Barbican” to draw and enforce a new class line. As a result, Miss Beatrice remains straddled between an old desire and the new reality. For Clare, the lines between the real and the fictive are blur during her stay at this house. Her association with *Great Expectations* now becomes a reality as she becomes a band-aid for Miss Bea’s loneliness. Her father frequently asks her to consider the house her home but Clare feels more and more out of place and claustrophobic. Her only diversion is her consideration of fictive or historical narratives of girlhood escape: “she could pretend she was an Aztec princess kept prisoner by a conquistador. Or a girl whose family had died in a cholera plague, like the girl in *The Secret Garden*, who had managed to find a playmate hidden away” (Cliff 156). She relies on literary representations of confinement and freedom to remain hopeful about her future.

Clare’s act of reading in Miss Beatrice’s home reveals her acceptance of prejudice as a way of life in her culture. Her daily reading of the national newspaper to the old woman zooms in on an advertisement for a performance by the operatic singer Lily Pons in the following scene:

‘Clare read the headline to Miss Beatrice: “Lily Pons, world famous coloratura soprano to sing in Kingston...”’

“What! Read that again.”

Clare repeated the words from the newspaper.

“A colored woman! A colored opera singer! What nonsense! Didn’t that business with Marian Anderson teach them anything?”

“But Miss Beatrice... “Clare tried to explain what she knew about the opera from the teachers at St. Catherine’s. “ I think coloratura has to do with the way she sings. It doesn’t mean she’s colored.” (Cliff 157)

Miss Beatrice ignores Clare’s assertion about Lily Pons’ racial classification and continues to point to the atrocities implied in the changing color of high art. The act of misreading and misunderstanding by this colonially educated woman exposes a need to maintain origins of power in the Jamaican social scene. Her misreading of the ad leads her to misread the picture of Pons in the newspaper, and she decides, “Look at that face. It gives her away completely. That *must* be what the word means. Don’t give me any nonsense, girl. What do you know about it anyway? You’re not so pure yourself, you know” (158). Miss Beatrice asserts her authority to read race, even when she cannot read a text, and her assertion solidifies mainly in the moment that she identifies the fact of Clare’s race mixture. In this new home space, Clare remains “mixed” but mixture is not a quality of or for liberation.

The only benefit to Clare’s sojourn with Miss Beatrice comes when she learns about the old woman’s sister who allegedly “was too ambitious for herself. Surrounded herself with books. She had some inflated notions about leaving Jamaica. And she did not want to marry – carried on so about that, she nearly killed our father” (Cliff 159). Miss

Winifred, labeled as insane by her family and the people of her social group, initially functions as a character in cautionary tale for Clare. This correlation of reading, intellectualism and a sense of rebellious independence allied with madness recalls the Victorian model of white womanhood contested in literary re-fashionings of the tragic heroine figure, *Wide Sargasso Sea* being the most significant one. Cliff's reference to Jean Rhys's novel in the final scene consolidates her project to re-cast the white or whitened woman in the Caribbean space as empowered or justified rather than just doomed. To return to the scene of Miss Winifred, her crime is not in acquiring knowledge, although she clearly demonstrates to Clare that her knowledge about the *Zong* massacre and the extermination of Amerindians made her a dangerous white body given Clare's father's explanation of the order of things. Her real crime occurs in the actualization of her rebellious knowledge by giving birth to a "coon baby" as a result of her love affair with a black man. Unlike her sister Beatrice, who asserts her purity by condemning Clare's lineage, Winifred confesses that her mother is Indian, thus dismantling the discourse of racial ascension to which her family expects Clare to conform. But Miss Winifred reinforces what Kitty Savage has also taught Clare: "Only sadness comes from mixture" (164). Just like Miss Winifred, in her real life Clare can never find a home that is compatible with the conflicted and fragmented story that her physical body bears.

Instead, Clare returns to the imaginative by way of a dream that is Cliff's most explicit intertextual moment. Belinda Edmondson aptly correlates this dream scene to the scene of betrayal between Antoinette and Tia in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*.⁶² The implications of this dream for Clare's sense of homelessness have importance. This

dream acknowledges her betrayal of Zoe in the bull murder incident. But it also indicates her desire to repair that relationship. Zoe remains her only real companion, the only safe middle space between the distorted worlds that she must balance. She awakens from the dream with the true achievement important in all of her reading practices. Her menstrual cycle begins. The moment that “she touched herself with her finger and she touched blood” (Cliff 165) is the moment she abandons the urges and preoccupations of her bloodlines that have brought no reward. The discovery of her womanhood allows her to liberate herself from the search for racial stability through literary or genealogical means. By refashioning a critical scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that creates racial fracture rather than unity, Cliff puts forth two complex lines of thought. The first is the identification of Clare’s will to recuperate the loss of her friendship. The menstrual cycle signifies feminine autonomy that inheres Clare with the ability to speak and act on her own behalf, which has not been possible or successful for her throughout the novel. However, the ending is only suggestive of this new power, not indicative of it. Readers will never know if Clare has the will to act on the agency she has garnered while piecing together the fragments of her family’s and Jamaica’s history.

Another merit of this scene is the menstrual cycle’s relationship to Clare’s reading practices throughout the novel. From a feminist point of view, the act of bleeding is one kind of articulation at which Clare succeeds, when all her acts of reader response have failed. Even her writing in the diary is a closed-off gesture with no intention of having material consequences for herself or the other characters she engages. Her affective responses to reading have been incomplete or unsuccessful. Instead, “touching herself with her finger” is an attempt to write her dream of Zoe into reality. Although it is not a

book, it is another iteration of the imaginative to which she must respond. Clare's dream realizes Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture* or feminine writing, in that she "physically materializes what she is thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way, she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking" (Cixous 881). Her period is a manifestation of her potential to be a speaking, reading and writing subject in this place, the awareness that can only come through understanding Winifred, a person seemingly cast off because she does not fit the binary but completely at peace with the multiple spaces that she has and can occupy.

Reconstructing History through Narratives of Place

Because *Abeng* is set in the 1950s and *The Orchid House* was written and published during that time, it might be useful to consider the texts' relationship to the period's discourse on race, class and gender that inform the characters of these novels. While *The Orchid House* is written in the moment of political upheaval, *Abeng* is produced from a position of hindsight. Cliff is writing in the 1980s when there is enough cultural evidence that cultural modernity is not simply a product of national independence and also that black aesthetics as the governing paradigm for literary studies has been inadequate. The differing tones in the endings reflect the difference in the authors' relationship to that era.

However, a number of similarities exist between these novels and illuminate their collective function in representing scenes of reading. First, Allfrey and Cliff manipulate the structural principles of the *Bildungsroman* to accommodate a different phase in

postcolonial national formation. Instead of the traditional *Bildungsroman* form that achieves a telos in identity formation, Allfrey and Cliff present narratives of place, works that privilege spatial logic and mobility as a way to account for multivalent histories that pass through the physical Caribbean landscape. Unlike *The Mystic Masseur* or *Annie John* in which the protagonists' impulse to leave their place seems inevitable, *The Orchid House* and *Abeng* reflect the opposite impulse. Characters who must leave – whether Clare or Kitty or Lally or Joan – struggle with that decision (in fact, they want often want to stay) and see their displacement as either an act of abandonment by those around them or an act of betrayal on their own parts.

Additionally, both novels reveal the use of books as heterotopias of compensation, according to Foucault's principles. For these heterotopias, "their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault 27). The narrative voice and structure of both novels work to order a revisionist history of West Indian social interaction that makes the notion of binaries – rejection of colonialism through blackness vs. resistance of new order through racial and class oppression – appear to work against the function of a postcolonial archive. In *The Orchid House*, Lally is positioned as an ironic representation of the pull between the two barriers: the marginal white colonial group and the black dominant group. Both want the same thing, which is to keep these worlds separate. Allfrey tries to show that neither is the appropriate response. The failure to communicate between Master and Lally is one example of this challenge of living with divergent ideologies. In *Abeng*, the struggle in this divide is articulated between Clare and Zoe, who speak to each other but have difficulty in understanding or accepting each

other's words. The limitations of language in both novels point to a need at this historical juncture for a new vocabulary to define the social space of the West Indies at this in-between stage. Surely, all characters exemplified here pay a price for their reliance on "old" vocabulary to define themselves in relation to the places they occupy.

Naming in the novels is another way that Cliff and Allfrey critique the binaries of racial and gendered structure in the newly independent West Indies. The lack of a family name in *The Orchid House* is a significant gesture on the author's part to remove origins that are tied to patriarchal genealogy. Allfrey substitutes the women's identification with a name and family with their association with space and the island. In *Abeng*, naming also serves a similar subversive function. The contestation between the names Savage and Freeman in Clare's identity, and the irony embedded in each assignation, exacerbates her schizophrenic understanding of self (to again borrow Gikandi's term). Additionally, her own name Clare embodies both the irony of both racial discourses, as her father thinks he names her after a famous University hall but her mother names her after a St. Elizabeth black girl who saves her life. Reading, then, serves as a constant search for a fixed and stable sense of self that a name provides; one that grounds these characters rather than continuously uproots them.

One conspicuous aspect of the novels' treatment of reading and space is the issue of what is being read. While neither author invests heavily in having the main characters adopt a tradition of British canonical texts, the canon is present throughout. Both authors (Cliff more overtly) are in conversation with British Victorian-era writing. However, the texts in focus are from discourses outside the British canon. Particularly, *The Orchid House* calls on French canonical texts as the hegemonic discourse of choice, even when

the girls are clearly situated in a predominantly Anglophone community. Surely, one obvious explanation would be Phyllis Allfrey's own love of French literature as a result of Dominica's embattled ownership by both France and Britain, leading to the island's adoption of visibly syncretic culture, along with the island's geographical placement between two French islands, Guadeloupe and Martinique. However, reading Proust and Baudelaire instead of or alongside Dickens or Wordsworth also suggests the author's desire for an alternate origin, one that validates the multiplicity of histories on the island. Although Michelle Cliff continues to build on a tradition responding to British canonical texts, she similarly pulls from other traditions to construct the literary history that Clare engages. Like Allfrey's acknowledgement of French Romantic influence, citing Jewish, African American, Classic Greek and Roman and Jamaican folk narratives is a way to incorporate the multiple sites of participation in twentieth-century regional identity.

Examining Anglophone Caribbean literature through the character-as-reader category in *The Orchid House*, *Abeng* and other West Indian novels, thus provide new understandings of the symbiosis of politics and geography in the pursuit of cultural modernity. The tensions between exile and rootedness, informed by race, class and gender politics, recur not only in the kinds of stories that West Indian authors choose to tell, but how those stories are received in and outside the region itself. In the coming chapters, I analyze reception of Caribbean literature to illustrate how the quest for the ideal reader is constituted according to discourses governing entitlement to place.

Chapter Four
Migrating Bodies, Migrating Texts: Reading in the Caribbean Diaspora

“They wanted to show off what they had learnt to the foreigner, which explains why, when the actual stuff was being written under their noses, they could not recognize it.” –George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

“The time has come for postindustrial society to start rereading the Caribbean, that is, to do the kind of reading in which every text begins to reveal its own textuality.” –Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*

West Indian writers’ engagements with space and place emerge in a range of narrative forms in Caribbean literary history – yard fiction, bildungsroman, revolutionary narrative, narrative of place – and highlight the significance of movement and fluidity that characterizes the evolution of Caribbean geography and politics. Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s postmodern analysis of patterned movements in Caribbean linguistic and economic history explains the production of Caribbean literature as a persistent confluence of patterns, particularly the plantation concept-metaphor. In his groundbreaking work *The Repeating Island*, Benitez-Rojo uses the language of spectacle to characterize twentieth-century Caribbean literature across its numerous linguistic, ethnic and geographic registers. Responding to “the West’s idea of the Caribbean as a product of ... mistakes and inventions” (220), originating with Columbus’ mistaken trip to the Americas, the theorist suggests that the Caribbean novel is a packaged performance meant to confront Western expectations and myths about Caribbean identity. Benitez-Rojo offers an interesting way to think about how readers may engage with Caribbean literary texts, ideas that prove useful for looking beyond representation and toward the

reception of West Indian narratives outside of the geographic parameters of the archipelago. To him, Caribbean literature is

a discourse that, as well as being scenographic, is double in itself: a supersyncretic discourse. This discourse speaks to the West in the terms of a profane performance and, at the same time, it speaks to the Caribbean in the terms of a ritual performance; it has scientific knowledge on one side and traditional knowledge on the other. The ordinary non-Caribbean reader registers only the profane reading, although he usually gets a glimpse of “something more”; the Caribbean reader sees both.... It is this scenographic (public) cross-dressing ability that leads me to think that the Caribbean text is, like the Caribbean reader, a consummate performer. (Benitez-Rojo 221).

In my previous chapters I have shown how analyzing characters as readers may help reveal the various types of performance involved in reader response for Caribbean subjects across class, race and gender.

However, all the novels studied thus far have centered on the geographical space of the Caribbean. What happens, then, when the island repeats itself in the metropolitan spaces and contemporary Caribbean writers in the diaspora attempt this performance? Further, what happens when the definition of “Caribbean” gets absorbed into diasporic or metropolitan conceptions of identity? What shape can this performance adopt to accommodate the traditional knowledge of the region and a new knowledge that includes the migratory patterns of Caribbean peoples in the postcolonial moment? Reading

practices of such narratives seem to lend themselves most readily to changes in the global and technological impulses of contemporary society. I explore these implications of reading the Caribbean in a contemporary diasporic context by investigating, as an illustration, the reception of a critically acclaimed and immensely popular novel from England.

In 2007, Great Britain celebrated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire. The commemoration of the complex history of slavery, the slave trade, colonialism, and migration signaled for British citizens – born and naturalized – a cultural milepost in the incorporation of racial and ethnic identities into the whole of British cultural identity. In one of the anniversary’s celebratory gestures, one that coincided with national attention to literacy, readership, and education, the country embarked on a national reading campaign, its central text being the fourth novel of a Black woman from London named Andrea Levy. This novel, *Small Island* (2004), became for Great Britain a metaphor for its arrival at an epochal moment in its aspiration toward multiculturalism. In choosing the novel as the focus of a national reading campaign about Great Britain’s self-representation, the sponsors (the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts Council England) may have wished to join the history of British colonialism and participation in the slave trade and in slavery with a newer, progressive image of a comfortably diverse Britain. A text like Levy’s migration novel about the settling of Jamaicans in Britain in the mid-20th century could then point to the progress the British had made toward celebrating this diversity if all readers of the novel could understand what exactly the *Empire Windrush* had to do with the transatlantic slave trade. To facilitate readers’ journeys through the historical novel, the national reading campaign

made smart use of a website designed to make certain conceptual connections available to those participating in the reading project.

The *Small Island Read* website, established in 2007, used the novel as the pocket guide for revisiting the history of slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire. The website published this justification for its literary choice:

2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill and *Small Island Read 2007* was part of a wider national initiative commemorating the ending of the trade and exploring slavery's continuing influence upon multicultural Britain. The novel *Small Island* was chosen not only because it is an entertaining and enjoyable read but also because it provides an insight into the initial post-war contact between Jamaican migrants, descendants of enslaved Africans, and the white "Mother Country."⁶³

The website even boasts that, "Small Island Read 2007 was the biggest mass-reading initiative that has ever taken place in Britain."⁶⁴ *Small Island* proved successful as a fixture for the important historical moment of post-war contact that changed the direction of British national consciousness. Moreover, using *Small Island* as part of the national reading campaign construed it as the best text for finding meaning for how Britain should imagine and construct a multicultural definition of national identity in the twenty-first century. The novel seemed an obvious choice for the reading campaign because as a historical novel it provides some concrete truths about Britain's relationship to its

colonies around the globe. Also, Levy attempts to reconstruct the complexity of Britain's cultural makeup as often seen through the specific historical lens of whiteness, imperialism, and colonialism.

The narrative of *Small Island* follows the parallel lives of four people affected by migration during and just after World War II. Hortense and Gilbert leave their geographically small island of Jamaica to find the idealized mother country only to discover that social and intellectual smallness affects Britain itself. Their lives intersect with those of Queenie and Bernard, two British citizens who had created quite localized existences in London until the war forced them into contact with a global community. As a result, Queenie and Bernard must reconsider their subject position as British, one they have always taken for granted as fixed and stable. Levy's innovative text attempts to write the diasporic subject beyond the limiting categories of nation or place. Evidence can be found in the mediation or balancing of a deliberately constructed narrative that plays on perceptions of what constitutes either history or fiction or the conflation of the two. Levy's detailed attention to the minutiae of daily life in England and Jamaica calls forward the repetition of conversations about race, nation, and class that must emerge in any project of multiculturalism. Moreover, the cultural experiment of the reading campaign in Great Britain provides a model that, despite its very practical and immediate goals, has managed to provoke critical questions about authorship and authority, audience and readership, while revisiting and revising postmodern approaches to race, class, nation and culture.

Small Island follows in a strong tradition of Caribbean novels about the initial journey from the colony to the mother country. Professional readers of that tradition

immediately identify its genealogy, particularly with the two most famous works in the Caribbean canon, Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* and George Lamming's *The Emigrants*. In fact, the packaging of *Small Island*, via the back cover blurbs, readily exploits these titles to lure an audience of trained readers who will understand this novel's lineage. However, Levy does not directly or publicly acknowledge Caribbean literature as a tradition in which she finds a foundation for this novel. In fact, one interview reports, "Throughout the process of writing and books, Levy says she never thought of herself as being part of any particular group, although she was an avid reader, especially of African American fiction" (Fleming).⁶⁵ Yet the unveiling of the package reveals an intricate and deliberate weaving of elements from Selvon's and Lamming's realist novels indicating a performance that blends traditional Caribbean literary history and a new understanding of British identity: not quite in the rubric of borrowing and not quite in an intertextual homage to any literary encounter with Lamming or Selvon. Levy's use of the migration novel form, the text's reception and its textual conversation with West Indian migration novels constitute a kind of spectacle, "at once directed toward the West in terms of an excess of invention and professional competence (to make an impression, to follow the current), and also directed to the reader in the meta-archipelago" (Benitez-Rojo 241).

The West Indian novel of migration became the definitive literary record of the mid- 20th century Caribbean because it described an experience that highlighted the demographic and political mutability of the region. But the migration novel also allowed for an opportunity to legitimize Caribbean writing as literary and cultural work, especially in England and the United States, where the second-class status of Caribbean

migrants necessitated efforts at validation. Indeed, authors of migration novels did gain validation for the Caribbean by winning over some of the harshest critics of West Indian life and culture in England. As a counterpoint to such critics, George Lamming suggests, “An important question for the English critic, is not what the West Indian novel has brought to English writing. It would be more correct to ask what the West Indian novelists have contributed to English reading” (44). Simon Gikandi, in his reflection on the formation of British imperial identity, argues for colonialism as the “it” factor in the construction of Englishness. His work makes evident the complexity of Lamming’s observations, especially Gikandi’s interest in “the texts of colonial culture and the larger contexts in which they were produced, [though his] emphasis is always on the production and meaning of these texts” (*Maps of Englishness* xviii). I agree with Gikandi, that “texts provided the medium through which the crisis of both colonial and domestic identities were mediated” (xix) in the way English readings of West Indian novels inform England’s relationship to its colonies, in the English reader’s relationship to the newly arrived residents of England, and in the English writer’s engagement with West Indian writers. However, the popularity of the migration novel vis-à-vis Britain fades from literary production after Caryl Phillips’ *The Final Passage*, published in 1985.⁶⁶ Andrea Levy resurrects the genre after almost two decades and points to the persisting Caribbean influences on British culture. Moreover, the reading campaign’s focus on *Small Island*, a contemporary text, points to a change in the mediation dominating cross-cultural exchange now that globalization rather than decolonization constitutes the dominant paradigm.

Small Island holds its place within the framework of canonical Caribbean migration novels as an illustration of Levy's engagement with the idea of the Caribbean's relationship to England and with a contemporary understanding of diaspora. Earlier texts -- *The Emigrants*, *The Lonely Londoners*, *The Final Passage* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* -- signify, representationally, a lived migration experience. Levy appropriates their tropes and formal structures and integrates them seamlessly (and silently) into her account. Consequently, *Small Island* reaches the market in a multicultural Britain as the new (and, for some, the final) exemplar of the West Indian migration narrative. Levy's creative choices provoke redefinitions of Caribbean and diasporic identities when readers in England with limited knowledge of earlier Caribbean migration novels encounter the events of the plot. Amidst the array of intricate shifts in space and time, Levy's employment of specific historical events – the docking of *Empire Windrush*, World War II, the British Empire Exhibition – along with the formal structure of the text itself, function as symbols of a multi-temporal and multi-spatial nationality through which readers in real or virtual spaces can participate in the re-imagining of a number of historical narratives: those of the British empire, race and racism, migration, and war. All of these configure a newer literary and national text: a novel form that resists historical and literary categorization, as well as a newly scripted Britain that encompasses and embodies the differences aligned with each of the themes of a multicultural society – racial integration, cosmopolitanism, and cultural syncretism.

Small Island invites a global readership through the spectacular nature of the reading campaign's employment of book clubs, library talks and access to the web site. Yet the novel highlights essential parts of West Indian history to readers versed in

Caribbean literary history while simultaneously negating and/or memorializing crucial elements of Caribbean literary history to readers unfamiliar with both Caribbean history and literature. With its marketing success in Britain and the ways in which Levy successfully builds on the genre of the migration novel, *Small Island* participates in a delicate literary performance of diasporic entitlement. The gestures toward Caribbean literary history within *Small Island* and in the cultural discussion of the novel suggest a ghosting of original West Indian narratives of migration. The novel's structure and marketing call for a reconsideration of the methodology of reading. Further, the novel itself becomes a migrating book, one that seeks to claim legitimacy in any of the places it depicts and urges readers to search for associations or comparisons beyond the "here vs. there" spatial understanding of the West Indies' relationship to Europe. The dissemination of *Small Island* for the purposes of the reading campaign and commemoration in England works to create multiple texts and readerships that at once embrace Caribbean identity while minimizing it to promote British multiculturalism. First, I consider how the novel performs Caribbean literary history by engaging in conversation with earlier migration novels. I then discuss the theoretical implications of the novel's reception in this specific place and time.

Uncovering *Small Island's* Literary Archive

Four protagonists narrate the novel, and the story moves back and forth from each character's narrative "I," while also switching back and forth from the "real" time narrative of "1948" and the period loosely labeled "Before." As the reader moves between characters and marks the shifts in time, he or she creates order and makes

choices about which character to empathize with or disdain. In fact, comfortably creating that order or making those choices may be a task that eludes the reader. Shifts between time and perspectives occur unpredictably, leaving the reader unsure of which narrator or which time period he or she will encounter in moving from one chapter to the next.

Levy's decision to split the narrative between real time and a prior undefined time might be most usefully understood through the metaphor of the split nation. The novel's temporality addresses Homi Bhabha's concerns about classifications of time in literary representations of nation-building or nationalism. He argues,

The boundary that marks the nation's selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the 'selfhood' of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. (*The Location of Culture* 212)

If the text could be read in entire defiance of its structure, that is, by reading the "Before" narrative continuously without the interruptions of the "1948" narrative, what the reader might discover is that the Britain of "Before" is bound to national affiliation and historical time and the enforcing of boundaries, whereas the "1948" narrative challenges all the stringent borders and alliances of "Before." By blending together what could be two separate narratives, Levy not only subverts the importance of teleology to the rendering of history but also proposes that the present must always be understood through the lens of the past and that the ghosts of national identity always frame current

lived experiences. Levy's narrative structure depends on the cooperative and responsive interpellation of "Before" and "1948."

Furthermore, the style of narration works well with the text's reception by the British reading public, as it navigates websites and uses the Internet for multiple purposes associated with the reading project and the novel. For example, at Smallislandread.com, a reader can access information on the entire history of the transatlantic slave trade that, although never directly referenced in the novel, haunts the plot. For readers who cannot readily make conscious or unconscious reference to this history during the act of reading, the links to this prior time can help frame an understanding of the "real" time of the text. But they can also read and reach forward through the website, as links like the one entitled "Migration" allow them to learn about the value of the world as an integrated social space to Britain's global future. In this section, the authors of the site claim, "Today's Britain is the product of thousands of years of invasion, migration and settlement that have created the continually changing mosaic of faiths, cultures, languages, dialects, physical features, skills, traditions and identities that make up the British people."⁶⁷ And as if in a narrative form of a browser's drop-down menu, each of these various themes appears through an intertwined web of categories in *Small Island*: by character, by time period, or by chapter.

Caryl Phillips makes a painstakingly similar structural move in his 1985 classic migration narrative, *The Final Passage*. The epigraph to Phillips' novel from T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," the idea that "history is now and England," punctuates the time-space order of the novel that shifts the reader between "The End," which can function as either a time marker or a spatial location, then to "Home," which may refer to an English

residence or an island nation, to “The Passage” implying the doubleness of migration and slavery, and then to “Winter,” also not a specific time but a collective set of times marked in and by a physical place. As a novel, *The Final Passage* narratologically encompasses the logic of both a multi-dimensional idea of time and sense of place.⁶⁸ *The Final Passage* begins with the section called “The End,” as if Phillips were situating a fictive West Indian island as the ultimate home for the West Indian couple, Leila and Michael, whose journey to a promised metropole turns out to be the lesson of their West Indian citizenship (or at least Leila’s). Phillips’s use of the time-space categories to divide the novel remains seamless and subtle and does not interrupt the narrative voice or disrupt the focalizing lens through which the reader understands the plot.

In contrast, Levy’s narrative shifts do disrupt the focal points in the reader’s ideation about the text. Each categorical shift either familiarizes or defamiliarizes the reader with an individual character’s experience or a national history. The impending surprise of Levy’s narrative shifts differs from Phillips’ narrative movements because Phillips takes interest in a singular perspective. Levy concerns herself with situating multiple viewpoints at multiple moments in time. This difference represents a distinct shift in the Caribbean migration narrative: Phillips’s omniscient or limited omniscient narrator yields to Levy’s first-person point-of-view. Levy’s reorientation of the narrative’s perspective makes the implied reader more sensitive to every move from “Before” to “1948” and back again.

Also an important symbol in *The Final Passage*, the ship that transports the Jamaican subjects of England to their Mother Country figures probably as the most important articulation of “time space” in Levy’s novel. The docking of the *Empire*

Windrush signifies an important merger of the black and white faces of the British Empire. The history of colonialism and its effects on colonies like Jamaica made contact between whites of England and their black subjects part of a hierarchy of power and citizenship in which foreign black bodies usually fell to the bottom of England's complicated pyramid of citizenship. The rush of immigrants from Jamaica to England on this ship signifies an attempt to debunk that hierarchy, where Jamaicans and other West Indians come to the Mother Country for full rights and access to the benefits of national belonging to which their status as British subjects entitles them.

The events of the plot point us to the multiplicity of meanings that the ship embodies. For instance, Hortense acknowledges her feeling of disorientation and displacement as she tries to discern the landscape and behavior of London and how it differs from that of the ship. "I was very familiar with stairs. But all my mind could conjure as I looked up at this tall, tall house was ropes and pulleys. It was obvious that I had been on a ship for too long" (Levy 11). Hortense's inability to adjust quickly from the ship to the city confirms the notion that the space of the ship presents more than a medium for creating contact between communities; it becomes a community of its own with its own cultural value. Additionally, her sentiment that she had been "on a ship for too long" can be read as an unconscious or haunted gesture toward the history of the ship in the transnational exchanges of slavery and colonialism. Her black body, and the bodies of others like her, have, for too long, occupied abject spaces of subordination on the ship. Hortense's arrival in London signifies her rejection of that subordination and her desire to exercise her rights to equality in the British world. The experience of the black characters in *Small Island*, especially that of Hortense, confirms why *Empire Windrush* embodies a

definition of the Caribbean as moveable and composite. Additionally, Levy's engagement with the white responses to blacks' aspirations for citizenship brings to light her interest in historicizing Britain's investment in multiculturalism, or at least its desire to invest in it.

The symbolism of the ship in the novel also adds to *Small Island*'s value as a memorial for the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. Given that the British Empire's naval prowess produced the large-scale transfer of humans across the Atlantic, the Atlantic journey of the *Windrush* serves to remind readers that the contact of race and culture in this moment represents only a recurrence, but not a reversal of history. However, while the ship can be read as a memorial for the repugnant history of colonialism and slavery that the "Read *Small Island*" campaign acknowledges, it also functions as a positive signification of West Indian migration to Britain, another side of the campaign. The fact that one image from the novel, among others, performs this doubleness of signifying both the past and the future proves the possibility of an interstitial space where the people can readily access their own subjectivity through one artifact. Culturally, the ship is one kind of aura, according to Benedict Anderson, a lasting or haunting memory, that he argues, "make[s] its presence felt within the replicatory series" (49). While the British may recognize a day to celebrate the *Windrush* docking, a replica in the form of a novel keeps the aura of these events in continuous circulation. Moreover, the further transposition of the printed text into a digital form of dissemination extends the seriality of that memory;⁶⁹ hence, the *Empire Windrush*, for example, can be part of the cultural memory even in a virtual world where people can move in and out of conscious acknowledgement of its presence and importance.

A consideration of the structure and symbols in *Small Island* only begin the discussion of the resonance of West Indian migration novels in Levy's narrative formation. Characterization is another area in which those comparisons emerge. On the novel's first page readers meet Queenie. This white woman, whose name embodies the image of empire, recasts another Queenie, George Lamming's black migrant of the 1940s in his renowned novel *The Emigrants*. Yet, Levy's Queenie does not just appear as an opposite to the black Queenie of Lamming's work, but as one who mimics and refracts the black Queenie. In some ways, Levy's reversal of the Queenie character in this way reveres the royal symbol of the British Empire, restoring white femininity to the reality and idea of the Queen. This reverence may be read as a strategic move to locate Britain as the focal point of the novel. Cynthia James argues that Levy's play on language, such as the appropriation of the name Queenie from Lamming, should be read as a mockery of the esteem held by loyalty in British Empire (C. James 8). James suggests, "narration in *Small Island* is structured with light humor around published autobiographical narratives, West Indian and British, which intensify their cultural confrontation" (8). James goes further to cite various oral histories found in British archives in which she locates Levy's sources for the characterization of her protagonists.⁷⁰ Moreover, James deliberately shifts the inheritance of Levy's textual references from these oral histories and argues that "the juxtaposition of voices of perceived high and low [registers], each just as insistent on asserting its dignity and right, shapes the revision that *Small Island* engages in of the *Windrush* era in quite a different way from realistic Caribbean texts such as *The Emigrants*, *The Lonely Londoners*, and *The Final Passage* that fictionalize the era" (9). James sees this blending as an asset to Levy's work as a writer. However, other

implications of Levy's inheritance of such detailed vocabulary from these earlier works also arise. In fact, Levy seems to signify Lamming's character quite obviously only to readers who have a vigilant eye for the details of *The Emigrants*.

Moreover, *Small Island* refigures Lamming's Queenie character in two critical ways: to give interiority to the immigrant woman's experience through the voice of Hortense and to critique the negative history of Empire in the discourse of multiculturalism. Lamming's character resurfaces by name and by personality in the two female protagonists of *Small Island*. References to Lamming's character join Levy's narrative to the lineage of the West Indian migration novel, while also establishing the work as a British cultural product. First, Lamming's Queenie becomes reified in the Hortense of *Small Island*. In *The Emigrants*, Queenie as a character evokes discussion and talks little. She becomes the object of knowledge for Brits and West Indians in London alike. Conversations about her by other characters in the novel indicate strong similarities between Lamming's depiction and Levy's representation of Hortense. One of the other characters, Phillip, refers to Queenie as the "pretty one on the boat" (*The Emigrants* 185), which suggests her distance from the other travelers on the ship. She has not quite invested in her own appearance in relation to the British, but she becomes the subject or object of study - British and West Indian - due to her appearance. One such example is Queenie's scrutiny when she visits a neighborhood hair salon: "The women turned quiet when Queenie entered. Her hair was combed up from the nape in a circular mound. She wore a night blue blouse above the polka-dotted skirt which she had often used on the ship" (153). The immediate "Thank you" to the women's comment about clothing, not directed at all at her, indicates Queenie's complete confidence in her self-

presentation and in her insight into how her face and her body will be read and evaluated by others. The attitude the ladies in the shop evince towards her also indicates Queenie's self-identification as distinct from the group of West Indians. During the course of *The Emigrants*, Lamming's Queenie escapes from the myopic gaze of the West Indian community and works to find freedom in the British community.

An important scene in *Small Island* addresses the ways in which Andrea Levy complicates the representations of ethnicity, gender and assimilation by playing on the character in the 1954 novel. It occurs in a moment of exchange between the two figurations of Lamming's Queenie: Hortense, who carries Lamming's character's demeanor, meets with Levy's Queenie Bligh to go shopping. Hortense mirrors the assertion presented in the hair salon scene depicted in *The Emigrants* by saying, "I was dressed as a woman such as I should be when visiting the shops in England. My coat clean, my gloves freshly washed and a hat upon my head" (Levy 272). Hortense does not need or expect any acknowledgement of her worth, sure that she has adapted well. Imagine, then, her shock at seeing Queenie Bligh's ghastly ensemble: "And yet it was she, this young Englishwoman, and not I who was dressed in a scruffy housecoat with no brooch or jewel, no glove or even a pleasant hat to lift the look a little" (272). That a woman with a name befitting royalty and having the status attributed to her of race and citizenship and entailing beauty and stature could dress so abominably shocks Hortense, but it sensitizes readers as well. Likewise, Queenie's confidence in *The Emigrants* can be juxtaposed with Levy's Queenie Bligh's confidence that she can walk the streets in a house dress and have no one care or notice at all. The difference between these two novels is that Lamming's character yearns for recognition in a place where her difference

makes her at once hypervisible and invisible, while *Small Island*'s Queenie displays no such desire – her comfort and nonchalance are an exercise of her privilege as a white British citizen.

Levy continues to appropriate the earlier figure and vacillates between Hortense's sheer ignorance of her surroundings and her awareness of the ironic juxtaposition with Queenie Bligh, where she is on equal social footing, if not superior. It is in this vacillation that Levy achieves the writing that Homi Bhabha describes as "a mode of representation that marginalizes the monumentality of history [and] quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (*The Location of Culture* 125). The scene in which Queenie and Hortense go to the shops together functions in this mode. Hortense makes an assessment of Queenie's house dress as compared to her own fancy attire (including gloves) and decides that British women do not know proper styles of dress: "Imagine my astonishment when, reaching the bustling street, every Englishwoman I look on is also attired in a dowdy housecoat" (Levy 273). It does not occur to Hortense either in that moment or in retrospect that her notions of proper modes of dress have been exaggerated or held in a historical deep freeze in Jamaica. Conversely, Hortense does have her haughtiness reflected back at her, especially with her lack of knowledge about how British women carry bread. Slightly embarrassed and incredibly frustrated by the grocer's inability to understand her perfect diction in her request for condensed milk, Hortense is further aggravated when she gestures a request for bread and he hands it to her with "his big hand over the loaf, his freckled fingers spreading across it. Was I to eat this bread now this man had touch it up?" (Levy 274). Queenie's comfort in that space leads her to misread Hortense's own misreading of the

cultural custom of buying bread and quickly educates the foreigner: “This is bread” (274). Both Queenie and Hortense fail in their exertion of power in this moment. Their equality here is only in a failure to acknowledge and accommodate each other, an unwillingness to read the simultaneous unity and difference in their cultural histories. Levy’s attention to reading and misreading of behavior is one way to account for the inclusion of the earlier Queenie image in order to expand and critique it.

Levy’s double distortion of Queenie in *The Emigrants* can also be read as a debunking of the masculine writing of Queenie whose bleak demise in *The Emigrants*, especially as a consequence of failed integration, problematizes the integration of West Indian subjects into the British nation. Hortense represents the possibility of recognition and redemption, the possibility of adjusting from the life on the ship to life on land again. Further, Levy’s dismantling of the Queenie figure in this way destabilizes the Manichean assumptions and representations of earlier migration narratives that blatantly privileged the “us” (West Indians) above the “them”(British). *The Emigrants* is only one of the migration novels registering in Levy’s work that sets up diametrical opposition between England and the Caribbean. Levy’s novel resists such a premise in its depictions in favor of an embrace of simultaneous nationality as a narrative and cultural possibility.⁷¹

Jamaica Kincaid’s novel *Lucy* offers another text that denies and defies the simultaneous nationality that characterizes cultural “dissemination” in the postcolonial context. The protagonist Lucy rejects her home Antigua (her mother land, technically), rejects her birth mother, but first and most importantly, she rejects the Mother Country of England by dismissing the literary artifacts forced upon her through colonial education. Her memorization and recital of William Wordsworth’s “I wander’d lonely as a cloud”

bring about an epiphany about her difference from Britishness, an identity that the colonial education teaches her to mimic. What Lucy does is read the poem as a denial of her Caribbean landscape, and by extension, a denial of her own subjectivity as part of that landscape:

After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; that is, outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. (Kincaid, *Lucy* 11)

Lucy's metaphorical erasing of that poem from her mind signifies Kincaid's own erasure or forgetting of British canonical literary forms in an effort to situate her own writing as autonomous, mirroring the autonomy of the newly independent nations of the West Indies. So, when Andrea Levy invokes the trope of the daffodil in *Small Island*, interesting questions surface about Hortense's relationship as a Jamaican subject (pre-independence) to the British nation and about the author's own relationship to British and Caribbean literary history.

In Hortense's Jamaican world, she embodies all British knowledge, and the admiration Lucy receives she similarly receives in the colonial classroom. Hortense functions simultaneously as student and teacher, reader and author, as she transmits her knowledge from the classroom to a peasant, her maternal grandmother turned housemaid in her adoptive parents' home, Miss Jewel, who lacks both the literacy and the access to education needed to engage with the literary artifacts of Britishness. Hortense instructs Miss Jewel to "speak properly as the King of England" (Levy 36), and uses memorization and recitation to teach Miss Jewel authentic British behavior. Yet, the parody in Levy's text is not mimicry followed by an erasure, but a re-scripting of "I wander'd lonely as a cloud":

Even though she asked, 'Weh yoh say it name – daffodil?' and did not stop fussing until I had drawn the flower in the dirt, she learned every word. Watching my lips like a child enthralled, moving her own to form the same shapes. Recounting every perfect word with her chin high and her arms folded under her breasts. But soon she was rehearsing her own version as she went about her day. ' "Ah walk under a cloud and den me float over de ill. An' me see Miss Hortense a look pon de daffodil dem".'

(36)

Comparing Kincaid and Levy's responses to Wordsworth's poem, three critical issues of readership surface. First, Hortense "reads" the poem to Miss Jewel as an endorsement of the British colonial project, articulated through the school system that inculcates both

academic and cultural values of Britishness. Actually, Hortense's teaching reverses a West Indian inculcation of values from one generation to the next, as Miss Jewel, is on the receiving end of a foreign education rather than Hortense being the recipient of local knowledge. Later on in the novel, however, Hortense learns that none of these values has currency when she enters the racially and culturally divisive London landscape. So, Hortense's readings of "I wander'd lonely as a cloud" prove practically useless to her, while Miss Jewel's incorporation of Hortense into her Jamaican version of the commonly called "Daffodils" poem provides the reader with a model that early Caribbean authors used for appropriating and manipulating the literary tools of colonial literary orthodoxy. Miss Jewel serves as the ultimate reader and author in this scene; her distance from the Western canon gives her the creative agency that Kincaid's Lucy asserts in her erasure of the daffodils by forcing this distance between herself and England. Additionally, Miss Jewel gets to re-script the poem, thus constructing a new archive to replace the one Lucy destroys. By directly referencing "Mr William Wordsworth" in her invocation of the "Daffodils" poem, Levy qualifies which literary histories constitute formations of knowledge.

The second issue revolves around Levy as a non-reader of Caribbean literature and her forgetting of Kincaid, and the third around the question of whether reading always occasions (or always has to occasion) recognition or misrecognition of one's own relationship to the imperial text. Both Hortense and Miss Jewel succeed at the task of identifying and denouncing the literary archive of colonialism very differently than Lucy. Reading and elocution do not provide Levy's characters with the same desire to destroy colonial identity we see at work in *Lucy*, because Lucy erases the image of daffodils

while Levy's characters merely displace and re-appropriate the context of that tradition. Wordsworth remains a part of their understanding of the self, especially Hortense's self-identification in Britain, even at the moments where the characters change the language and meaning of the poem's images. Levy's use of Wordsworth's imagery suggests that, even in the contemporary moment, when the value of measuring racial and national affiliation seems to have decreased, the colonial archive permeates literary understandings of social and spatial location. Andrea Levy does not draw attention to the interiority of Hortense's reading practices in the scenes of reading of the novel. Her reading always mimics or repeats figures and figurations of Englishness while eventually disrupting them. What does that mean? The satire and humor at play in *Small Island* may explain the gap in traditional moments of reflecting on reading. The onus falls on the reader of the novel to make the judgments about British identity as presented in such a scene. In later scenes of the novel, in which Hortense is confronted with the frigid cultural climate of England, Levy seeks to dismantle imperial orthodoxy by revealing both white and black attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism, disdain and frustration respectively.

A statement on West Indians' ability and desire to be incorporated into the Empire surfaces in the parallels between the daffodil scenes in both novels, and in the presence of babies and the process of adoption in *Small Island*. Because Hortense unequivocally accepts the imagery of Wordsworth's daffodils, she correspondingly accepts Queenie's baby. Lucy rejects the images and is the anti-mother, only invested in self-awareness (Kincaid, *Lucy* 132). Hortense knows no moment of misrecognition because she goes through the novel with "all knowledge of England" (Levy 36). The

security of adopting a baby with a white mother as she moves into her new home with her Jamaican husband stands at the apex of achievement for Hortense.⁷² To be a good West Indian, Jamaican or other, means to integrate Englishness into self-identity. Hortense becomes the heiress to British identity as she metaphorically becomes the new Queen (ie) of her home and, loosely by extension, the British nation. Of course, this adoption reflects a reluctant choice within the narrative, a fact that points to the reluctance to integrate illustrated in the social and labor tensions depicted in the novel. Hortense thus describes the changing of the guard, the move to her role as head of the home:

No compunction caused me to look back with longing. No sorrow had me sigh on the loss of the gas-ring, the cracked sink, or the peeling plaster. At the door to Mrs Bligh's home I stopped. I tapped gently three times. There was no reply. I tapped again, this time calling her name. Still no one came. But with only a flimsy piece of wood between us I could feel her on the other side. The distress in a halting breath. A timorous hand resting unsure on the doorknob. She was there – I knew. 'Goodbye, Queenie,' I called, but still she did not come. (Levy 438)

The anxiety and ambivalence communicated in this final scene of the novel validates this new family unit and new model of the nation, ones that will and must come to fruition. Even though Queenie and Hortense both sense each other's presence, neither will acknowledge her dependence on the other to make this exchange possible. Hortense expresses certainty but characterizes Queenie in "distress," a nod to the resistance of the

British of that era to conform to the audacious presence of West Indians who had no intention of leaving and all plans of settling. Certainly, this image differs from Phillips's bleak return to the island in *The Final Passage*. Unlike Leila in that novel, Hortense's arrogance -- and her formal training -- seem to find a purpose and work to her advantage in this situation. Hortense finds redemption and satisfaction in the end, causing her to think of herself as having equal or better status than Queenie: "I never dreamed England would be like this. Come, in what crazed reverie would a white Englishwoman be kneeling before me yearning for me to take her black child?" (Levy 433). Again, this newborn seems to project the possibility of an interstitial space in the future. Adoption, much like daffodils, becomes a trope through which the Empire replicates itself and remains simultaneously resisted throughout Caribbean and diasporic literary history.

The inversion of literary tropes, similar to the reversed characterization of Queenie, coincides with the juxtaposition of narrative voices as depicted in another important migration novel. As a classic Caribbean novel, the canonized *The Lonely Londoners* legitimizes itself by the ways in which Selvon embodies the Caribbean experience and validates its readers individual lives every time they interact with a character who sounds familiar and behaves in a way that inspires nostalgia. While the act of reading repeatedly seems fundamental to any iteration of Caribbean identity in the postcolonial moment, *The Lonely Londoners* refuses to represent a scene of reading itself. The novel only tangentially addresses characters' engagement with reading of any kind and focuses on the movements of working class West Indian immigrants into the cold and distant city of London. But Selvon's novel fascinates, not for what the characters read, but for its own readability. *Lonely Londoners* fits the narrative criteria for a readerly text,

that which Roland Barthes says “can be read, but not written” (Barthes, *S/Z* 4). Barthes distinguishes between the readerly and writerly to describe the ways in which texts function or are consumed in any society. To make this distinction, he defines the readerly as a product with “a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds;... the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable” (5-6). The authority of the narrative voice of Moses in Selvon’s work functions not just to construct a literary narrative, but to build a cultural narrative. The sound of Moses’s voice resonates with any reader who identifies the comedic in his dialect, his idiomatic expressions, and his comfort with insults and compliments as characteristics of the individual West Indian’s performance in everyday life. This voice and Selvon’s poetic diction produce a ubiquitous folk character out of Moses, almost like other folk figures, such as Anansi. Moses’ experience in London fits the example of the West Indian in London. When Andrea Levy writes the character of Gilbert decades later, she narrativizes the trope of Moses and the actual character Moses simultaneously.

If we accept, then, that the linguistic and comedic elements of *Lonely Londoners* that resurface in *Small Island* produce multiple readings or interpretations in the original and its reiterations in *Small Island*, then for both lay and professional readers, *Small Island* may be an act of rereading as defined by Barthes. This process “draws the text out of its internal chronology (‘this happens before or after that’) and recaptures a mythic time (without before or after); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading” (16). Although the first reading of Selvon’s novel may be the “first” reading of the migration narrative, the notion of rereading rationalizes lay readers’ engagement with Levy’s story as if the migration

narrative had not been told first by Selvon, then by Lamming, then by others after that. Her work appears particularly conducive to the “same and new” (Barthes, *S/Z* 16) effect that Barthes suggests occurs in such a process of textual engagement.

Selvon’s use of language enhances the accessibility of the narration in *The Lonely Londoners*. Moses and the other West Indian immigrants he encounters while in London speak in a multitude of voices that characterize and categorize a number of converging Caribbean identities enacting the kind of rhythmic performance that Benitez-Rojo sees as indigenous to Caribbean writing (Benitez-Rojo 27). The oral nature of the narrative allows a reader to own the experience, for example, of Galahad standing at the bus stop, utterly confused about which bus to take and in which direction to go and entirely elated by Moses’s subsequent rescue. The speech of both men in this scene evokes the problematics of race and gender: navigating past the urbanites and through the cityscape of London represented a unique experience for black men in Britain at that time. When Galahad has his first interaction with a white police officer, whose attempt to help him get to his location was also tainted with resentment at his presence, he realizes his vulnerability and decides to reclaim the pompous and naïve arrogance with which he stepped off the ship: “‘You getting on like a damn fool,’ he tell himself. ‘What happen to you? All of a sudden like you gone stupid. Take it easy,’ he say, unconsciously repeating Moses’ advice. ‘You new in this place, it will take you some time to settle in’” (Selvon 43). Moses eventually comes to rescue him after predicting his over-confidence and consequent regret, intuiting his needs and meeting him at the bus stop to ride with him to the employment center. This scene transplants itself in *Small Island* in Hortense’s recognition scene. When she applies for a teaching position, and repeatedly rejects

Gilbert's advice on her presentation and his offers to accompany her, Hortense faces the most mortifying encounter of her time in London. She begins her day with her usual comical arrogance: "This was the day I was going to present myself for a position as a teacher at the offices of the education authority and no pained-face, fool-fool man was going to imperil my elation" (Levy 371). But after a series of embarrassing encounters that lead to her walking into a closet in an overly formal white dress, she has the ultimate break, and "this was probably the first time the woman's cheek ever felt a tear" (379). She must compel herself to see her world differently and to appreciate Gilbert's role as her guide and to trust in the truth of his knowledge of the real England. In fact, Levy accentuates Hortense's humiliation by switching the narration of this scene from her voice to Gilbert's, removing the pompous agency with which she walks and talks in London. The switch of narrative voices here not only strips Hortense of the delusions of her seamless transition into Britishness; it also invokes the comedy and satire that Selvon uses to mitigate the bleakness and difficulty of assimilation into a new place and identity.

Other ways in which *Small Island* absorbs Selvon's folkloric elements emerge most evidently in Gilbert's demeanor and speech. The interiority with which Levy casts Gilbert Joseph alludes to the stream of consciousness moments when Moses comments on West Indian life in London. Gilbert's frequent internal monologues appear as if he were having a direct conversation with the reader and were expecting a response to or agreement with his point of view, especially when he uses humor to characterize the other character-narrators of the novel. Gilbert's comedic first-person voice functions similarly with the limited omniscient narrative perspective of Moses, which Kenneth Ramchand has described as that of a "chronicler, repository of the experiences of the

group, and as the ideal and attuned sensibility” (Ramchand, “Introduction” 12-13) of the West Indian perspective in the novel. In many ways, Gilbert figures as the critical compass of West Indian immigration. He has the distance and insight to measure his experiences in the West Indies, unlike characters, like Elwood, who romanticize home and have a generalized disdain for Empire. And in England, he fares better than Hortense, who, in the cultural and literary trajectory of migration and resistance, should be the privileged resistant reader of English life, since she comes equipped with some of the formal education to imbibe and then denounce British colonial consciousness as distinct from her West Indian subjectivity. Levy may be suggesting that the pragmatism required for adaptation and assimilation into this new society works effectively outside the boundaries of formal colonial structures. We have seen the displacement of characters who try to conform too strongly in *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Orchid House*, and other Caribbean novels. However, although Gilbert (like Moses) seems to navigate discourses of race and racism more comfortably and intuitively because of his cosmopolitan sensibility adopted in wartime, his distance from formal colonial education presents its own set of problems, especially in his understandings of national and regional solidarity - how to be a West Indian and not a Jamaican in England.

It is not just Hortense’s mistranslation of British culture and mannerisms that is at stake in the identity politics of the novel. Gilbert views the other Caribbean islands as small islands, the common term to which Jamaicans, who assume a position of privilege in the region, subscribe. His enrollment in the RAF presents him an opportunity to participate in Britishness. However, the gaze of the British on his black, foreign body places him under the lens of a microscope where he becomes diminished. Gilbert’s

ability to escape this perspective of large and small, however, filters through the additional lens of race, which not only provides a vantage point but introduces another transatlantic or diasporic relationship with the United States as well. The movie scene in which the film *Gone With the Wind* provides the backdrop for the fight between Gilbert and the American soldiers over his relationship with Queenie highlights this dimension. This scene actually creates the narrative rupture of the text, dividing the promise in the ending of “Before” for both Queenie and Gilbert from the complacency depicted in their lives in “1948.” The war is the catalyst that brings unlikely subjects such as Queenie and Hortense’s cousin Michael Roberts to the same space, and even to the same bed. Yet the tragedy and turmoil of war do not erase difference even when they work to create a syncopation of identities. Gilbert and Queenie’s encounter at the movies serves as a rich example. In the “Before” narrative, Gilbert is on active duty in the Royal Air Force and he first meets Queenie when he finds and returns her father-in-law Arthur, who wandered away from their farmhouse. Gilbert recounts the encounter at the movie theater as a scenario in which racial segregation is enforced. His resistance to this racism prompts a riot that ends in Arthur’s accidental death. The movie being played just happens to be *Gone with the Wind*, the classic cinematic depiction of the racial climate of the American South from the perspective of the white planter class. The violence born of racial difference that ensues in this scene of the novel explains how World War II, which brings these two people together, also exposes their difference brings to mind the construction of racial difference for social and economic gain.

Interestingly, *Small Island* is the first migration novel to engage significantly with World War II. Neither Lamming nor Selvon nor Phillips engages directly with the ways

in which the war contributed to the tenuous relationship between blacks and whites in England.⁷³ Rather, in the works by these other writers the focus on the actual journey to England and the minutiae of everyday life in London surface as points of contention. Levy shows little interest in the journey; she pens a narrative of destination. Her insistence on the necessity of integration with whites in London – the awkward and necessary conversations between Hortense and Queenie and between Gilbert and Bernard – makes the novel an ideal text to promote Britain’s multiculturalism.

The project of destabilizing racial and ethnic categories also becomes evident in Levy’s engagement with another geographical unit of the British Empire, India. The character Bernard, with his participation in World War II and in the Indian partition of 1947 and his subsequent psychological and sexual dysfunction elucidates the complications of Empire particular to West Indian identity formation in the diaspora. Bernard’s experiences in World War II and in India do not teach him about difference across ethnic and geographic contexts. He believes “the war was fought so people might live among their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for the coloured people. Look at India. The British knew fair play. Leave India to the Indians. That’s what we did” (Levy 388). His evidently racist logic leads him to become antipathetic based on his blurred sense of the “other” – black, brown, dirty and diseased. As a result, he returns to England where Gilbert’s Jamaican patriotism or Hortense’s formal education have no weight except to fuel his anger at the attempts by people who are not British to perform British culture. In his disagreement with Gilbert towards the novel’s end, he thinks, “Put his palms up to me. Submissive. Telling me that he didn’t want any vexation. Said he was only interested to find out what

I wanted. But I'd seen all their tricks out in India" (Levy 390). Gilbert's assertion of equality enrages Bernard and his anger at Queenie's conception of a child with a black man when they could not produce a baby together reveals his mistaken conflation of cultures and his projection on Gilbert as a result of his experiences.

The examples depicting Bernard's resistance to racial and cultural difference during his global travels during the war beg the question: is it possible to achieve a truly multi-cultural society when difference remains visible on physical bodies and in cultural practices? Some critics have asserted that this novel has as its central concerns race and its inherent power relations. In an assessment of the treatment of Empire in the text, Tangea Tansley has argued that "although *Small Island* has this placement of self in a diasporic setting as one of its major themes, central to this novel is the confusion faced by both black and white against the setting of a fading empire" (Tansley 294). Although Tansley offers a strong reading of the novel, the racial tensions in the text are less involved in political power but stand rather in relationship to all the other thematic and symbolic elements highlighted so far. None of these concerns can take a central place in relation to each other, and none can exist in isolation. To speak about race as a central theme, without the nuances of colonialism, the war, and migration overlooks the work of this novel in resituating Caribbean identity, and similarly, in constructing an alternate methodological approach to Caribbean literature. What Levy does with race is to use the familiar issues of segregation and the native-foreign dichotomy in Britain to comment on the experience of minority migrant subjects and to propose the possibility of a community in which the very idea of minority can be eliminated. Queenie's decision to give up her baby to Hortense and Gilbert at the end of the novel points toward that drive

towards multicultural citizenship. The baby's bi-racial status – as a product of Queenie and Michael Roberts, who is, ironically Hortense's cousin– subverts the racial boundaries that the segregation inscribed, a subversion the text's events attempt to solidify. Both Hortense and Gilbert can secure a place as citizens of their adopted home, where their British-born baby serves as the passport. Also, the family unit that they now create represents the possibility of regeneration, promising a nation (with the family as its microcosm) that will embody the history from which it came, but also project a future without the struggle out of which it had to come. Andrea Levy's success in *Small Island* results from her proposal of a "supersyncretic discourse" (Benitez-Rojo 221) as the only way to make the differences in race and power dynamics commensurable.

Reading *Small Island's* ending as a representation of a new model of citizenship explains why the novel prevails as the commemorative text for the Abolition's anniversary. No doubt, Levy's position as a Black British writer places her in a position of privilege above other older writers who have been traditionally categorized in the group of migrant intellectuals who had to choose between their Caribbean national identity or British affiliation. The reading campaign's choice becomes more interesting given *Small Island* is Levy's fourth novel to be published in England and not the only one on issues of diaspora and multiculturalism.⁷⁴ Perhaps *Small Island's* critical success made it suitable for the project that the British government had imagined. Clearly, Levy's work belongs to a tradition of migration novels distinctly West Indian. Still, the intertextuality of Levy's writing locates her work outside the canon of British contemporary writers but within the canon of Caribbean literature. The message of a relatively flourishing British multiculturalism so effective in *Small Island* may come through its ability to speak to

readers without the literary history that would support a definition of England by what it is not.⁷⁵

As a second-generation migrant, Levy can claim Black British identity with the legitimacy of a legal and cultural presence that would not have necessarily been available to writers such as Lamming and Selvon in the 1940s. Yet, her status as Black British holds importance because being British and the inherent privilege of that status cannot be compromised by the adjective “Black” that modifies it, since the author holds a legal and political status rather than merely a social signifier. In fact, this “Black” signifier strengthens her eligibility for inclusion in this particular case, a privilege that eludes the “Black” characters in her novel because of their status as foreign subjects. In this very location Sangeeta Ray finds tangible success for such a model of simultaneous nationality -- being of a culture and belonging to a place. She argues that the idea of the Black British as a multi-ethnic subjectivity

is capable of the kind of positive ‘dissemiNation’ of a hegemonic writing of a British nation... One could go even further and argue that the term ‘black British’ is closely linked to the ‘black English,’ which in syncoating its two meanings (nationality and language), suggest coalitions that can be forged across and beyond national boundaries, forcing us to acknowledge the fragility and permeability of national borders even as it reminds us of the enduring legacy of imperialism and colonialism. (Ray, “Rethinking Migrancy” 189)⁷⁶

Sam Selvon actually makes a similar argument about his use of language in *The Lonely Londoners*. In one of many interviews on his writing process, Selvon suggests that his combination of voices, dialects, and languages to represent the narrators and characters, in a sense, sought to validate in Britain (at a time when Caribbean immigrants were cast off as a growing problem) the multiple and various forms of language, and thereby consciousness, that characterize the Caribbean region. Levy's direct or unconscious intertextual dialogue with earlier Caribbean texts certainly hints toward issues of literacy and language that cannot be removed from the national development of West Indian countries. If the status of Black British forms merely a starting point for achieving the doubleness of identity, then the goal of achieving a multiplicity of identity in a Caribbean context might stem from this model, as Levy herself seems to want to do by acknowledging her Black British status as well as her Caribbean heritage.

Writing, Reading, and the Participation in Spherical Time

Taken together, *Small Island* and its public reception in the reading campaign, by restructuring characters' and readers' spatial and temporal assumptions and expectations, articulate a concept of diasporic citizenship that I refer to as "spherical time." This notion incorporates and builds on the various models of time and the nation as they have been developed in postcolonial criticism and critical theory. In addition to Homi Bhabha's simultaneous nationality model, in which postcolonial narrative can formally participate in multi-temporal cultures, my idea of spherical time also considers Pheng Cheah's notion of spectral nationality, which assumes a kind of death or pastness of the nation and

nationalism. Positing that the preoccupation with nationalism suggests an obligation to “the frozen past” (3), Cheah argues that this ghost of nationalism — the relationship between the nation and the state — presents difficulties in narrating postcoloniality in contemporary spaces. Referring to the loss of this ghostly nation as homelessness, he claims “the Bildungsroman provides the symbolic resolution to this homelessness” while he argues that “this home – the nation – cannot just be a revival of precolonial indigenous traditions, even though it may draw on progressive elements from such traditions” (Cheah 243). Although Cheah’s analysis focuses on the Bildungsroman as a genre, his arguments about the spectrality of the nation as a construct provide a foundation for showing how the migration novel as a form becomes reified in the genre of the historical novel. *Small Island*’s incarnation of slavery’s history works simultaneously with and against annals of history. Levy’s work attempts to resolve this contradiction by taking on a narrative structure that transcends teleology and historicity. As opposed to the transatlantic slave trade, which *Small Island* commemorates and in which Africa, the Caribbean, and Britain were key regions, my model of spherical time assumes a triangulated relationship with the Caribbean, Britain, and the United States. In the former, relationships are coerced and the movement of bodies permanent, flowing in one direction. In spherical time the movement of bodies follows a voluntary and reversible path.

The model of the repeating island⁷⁷ supports the enactment of spherical time, where each reflection of a particular homeland’s specific cultural networks facilitates and reinforces conceptualizations of the unified shape of the Caribbean nation, Caribbean citizens already think of themselves in terms of simultaneous national affiliations: they

belong to individual nations (St. Kitts, Dominica, Guyana) as well as to the Caribbean nation as a whole. The migration novel—and by extension, migration itself—marks a shift in Caribbean spatiality and temporality: permanence evaporates, and spaces come into being and disintegrate. Textual representations of Caribbean citizenship, then, must accommodate both this simultaneous nationality as well as varied temporal and historical sensibilities. The result shapes a perpendicular relationship between cyclical time and spatial multiplicity, which assumes a spherical or planetary formation. In other words, as readers move through the chapters of Levy's novel, and the links on the website, they imaginatively portal into multiple time periods and geographical locations all at once -- 1948 Britain, 1948 Jamaica, Jamaica of "Before," Britain of "Before," India of "Before," contemporary Britain, and contemporary Jamaica. Their imagination becomes a metaphorical planet spinning on an axis.

The concept of spherical time becomes even more pronounced in a reading of *Small Island* because of its integration into Great Britain's commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The virtual dimensions of the text,⁷⁸ including the website's history lessons, reviews of the novel in prestigious journals around the world, and Andrea Levy's book tours in public libraries around England, enhance the already layered configuration of the novel itself. While individual readers can interact with each narrator by engaging in a closed, private reading of the novel, they continue to be bound to the community of readers who also attend Levy's library events and who visit the website to explain moments in the novel that may be unfamiliar. This conglomeration of reading publics, hypertextual engagement, and lay (or even

professional) reading offers another complex literary or cultural iteration of Benedict Anderson's imagined communities.⁷⁹

The spherical patterns emerging in the literary conventions that produce the text and the cultural products that emanate from it result from the examination of *Small Island*'s genealogy in the Caribbean literary tradition. Andrea Levy presents an interesting case compared to other authors of the genre given that her personal affiliation with the Caribbean and its works of literature seems to be geographically distant, yet literarily engaged. The connections between the novel as a product of this Black British identity, rather than of a West Indian origin, and the burial of a Caribbean literary history in its presentation to the national reading public deserve attention. The reading practices required to engage with *Small Island* in the commemorative moment of the Abolition Bill necessitate an absence or forgetting of other texts and reading practices in order to make the process and products of assimilation celebratory. My understanding and application of spherical time within the novel and the earlier novels it mirrors are bound to discourses of professional reading, interpretive communities and concerns about the configuration of a postcolonial archive. The intricacies of the novel's construction and the architecture of its dissemination might offer a way to preserve the literary memory of the Caribbean even as the region's literary production becomes more dispersed and elusive.

I propose the term "inter-national" as a way to consider what Benitez-Rojo calls the "hypostasized union of here and there" (235) embedded in the form, dissemination and reception of *Small Island*, a term that participates in the redefinition of the Caribbean Diaspora. The idea of the inter-national stands in contradistinction to the international, bears a similarity to notions of universalism, a term that Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei

Shih argue “demands a politics of assimilation, incorporation, or resistance, instituting a vertical struggle for recognition and citizenship” (Lionnet and Shih 2). The inter-national calls for greater emphasis on understanding literary studies and minority discourses through relationships of equal cultural exchange between parts of the world that may reflect unequal relations of power. More specifically, the inter-national characterizes the relationship between nations in the Caribbean, between the Caribbean as a unit and the metropolis (in this project, England or the United States), and the relationship between each of the nations and the metropolis. The hyphen marks a differential space that requires neither assimilation nor resistance but offers an opportunity for each nation to assert and assume a politics of belonging that operates contrapuntally with other nations with ongoing influence on its national formation. While the term “minor transnationalism,” proposed by Lionnet and Shih, provides a model to speak directly and laterally to other minority or “othered” cultures without accessions by the West, the inter-national provides a term to engage the peculiar cluster of nations and cultures of the Caribbean whose lateral interactions with each other and constant ties to England and the United States mean that neither a margin-margin nor a center-margin binary sufficiently accommodates the cultural interstices of Caribbean identity and its relationships to other cultural/national identities.

Small Island is an inter-national novel that also positions itself at the intersection of British and West Indian literary traditions. It is a narrative enactment of simultaneous nationality both in its production and reception. Levy’s migration novel resists a generalization of the migration experience across postcolonial cultures and reveals the ways in which multi-temporal and multi-spatial identity has existed in exchanges

between an aging empire and the emergent nations of that lost empire. How best might Levy's example become useful in outlining the trajectory of the inter-national in Caribbean literature of the twenty-first century? The inter-national gestures of the novel appear in Levy's narrative strategy, the novel's relationship to the nation, and the effects of its reception. The textual elements of both plot and structure in *Small Island* opens to a hypertextuality that complements a reading of the plot within a national reading campaign. Moreover, the novel's use of tropes and narrative techniques from earlier novels allows *Small Island* to inscribe its own historiography even as it obviates the earlier migration novels. The "re-scripting" quality implies a critical and popular amnesia of Caribbean literary history and suggests a critical ambivalence that complicates situating Levy's work as part of a genealogy. The result is a figuration of a liminal nation that transcends the limitations of physical boundaries, national affiliation, and obligations to teleological time and direction.

***Small Island's* "Inter-National" Implications**

A possible point of entry to think through an inter-national model of Caribbean literature is the versatile concept of Creolization. Renowned Caribbean theorist Edouard Glissant uses the notion of Creolization as a framework for how the Other can be incorporated into hegemonic conceptions of history in the Caribbean. In the essay "The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World," he describes the process thus: "Creolization has the following characteristics: the lightning speed of interaction among its elements; the "awareness of awareness" thus provoked in us; the revaluation of the various elements brought into contact (for creolization has no presupposed scale of values); and

unforeseeable results. Creolization is not a simple crossbreeding that would produce easily anticipated syntheses” (290). Levy’s novel contends with the integration of language and thought that Glissant describes here and in his other works,⁸⁰ both in the movement of the plot and in the use of narrative perspective, and can be read seriously as a text about Creolization, where both the white and black characters become creolized, as in their development they reframe their perspective from an extreme and move closer toward a middle ground.

Levy’s constant attention to such details amidst the elements that transcend such difference speaks to Glissant’s assertion that “the idea of the world ought to be founded on the imagination of the world, intertwined poetics that would allow me to guess how my place connects to other places, adventures outside without moving, and carries me with it in its immobile movement” (294). An awareness of one’s difference from the other forges a global sensibility. Eliminating the idea of “Other” as a marginal subjectivity and “other” as inter-connected become key. Theoretical concepts of creolization developed by Caribbeanist scholars assert this very idea as the region’s source of survival.⁸¹

If we consider Glissant’s theory as a place to begin understanding the identity formation that the main characters go through, we may come to understand more fully Levy’s success in constructing inter-national consciousness in the text. That inter-nation will emerge from the challenge between globalization and Glissant’s idea of worldness. The concept of worldness might be most accurately represented by the baby at the novel’s end. He counters the tone on which the novel begins, in which the idea of globalization and Westernization most clearly illustrated in the British Empire Exhibition

quantifies and commodifies the cultures of nations branded with the national identity of Britishness. Early in the novel, Queenie describes her childish perception of the British Empire as spanning only the parameters of that exhibition she visits with her family. Her naïve declaration that “I went to Africa when it came to Wembley” (Levy 1) situates Queenie immediately in a position of privilege that secures her access to and knowledge of this place that England owns. Her realization that the British Empire Exhibition was only a representation and not a reality emphasizes the popular acceptance among the British that the Empire is one singular entity that can be captured in one space and even be transported at the will of England for its own amusement. That Queenie’s narration introduces the novel, especially with that scene, is no coincidence. Indeed, Queenie’s voice and perspective turn out to be paramount in this novel. Queenie functions as the pivotal character in the text, both literally and metaphorically, as her presence usually serves as a catalyst for other important events in the plot. In fact, because Queenie’s identity as the white woman parallels the image of the Mother Country, Levy’s privileging of her voice in the prologue expresses sympathy for Empire that does not only complicate a reading of the plot but also presents a troublesome telling of the particular historical moment in which this story takes place. The challenge between these two forces remains volatile in nature, and, as Glissant notes, has unforeseeable results. Yet by grounding that dialectic in the foundation of both literary and cultural history, Levy seems to provide continuity and allow for the promise of regeneration from these international exchanges.

The referencing of each of the West Indian migration novels in *Small Island* may well be Levy’s acknowledgement of her role as heiress of the heritage that she ostensibly

disavows. Consequently, her work can appeal to professional readers who may recognize the multi-layered intertextual interaction that underwrites the narrative. Members of this interpretive community can map the invisible terrain that her text covers. The interpretative community retains the means to establish conversations between the novel and the corpus of Caribbean literature, the novel and each individual author constituting that corpus, and between canonical Caribbean writers. Therefore, the inter-national narrative can only appeal and be transparent to professional readers. The inter-national narrative comprises works in which the nation is at stake. Uninitiated lay readers thus need hypertextual mediation to participate in the holistic appreciation of the novel and to see the full measure of the map. As an inter-national narrative, *Small Island* engages in the kind of simulation that Baudrillard describes:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced.... A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of differences. (2-3)

The novel's participation in a hyperreal exercise between real and imagined or imaginary readers further strengthens its categorical placement in the interstices of the Caribbean Diaspora, resting along the fault lines of West Indian literary history and British multicultural citizenship. A salient example with other implications is that the novel begins with a blurring of the real and imagined in its first line: "I thought I'd been to Africa," representing Queenie's understanding of the real world confused with the condensed model of the Empire in the British Empire Exhibition. The futility of "reality," as such, evidenced in the ways in which the context of the British Empire Exhibition ends up framing the whole plot, offers us another way to interpret the inter-national.

The place of this text in the genre of the historical novel provides a new opportunity for untrained readers to encounter social and literary moments that write and rewrite the trans-Atlantic cultural experience. Levy may be trying to recuperate a lost literary history by providing a narrative located in a particular time and place while using the mundane to elucidate the causes and effects of that crucial moment in history. However, the protagonists of *Small Island*, while their experiences may provide a microscopic view of how these large events affect daily life, represent archetypes if not stereotypes of their specific socio-cultural selves. Levy's use of the didactic or pedagogical mode of telling the stories seems to defeat the purpose of scaling down the larger events of history to their effects on daily human life. And what seems to be "real" about this novel rests in its very success, that a literary work, in its very best attempt to acknowledge what might be forgotten, gains its recognition through the act of forgetting.

The multiple acts of reading involved in the reception of *Small Island* sustain a new textuality, the charge by Antonio Benitez-Rojo with which this chapter begins. She

follows other metropolitan authors like Caryl Phillips and Jamaica Kincaid who experiment with form and genre to destabilize conceptions of place and affiliation. By approaching the genre of Caribbean literature from Levy's inter-national model, I argue, notions of nationalist identification, territorial legitimacy and ownership of cultural production may be so greatly expanded that terms like "ethnicity," "colony," and "empire" will function merely as historical artifacts upon which the future of Caribbean literature builds. To read the Caribbean intertextuality of *Small Island* as Levy's silent or silenced acknowledgement of Caribbean literary history is to situate it within a professional readership. Its appropriation within the sphere of lay readers in the 2007 *Small Island Read* campaign then forces Andrea Levy and *Small Island* into a well-tailored dance between recognition and rejection of their place in England and, therefore, into the Caribbean.

Analyzing the reception of other contemporary novels by writers in the Caribbean diaspora, in the United States for example, provide additional support for the importance of Levy's project to reception studies of Caribbean literature. Popular or middlebrow reception of lesser-known authors from postcolonial nations has created a new market for writers and a rich site of critical discourse about the intersections of reading, technology and culture in the digital age. The concluding chapter considers how the idea of lay or popular reading of Caribbean texts produces challenging definitions of the West Indies, how authors attempt to respond to these definitions and what possible directions such reception might take the professional or academic considerations of the Caribbean canon.

Chapter Five
Reading and Responsibility: “For whom, then, do we write?”

[The West Indian writer] writes always for the foreign reader. That foreign does not mean English or American exclusively. The word *foreign* means other than West Indian whatever that other may be. He believes that a reader is *there*, somewhere. He can't tell where, precisely, that reader is. His only certain knowledge is that this reader is not the West Indian middle class, taken as a whole.

--George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*

The representation of readers and the exploration of contemporary reading publics explored in this dissertation generate a set of key ideas about Caribbean writers' definition of home in relation to West Indian geography. They have also helped explain the ways in which colonial subjects in the Caribbean are bound by limits of place, race, and gender in their self-development via hermeneutic exercises. All the novels analyzed in the dissertation find their setting in large part in the West Indies, and most end at the edge of the metropolis, at the points when the subjects will enter or have just entered the metropolitan nations that have contributed in some way to these characters' complex sense of self as oppressed and disenfranchised. In light of the revelations of colonial and postcolonial epistemology within the region, one may then ask: How does a reader read when she leaves the place in which she has learned how to read? Analyzing texts that depict acts of reading outside of the Caribbean space produce another rich study of such works as Shani Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea*, Patricia Powell's *The Fullness of Everything*, Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migratin*, and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. These novels warrant a more thorough consideration of the influence of literary encounters on migrant or diasporic subjectivity. Such an investigation will provide additional textual support for the various tensions of national and cultural

affiliation that have already been identified in the analysis of *Small Island*'s production and reception.

These tensions remind critical readers that George Lamming's fear about the foreignness of West Indian literature's readership remains a literary, political and ethical quandary yet to be resolved. As the capabilities of the virtual world advance, print culture works to provide new modes of publication, mediation, authorship, and readership. Blogs and social networking sites have forced, if not the restructuring, then the rethinking of what is read/readable and by whom, what is literature, and what is not. Yet, as Madhu Dubey argues, "the more powerful sway of electronic technologies has sparked a crisis for writers of print literature, which seems at best to occupy residual space within the postmodern cultural domain" (55). Instead, the question of how one can make conventional forms of reading and writing continually engaging through new technological forms may be more pertinent. This question has real-time value because producing evidence of a reading culture remains an important way for Caribbean nations to assert modernity and cosmopolitanism and, in turn, to justify larger claims to political and economic autonomy. Thus, literary festivals,⁸² for example, emerge in the region in the early twenty-first century alongside publishing houses grown organically from writers and publishers living in the West Indies.⁸³ These recent examples of literary production serve to justify a serious consideration of Caribbean literature defined by its geographical dimensions. The literary festival functions as a site to merge the canonical and the grassroots histories of literary production and to maintain a strong sense of national identity and ownership while inviting global participation and engagement through its websites and its invitations of writers of West Indian descent living abroad. Readers and

critics may have to wait and see if the paradox of the festival phenomenon effectively creates the ideal *and* universal readership for Caribbean literature or whether the content and contexts of its presence foster an essentialism akin to the extremes of Afro-Caribbean aesthetics on one hand and, on the other, colonial master narratives of the unknowable and transient Caribbean space.

Caribbean scholars across disciplines have historically been interested in examining responses to dominant colonial narratives of “facts” and “history” pre-twentieth century. Sociologist Mimi Sheller confirms how “Northern academic publics interested in knowledge about the Caribbean emerged from the reading publics who consumed fictional tales and factual knowledge about the Caribbean as early as the sixteenth century” (197). Those colonial narratives define the Caribbean’s geographical and social landscapes according to an outsider’s ability to know or master the rugged, tropical terrain and the social contradictions emerging from such a plurally configured geographical and political entity. Sheller reminds us that contemporary concerns about how the Caribbean is received and understood surface in popular culture in tandem with academic culture, arguing that “Caribbean writers and theorists have intervened repeatedly in the projects of ‘imaginative work’ which have produced the Caribbean, but they cannot stop the train of outside interests who produce books about the Caribbean for their own interests” (199). As early as James Anthony Froude and other colonial travel writers, trips to the Caribbean have not only served economic, recreational, or anthropological purposes. These trips have also functioned as projects of self-identification for Europeans whose failures, limitations or successes reveal themselves only against the image of the native ‘other’ in the tropical American space.

Indeed, the Caribbean space has fostered a culture of self-making around the world by serving as a site of imagined contradictions and contestations in which European Empires always emerge master and conqueror or nemesis. Sheller confirms, “Despite its indisputable narrative position at the origin of the plot of Western modernity, history has been edited and the Caribbean left on the cutting-room floor. Having washed its hands of history, the North can now present itself as the hero in the piece, graciously donating demographic tutelage, economic aid, foreign investment, military advisers and police support to the region” (1).

Sheller’s work and that of other social scientists explore an anthropological view of Caribbean consumption in North America, with a focus on tourism, food culture, and music. In examining the consumption of the Caribbean through reading and interpretation of literary texts, this chapter contributes to ongoing conversations about reception and the fate of literariness, especially in historically political fields of study. The broader study answers the following questions as they pertain to re-thinking the reading and reception of West Indian fiction. How has Caribbean literature engendered the knowability of the Caribbean, and how is its reception implicated in mythical understandings about the region in which colonial narratives might persist in insidious ways? Further, how does exile and immigrant writing in the Diaspora change the nature of literary reception and blur the lines between metropolitan identity and Caribbean identity? And more importantly, how do writers of and about the Caribbean respond to the tendency to merge understandings of Caribbean literature with the Caribbean space itself? This concluding chapter revisits the main assertions of the dissertation while arguing, additionally, that the reception of fiction produced in or about the West Indies resurrects conventional debates

about postcolonial studies on the relationship between politics and aesthetics, between or among the reality of the Caribbean readers' perceived notions about the Caribbean and authors' representations of the Caribbean in their literature. Consequently, contemporary writers of Caribbean fiction respond to readers of their work by taking on the challenge to create relationships between readers and writers, between fact and fiction, between the nation and the diaspora. Throughout the dissertation, Caribbean writers' fictional responses to dominant narratives have been examined. This chapter takes its examples from the positions presented in their nonfiction works.

Critics of the position taken in this chapter may argue that under the most perfect conditions, reading remains always about an act of visitation. Literature as a cultural product invites its readers to explore other worlds through a vicarious experience. Why is the idea of visitation through reading a relevant mode of investigation, then? The short response is that the conditions between and among cultures show imperfections and, very rarely, equality. Colonial education, for example, builds on the expectation that overseas subjects will acquire their "mimic" identity through the act of reading and memorizing the way of the British, as seen with characters in *The Mystic Masseur* and *Annie John*. Moving forward, then, the feeling of immediacy in current global culture additionally fuels the reliance on stock wiki-esque depictions of people and places to fulfill fleeting desires of guilt or curiosity about the "other" as people move through their daily lives. The market has monopolized on the instant gratification impulse by presenting books about foreign cultures as alternatives to travel, especially in harder economic times. An NPR Books review, "Three Travel Logs For Your Summer Staycation," posted on the NPR Books Facebook page,⁸⁴ suggests to readers through the status update feature that

“all you need is a couch, a cold drink and these three books” for a great exploration of places both near and far. Thus, at this current and significant cultural moment scholars may ask, as George Lamming did before, “For whom then do [they] write?” How do authors who write about the Caribbean engage and respond to readers’ impulses to use texts in lieu of vacation?

In the previous chapters, reading serves as a conduit to staking out and assuming a topographical right and inevitably a sense of cultural belonging for fictive and actual readers. Pauline Melville’s⁸⁵ short story, “The Iron and the Radio Have Gone,” gives a thematically reversed story about entitlements to place in the West Indies. The story depicts how foreigners – not ideologically, but legally and culturally – understand their roles, privileges and responsibilities when navigating the Caribbean landscape. The short story follows Molly Summers, a middle-aged missionary school teacher from England, who goes to Guyana to learn more about diversity in order to instruct her students more effectively and ethically about the region upon her return to the UK classroom. The major events of the plot span a few hours as Molly accompanies a few distinguished locals around the city of Georgetown and learns surprising lessons about herself in relation to race, diversity, and belonging.

Molly’s visit to Guyana originates in her love of the region’s history as adopted in her reading: “She studied the pre-emancipation history of the West Indies, experiencing quiet satisfaction at the role of the Quaker movement in the struggle against slavery” (Melville 16). Seeing imperial history through the “down to earth” (16) religiosity of the Quaker church gives Molly a sense of pride in her understanding of her duty, as she describes it, to learn and teach about other cultures, “to work for, understand and promote

the culture of oppressed races in England” (Melville 16). What she assumes will be a trip for exploration and confirmation of her liberalism via a visitation to the landscape turns out to be a revelation that she cannot escape the expectations set forth in the colonial paradigm of self and other. Molly becomes trapped in the lexicon of imperialist racism and readers cannot be certain whether she is shocked at her findings or at her own reactions to those findings. The story ends with Molly’s fainting in the back seat of a car headed away from the airport, trapping her in this country she surely wants to escape.

The dark humor of Melville’s short story draws attention to the failures of visitation as an epistemological exercise through a number of salient examples. First, the people Molly must interact with behave either with pride in the colonial legacy or with anti-colonial disdain, which confuses her. On the one hand, Donella Saunders, whom she visits, epitomizes English mimicry in her demeanor, speech, taste, and aspirations. The title of the story actually comes from a line spoken by Donella in an affected British accent to refer to an incident of theft in her home. Having lived in England for years, she recalls her friendship with British aristocrats, and thus Molly ascertains that even in Guyana, Donella’s class status far supersedes her humble, Quaker lifestyle in England. Donella works as an active entrepreneur who negotiates the trade of goods with the highest-level officials and who has the resources to make high-end purchases and fly from one part of Guyana to the other on a whim. She also stores old copies of British magazines – *Harper’s* and *Tatler* – for her guests, a sign that while she has re-adapted quite well to Guyana’s economic landscape, she refuses to let go of the British culture that she has adopted and that actually makes her life in Guyana much easier.

On the other end of the spectrum, Ralph Rawlings, Molly's host in Georgetown and the brother of "the only black teacher in the school" where she works, shows visible annoyance with her presence and the imposition of her odd visit intruding into his daily routine. His presence draws closer attention to and starkly contrasts the anthropological danger of Molly's expedition: "she had begun collecting small items like a magpie, postcards, Amerindian artefacts [sic], the sort of thing that would be a stimulus in the classroom. Now she needed books. Story books and picture books" (Melville 17). Ralph feels confused and takes slight offense at Molly's insistence on buying books about Guyana to take back to England. His response, "Don't be foolish my dear. All those books come from England. You can get them when you return" (20) points to the truism of Britain's ownership of knowledge (the power to print and sell books) via imperial expansion and also to the problematic idea that knowledge about the Caribbean is collected and produced outside the region and that it is always already a foreign knowledge. Further, Ralph's chastisement of Molly and by extension, the entire practice of knowledge production, when he says, "besides, there's little enough here without you walking off with half the literature in the country" (20), reinforces the historical challenges of colonialism I have discussed in earlier chapters. Resources for literacy and education are not readily available to all people across class and race, and are, thus, treated as rarefied commodities, valued not just for the intellectual products but for their materiality as well: owning books has importance because books remain rare and knowledge absent or at least partially missing.

Molly's reaction to Donella and Ralph, and to the people, places, and events in the rough urban terrain of Georgetown, produces physical discomfort and, later, illness.

So we might now read Annie John's illness in response to colonial texts as a direct response to the British person's aversion to the political and material realities of the West Indies, as depicted in Molly's case. As Molly moves through the contradiction of elite actions by Donella and grotesque gestures by a pregnant beggar woman and the vagrant who spits in her face, the tangibility of Georgetown's reality makes her uneasy to the point that she "felt that she had turned into a mirage, shimmering and real" (Melville 24). Melville's descriptions of the sweltering tropical heats augments the impression of Molly's unsettled feeling that the similarities between Guyana and England may not be a world apart, as she had dared to assume. Imagining "the pregnant woman teaching a class in her school in London; Maxine, [Donella's] maid, casually chewing on a match as she examined a rack of shoes in the shop at Finsbury Park" (24) causes revulsion in Molly and forces her into a state of malaise. She eventually passes out at the sight of a white man begging outside the bank: "He's English...that beggar...a white man" (26).

Pauline Melville's satire highlights a number of significant concerns about the reading of culture, particularly of communities and places historically othered in the West. While Molly's desire to be more culturally fluent in her teaching practices does not necessarily constitute an action warranting dismissal or resentment, the dangerous effects of her self-righteous posture in relation to Guyana and the Caribbean history of slavery become evident. Her self-positioning functions as the source of much anxiety about and resentment for herself and the characters she engages with while she travels.

Melville's short story would fit right into Angeletta Gourdine's comprehensive exploration of touring, a concept that "encompasses ritualized behavior that follows the colonial script: modern person travels to premodern historically frozen place, hoping to

explore both internal and external unknowns” (Gourdine 81). Her essay establishes West Indian authors’ representational response to the master narrative of visitation and contemporary tourist culture of the Caribbean. The discourse of travel and visitation to the region traces itself back historically to the colonialist travel writing of James Anthony Froude and Anthony Trollope, among others. Through her engagements with Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid, and Edwidge Danticat concerning their “travel behavior and/or performance in response to the [tourist] industry” (80) and reading them against popular commercials selling the Caribbean’s “sun, sea and sand image,” Gourdine argues that “their writings expose tourists’ attitudes toward a geographic space and the use of that space to negotiate cultural positionality and place” and posits that “for natives and nonnatives alike, the Caribbean islands serve as sites of identity (trans)formation and performance” (82). In other words, the tensions between native and visitor, homeland and paradise, or physical and social spaces undergo negotiation and transference in these authors’ treatments of characters’ and/or readers’ expectations about who people (both foreign and native) are when they occupy the Caribbean space. Gourdine’s essay provides the appropriate critical springboard for investigating the cultures of reading in metropolitan cities that make these tensions continually resonant and demand authors’ and critics’ repeated attempts to rethink what Sangeeta Ray calls “the act and art of reading the other” in the project of postcolonial criticism (Ray, “Ethical Encounters” 47), to arrive at a hermeneutics in which readers and the subject of writing and representation “[engage] with each other without either glorifying her as a site of absolute cultural difference or making her like [them] in [their] desire to grant her similar rights” (48).⁸⁶

Closer analysis of public responses to celebrated Anglophone writers in the United States, particularly Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat,⁸⁷ reinforces how examining contemporary reader response of Caribbean literature reveals that people who are “foreign” to the Caribbean adopt a position of visitation that results in problematic representations of authors and their expected creative moves, as well as troublesome understandings about Caribbean ethnography. Such a study focuses on metropolitan, particularly middlebrow, reading practices of fiction by these Anglophone writers who embrace or have a claim to a Caribbean identity.

Jamaica Kincaid’s Responsibility: *My Brother* and *Autobiography of My Mother*

Jamaica Kincaid’s 1997 memoir, *My Brother*, about her brother’s unsuccessful struggle with AIDS, meditates on her work as a writer, the reception of her work, and on her own role as a reader. As an immigrant writer, Kincaid has long secured her reputation as a master sculptor of the human psyche and a controlled and controlling recorder of the nuances of Caribbean life. In many ways, she also draws upon a deep US literary tradition that includes her in its canon, even as it consciously marks her inclusion while asserting her status as a foreigner who writes about a foreign place. As such, she becomes fixed between another categorical binary. As Chris Bongie observes, “Postcolonial and Afro-diasporic Kincaid may well be, but that has not stopped her from finding a place in the literary mainstream: ... she is (or more exactly, can be read as) a middlebrow writer, one who takes some stylistic and ideological chances in her work but also writes in such a way as to be capable of pleasing a relatively broad audience” (Bongie 4). Bongie presents another binary of aesthetics and reception that informs my explorations. Her appeal to a

“mass” audience viewed condescendingly by the members of her class and interpretive communities suggests that the highbrow sensibilities – aesthetic and political – that inform the writing of works like *My Brother* are not a prerequisite for their interpellations in book clubs of West Indian-American women in Brooklyn, NY as an example. The personal identification of women who work on the Upper East Side as nannies or of middle class white women from Ohio with Kincaid, women who find her writing through a “Books about Islands” Amazon listmania search, comes at no cost and without effort.

Kincaid’s liminal location between a postcolonial elite and an American middlebrow writer is most evident in her early work as a writer for the *New Yorker* magazine. She views the embrace of the middlebrow only as a point of departure for her career as a writer and alludes to the dangers of a reading public’s tendency to merge the writer, the work and the reader’s desire to find herself in the story. Kincaid confesses of her “Talk of the Town” entries that, “the anonymity of Talk then was a gift, and I only saw that after Talk stories began to be signed” (Kincaid, *Talk Stories* 12). Feeling protected by the “We” persona she had created and alluding to the distance between herself and a public whose scrutiny she endured, Kincaid found more than a career at the magazine: she found a safe haven. But the ultimate protection at the magazine was her editor, Mr. William Shawn. Their relationship was a privilege “because for a writer, no matter your age, to have such a voracious reader, a reader who liked to read what you had written was a gift so rare and [she] had never been given it again” (13). Kincaid returns to the memory of Mr. Shawn in *My Brother* calling him the ideal reader of her work, even after she shuns the magazine that he ran, discounting its known stature as a notable reviewing site.

In Jamaica Kincaid's life and work, the tensions between a rejection of a middlebrow public reception and her longing for of an ideal individual reader is symptomatic of a West Indian and Caribbean literary project that yearns for the formation of an ideal audience or readership. Such a desire is a product of the peculiar production and dissemination of literature outside of the geographical borders of the region. Reviews of Kincaid's work by herself and others illustrate the tensions between reading – an act of feeling and breathing life into a text, to use Kincaid's language – and reception – the process of distancing from a text for the purpose of defining and deriving pleasure. Such a distinction reveals an impulse in American middlebrow reading practices to map cultural specificity too neatly onto literary representation. Reception of Caribbean immigrant or diasporic writing, such as Kincaid's, points to Molly Travis's observation about the tensions of classed reading practices emerging from modernist understandings of reading and canon formation. Travis notes that, in fact, "the highbrow and the middlebrow reader occur in response to [an] anxiety about promiscuity, with the promiscuous understood to mean indiscreet, indiscriminate and unrestrained" (Travis 19). Kincaid's stream of consciousness writing style and postcolonial themes might separate her from this promiscuity, but the discomfort and anxiety produced in readers of her work frequently place her outside of acceptable norms of the middlebrow or universal appeal and leave her still working for this singular ideal reader, as she articulates in *My Brother* when she says "for I can sooner get used to never hearing from him – the prefect reader – than to not being able to write for him at all" (*My Brother* 198). *My Brother* functions as a reviewing site of its own: Kincaid self-reflexively reads literature, reads herself reading and critiques the reader responses (or lack thereof) of the people in her life. Kincaid

positions herself as a reader and writer and employs affect to negotiate the intersections between the reading of texts and the writing about grief or death. Although she frequently references Antigua and her home in Vermont, she foregoes the politics of place that resonate in popular and professional readings of her fiction for an anomalous engagement with emotion.

Kincaid begins her self-representation as a reader when she reviews a book on gardening by Russell Page, *The Education of a Gardener*, that she begins reading when she first has to fly to Antigua to visit her dying brother Devon (*My Brother* 10). Her stages of critique mimic in many ways the kind of review that she criticizes. First, she makes a judgment about the writing style and associates it with an imagined personality of the author. Then, she compares it to “other books that I loved.” She still participates in the protocols of an interpretive community in a way that is not markedly different from the middlebrow culture that has become the site of reception for her work. The book travels back to Antigua with her and she changes her reading practice when she picks it up again in the presence of her brother. She later compares the author’s life with a possible life her brother could have: “I looked at my brother, for he was a gardener also, and I wondered, if his life had taken a certain turn, if he had caused his life to take a different turn, might he have written a book with such a title?” (11). She wants to supplant the permanent absence in her brother’s fated life with a kind of hopeful presence. She wants to imaginatively fill the void that his physical body will eventually leave behind. Her reading takes an affective turn once she associates the subject matter of the text with her brother’s physical body.

Like the characters in *Abeng* or *The Orchid House*, the narrator's reading in *My Brother* also serves to connect or reconnect with the place Antigua, but more pointedly to the feelings produced in that place, especially during childhood. Kincaid remembers that, "I would read books then, and this whole scene of me lying in bed and reading books would drive my mother to fits of anger, for she was sure it meant I was doomed to a life of slothfulness, but as it turned out, I was only doomed to write books other people might read" (*My Brother* 44). Her mother's association of the act of reading with laziness calls forth George Lamming's description of colonial attitudes to leisurely reading. Any encounter with a text that was not part of the educational system was an act of transgression against the peasant culture of the West Indies. Her behavior and her mother's responses to her actions explain the relationship with colonial texts that the narrator recalls on her visit to Antigua. These colonial texts also shape her reading of the relationship with her brother.

Kincaid creates registers of feeling through which she can connect with her brother in his last days. She describes a scene of reading with her brother during which she lays right next to him on his bed (41). Her physical placement seems to compensate for a lack she identifies in her family and cultural history: "We are not an instinctively empathetic people; a circle of friends who love and support each other is not something I can recall from my childhood" (42). Her efforts to assume the position of her brother by bringing their bodies together reveals a desire for her to endow him with successes and privileges associated with the culture of reading. Her reading act in her brother's bed is another iteration of the hope of Devon's actualization as an esteemed gardener in Antigua. Kincaid sees the impractical and too often expected role of the black male that

her brother occupies in this moment as directly linked, if not causally, to the actions bringing on his demise of AIDS. As she skims through his belongings, she notices that

In his room that time were some books on a table and a radio cassette-deck player. The books were his old school textbooks. One of them was a history of the West Indies, though it was mostly a history of the British West Indies, and it was exactly like the textbook from which I had been taught when I was in school. I was reading, lying on his bed, and when I got up to go, he gave it to me as a gift. I still have this book, it's sitting on a shelf with some other books that I like very much. (*My Brother* 45)

Kincaid's fictional works and her interviews reference a dislike for history books and a preference for fiction. In *My Brother*, she notes that her brother's love for history was nostalgic, romantic, and ideal in a way that was futile. The book on the history of the British West Indies was another example of his acts of theft and his fatalistic misreading of his circumstances in the past or present:

This book was a book he took from school. I understood that, taking a book from school; when I was a little girl, living on that small island, I used to steal books from the library, not my school, but the library; the school I attended had no books that I wanted to steal. I would not have wanted to steal a book about history; I only stole novels, and all the novels I stole were novels that I had read, they were all written in the nineteenth century. I was not interested in history then,

only so now; my brother had history books on his shelf. He was obsessed with the great thieves who had inhabited his part of the world, the great hero-thieves of English maritime history: Horatio Nelson. John Hawkins, Francis Drake. He thought that the thing called history was an account significant defeats recorded by significant people. Who had benefited from the significant triumphs; he though (as do I) that this history of ours was primarily an account of theft and murder (“Dem tief, dem a dam tief”). (Kincaid, *My Brother* 94-95)

Kincaid’s own acts of theft in this situation are justifiable from her standpoint and this is a significant moment of her own misreading, whether deliberate or unconscious. She distinguishes between fact and fiction, reality and representation, and for better or worse she suggests that stealing novels from the library is a theft correcting dominant representations of the British Empire. However, to steal history books from the school is an act of self-denial. Her brother denies himself the formal structures of colonial education that can equip him with the intellectual power to destroy and refashion not just books but also the production of knowledge.

Kincaid’s works written before *My Brother* also reflected her disdain for British Imperial history – from her essay *A Small Place* to her representations of historical figures, most notably, the Columbus figure of *Annie John* is wounded and disabled, “the old man can no longer get up and go.” Why, then, does this history of the West Indies get categorized among “other books that I like very much?” In many ways, Kincaid creates a paradox between her brother’s death and the presence of history books in his life that represented the larger culture of thievery in which her brother participated. Colonialism

remains the lasting trauma that makes these parallels prevalent, even in the twenty-first century. It is possible, then, for readers of *My Brother* to understand the books she likes as spoils of war from her personal kind of victory against colonial knowledge when she cannot claim a victory for her brother against the AIDS war.

After Devon's death, Kincaid is in transit to his funeral and must meet with a newspaper journalist to do an interview. This interview first reveals her resentment for middlebrow publications (*My Brother* 100-101) and the significant moment of transition is when she confesses her real emotions but not the real events of her brother's life. She adopts a conflation of text and place in her judgment of *New Yorker* readers, claiming that "the magazine I wrote for all my writing life so far was like the place in which I had grown up; it was beautiful, an ideal of some kind, but it had been made vulgar and ugly by the incredibly stupid people who had become attracted to it" (101). Her acerbic juxtaposition of tourists and colonizers with readers of middlebrow venues prompts a consideration of ethical responsibility in the context of reading and representing the Caribbean. Kincaid is one example of such a "call to respond" in Gayatri Spivak's terms, "to be responsible for a name" and to "be answerable for" the idea of the Caribbean as it is read in literature. In *My Brother*, as in much of her writing, "responsibility as obligation is the mode that the narrator adopts in this retelling of life on an island in the Caribbean" (Ray, "Ethical Encounters" 53). Kincaid's characters and narrators generally dread the sense of duty – via communication, remittance or memory – that binds the migrant subject always to the homeland. However, in the memoir Kincaid's role as an author also displays her responsibility as a "ethical, secret encounter with the reader" (Ray, "Ethical Encounters" 54), where she rejects readers' responses that demand

mastery of herself, her characters and the places she depicts and directs readers to register how the text makes them feel.

In one scene, Kincaid recalls a conversation with a childhood friend that stirs her interest in how she is read in her home country, Antigua. She says, “One day a woman who, when we were little girls together, was my best friend called me on the telephone to tell me that some books I had given her had been stolen and could I replace them. She was in tears. I was very touched by this, because they were books that I had written and when I had given them to her she did not seem particularly pleased to have them” (*My Brother* 82-83). Kincaid’s alludes here to news or information that she would rather forget about her publication history and the effects of her writing on the people in Antigua that she supposedly represented in her essay *A Small Place* and then in novels like *Annie John*. Her sensitivity to the shift in this woman’s perspective signals a desire that I discuss earlier in the dissertation about archiving West Indian identity in Caribbean literary texts. That the image of her work is redeemed or validated by an individual reader who may have an affective response, means that Kincaid successfully replaces a hegemonic narrative about Antiguan life with her own lived version. To store the memory of the novel *Annie John* in this woman’s mind to the point that its loss brings her to tears is to bring to reality the imagined replacement of colonial narratives with her own, as Annie, the protagonist, also does in that novel.

Yet such a redemptive moment must be juxtaposed with the public responses to Kincaid’s writing in literary reviews. The genre of the book review, in middlebrow publications such as newspapers and literary magazines, carries a keen relationship to an American or cosmopolitan understanding of space and place as it pertains to the

Caribbean. Reviews of Kincaid's work illustrate a preoccupation with defining the Caribbean space through literary tropes and a desire in American middle-class culture to "visit" and understand this place, if not in reality through imagined worlds. Such a tendency is evident in the reception of Kincaid's novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*.

My first interest in this line of argument was as middlebrow as they come. On a spring Saturday afternoon, I purchased a hardcover copy of *Autobiography of My Mother* at New York City's famous Strand Books that I intend to give as a gift to a Dominican friend. It was a used copy, as are most of the shelved items in the floor to ceiling stacks. On the subway, I browse through the copy and discover the folded page of the *New York Times* review by Cathleen Schine, "A World as Cruel as Job's," along with a sheet of notes. Someone else was in the process of assessing this novel for either personal or professional reasons, a review of some kind. Schine's review was the guided tour of the text. Reading the review alongside the anonymous reader's notes instantly led me to rethink how reading publics were created, even silently through marginalia and note cards, gifted anonymously to other readers from all walks of life.

Cathleen Schine's review, published in *The New York Times* in 1996, depicts a damning version of Kincaid's Caribbean. The far-reaching implications of Schine's review must be emphasized to validate reception's doubtless impact on the formation of a literary canon and cultural identity. As Wendy Griswold confirms, "The Sunday *New York Times* Book Review is the most prominent reviewing medium and, to some extent, determines what will be reviewed in the press outside New York" (Griswold 1089). Further, the newspaper's reviews frequently begin or elevate cultural respect for the titles

generated on its bestseller lists, the surest evidence that literary legitimacy depends not just on what and how people read, but most certainly on what people buy. Schine's review, while it may not strongly impact the purchasing value of *Autobiography of My Mother*, does then influence how readers of *The New York Times* (not necessarily of Kincaid's work) respond to the kinds of writing produced about the Caribbean region. The ominous interpretation of the novel in this review not only positions the narrator, Xuela, as cruel and destructive to humanity, but constructs a Caribbean landscape that cannot resist or withstand the psychological determinations of her narration. Schine argues that the only beautiful thing about the novel is the prose. This judgment leads other readers of the novel and her review to buy into the desolation and torture of the island she describes, a world so cruel.

Schine sees Kincaid's controlled prose that constructs the ethos of a marginal figure such as Xuela – female, Carib, motherless – as an exercise in arrogance rather than an exercise in agency: “Like the God of Genesis, she manifests herself through her words, describing the world around her and so conferring on it life – though in this novel, the only meaningful thing about life is that it implies death” (Schine). Xuela's association with the creation narrative renders her omnipotent, but only as a traitor to this place in her refusal to submit to a depiction of this island that is at once idyllic and mysterious. Xuela, and by extension, Kincaid refuse to respond to the middlebrow expectations of visitation that Schine's review implicitly desires. Schine's critique that “Ms. Kincaid intentionally simplifies the life around [the narrator], rendering it free of all dailiness, purifying it until it shines with hatred alone” (Schine) is further evidence of the reviewer's attempt to recreate the Caribbean's physical and social climates through her reading of this

character. What Schine reads as simplification of life may well be the amplification of Xuela's psychological and emotional transformations to which readers become complicit. Even a more generous review by Tai Moses in *San Francisco Metro News* reveals the search for an authenticity of place in the rendering of the narrator's life: "Xuela is Dominica – an orphaned country in shambles, its people enslaved and conquered, its past a graveyard. Here, Kincaid is saying, are the consequences of extinguishing a person's – and a people's – history" (Moses). Moses also betrays his need for a definition of Dominica even as he makes a valid thematic observation.

Another generous and more thorough review in *New York Review of Books* seems to more readily blur the expectations of Kincaid's work for lay and professional readers. Yet, it continues a trend in using place as the paradigm of critique, for better or worse, most immediately evoked in the title "In the Black Room of the World." The review by Darryl Pinckney discusses the novel in conversation with Kincaid's earlier works and his most pointed claim is that *Autobiography* rejects the possibility of reading the genre of the autobiography or the tendency toward autobiographical representation in Kincaid's work. Certainly, reception of her work frequently surrounds the autobiographical implications or sources of her work. Pinckney also focuses on the tangible nature of the setting of the novel claiming that it is "a departure from her previous novels with their descriptions of a recognizable world" (Pinckney). But a tendency to control an understanding of the landscape leads Pinckney to the conclusion that the realm of topographical description is "fable- or dream-like" (Pinckney). Pinckney is concerned with the lack of focus on time and place and reads his own dissatisfaction with the intangibility of place as Kincaid's denunciation of this old world: "Dominica is most

likely intended to be one of those places that lag behind the rest of the world” as he suggests there may be no cars there till much later in the twentieth century. Pinckney ends his review by acknowledging a tradition of exile writers, who clearly have no tangible place in the region and therefore “the most liberating thing for Kincaid is that she herself ended up in New York,” (Pinckney) away from oppressive England and mythical islands where cars show up too late. Then he praises her as a literary descendent of the great modernist writer, Gertrude Stein. Pinckney’s own disavowal of Kincaid’s West Indian heritage finds its justification in this absence of spatial identity that indicates that he, like the readers he advises, have been denied access to Dominica and therefore to Xuela and her “true” identity.

Schine also participates in this discourse of rejection and her review ends with a more problematic statement: “For as personal as Xuela’s account is... the mundane, which is to say the world, is banished from these pages: Xuela is a symbol. She sees herself as a symbol, an abstraction of an entire people’s suffering and degradation, and so there is a uniformity to her cold vision and a relentless rhythmic message to her empty life that is disturbing certainly – almost unbearable – without ever feeling real” (NYT). This reading counters Moses’ focus on the elements of daily life that do inform Xuela’s life, including “the poverty and slums of Roseau.” (Moses). Schine’s replacement of Dominica with “the world,” a conflation she makes repeatedly in the review, is only one way that the specificities of a particular space and experience are neglected or negated at the expense of a desire for truly knowing and identifying with the place. Schine’s blindness to the mundane in the novel is clear evidence of this desire, because, for Kincaid, elements of the mundane create the narrative. Kincaid reinforces her declaration

in earlier writing, that “in a small place, every event is a domestic event” (Kincaid, *A Small Place* 52). Nothing about the setting of *The Autobiography of My Mother* seems exceptional or exemplary experience to a professional reader of Caribbean literature or Caribbean life.

Shine’s assessment of Kincaid’s writing style further illustrates the erasure of a distinct Caribbean social landscape at the expense of the world. She says, “Ms. Kincaid has herself purposefully forsaken “the language of the poet,” abandoning compassion as if it never existed, while appropriating poetry’s cadences and strategies and power to conquer, to dominate, and at last to destroy. She leaves behind her a trail of icy negation. For whatever she describes, she vanquishes and renders lifeless” (Schine). The reviewer misses the motive in such an assessment. The theme of death in *Autobiography* doesn’t render the Caribbean lifeless. What it negates is one’s ability to read, and therefore to truly know, the place and thereby control it. Kincaid’s depiction of Dominica in *Autobiography* and her reflection on reading in *My Brother* challenge the structure in which she once participated and in many ways, helped construct. In the memoir, Kincaid reflects that she “became a writer out of desperation,” describing it as an act of saving herself (*My Brother* 195-6). Her response and implicit responsibility in her later fiction is to reserve the space of the ideal reader, not for reviewers like Shine or even Moses, who must define a space according to regulated and hegemonic narratives. She reserves the place for people like her childhood friend or Mr. Shawn, who similarly come to reading in personal acts of salvation, redemption or identification.

Conclusion: Acknowledging the Occasions for Reading

Jamaica Kincaid is only one of a number of writers across the Caribbean and the diaspora, as well as other postcolonial writers, who present a renewed sense of reflection to their audience and to their own roles as readers. For example, Zadie Smith (*Changing My Mind*) and J.M. Coetzee (*Elizabeth Costello*) have engaged these concerns in fiction and non-fiction. Most recently, Edwidge Danticat's essay collection *Create Dangerously* asks these very question: How can writers do justice to a physical, geographical place that is often marred by turmoil and exploitation and do justice to their own creative impulses at the same time? How do writers continue to write with an ideal reader in mind and remain faithful to a public that may come to their work to seek pleasure, comfort or identification? Danticat's return to the issue of readership is another prime example of an author's ethical turn. The twelve essays of her 2010 collection self-reflexively consider the role of the artist in catalyzing political change, a role that early West Indian writers such as C.L.R. James saw as the priority of the writer. Such a position for the artist creates many dangers, especially tenuous relationships between writers and the various readers who they claim to write to or for. Danticat fashions her ideal reader as the dangerous reader, and she writes "in part that no matter how trivial your words may seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them" (Danticat 10). For Danticat, the stakes are high for those who employ literature as a revolutionary mechanism or a means to political freedom. As she cites the various sanctions and censors placed on reading during the Duvalier regime in Haiti, she admires the audacity of the readers in her family and national history who made it possible for her to write:

“Reading, like writing, under these conditions is disobedience to a directive in which the reader, our Eve, already knows the possible consequences of eating that apple but takes a bold bite anyway” (10). Yet the author’s emphasis on literature as politically charged and to a large extent, revolutionary, stands against her reception in her other home, the United States.

Danticat’s literary ascent through Oprah’s Book Club’s reading of *Breath Eyes Memory* in 1998 is strongest evidence of the troublesome marriage between desire for universality and the recognition of an ideal reader. Her semi-autobiographical novel had received some critical attention, but was not an immediate attraction in the bookstore; not until Oprah came along. While the Oprah Book Club has an interesting, if not controversial, place within the US academy,⁸⁸ the literary circle’s work of disseminating works like Danticat’s first novel marked a turning point in the reading habits of both sophisticated and popular audiences. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* became more than just a novel about a girl who migrated from Haiti to New York. It became a story about Haitian migration to New York. It became the story of Haiti. Oprah Winfrey’s personal desire to use literature as a site for exploring marginal histories and cultures gave way to an international phenomenon. More than just the appeal of Oprah’s reverential status in the popular imaginary, the book club, which included an online and sometimes televised component,⁸⁹ was successful because it made available to the public what was once exclusive to the US academy, breaking down the ivy walls and proving that interpretive communities could exist successfully outside the academy and produce knowledge, not just for the masses but within the world of the masses. Moreover, not only did the book club make reading literature a popular practice, but it also placed on the map a variety of

important writers, many with ethnic backgrounds, who were merely bookshelf space-fillers in the academic world at the time of their appearance within the book club.

However, the consequences for the fame produced in mass culture were significant for Danticat, who received considerable backlash from Haitian and Haitian-American readers fighting against the representations of Haitian women in *Breath Eyes Memory* as another tragic story of an ill-fated nation.

Like Kincaid's *My Brother*, Danticat's memoir reveals her affective response to readers reading her work and she is "anguished by [her] own sense of guilt" (Danticat 33) when she reflects on responses like: "'Why was she taught to read and write?' I overheard a man saying at a Haitian American fund-raising gala in New York, where I was getting an award for writing this book. 'That is not us. The things she writes, they are not us'" (32). Reactions by this man and other harsh reader reviews she received as a result of the book and its dissemination suggest that the boundaries between writers and their readers of Caribbean/ postcolonial literature endure a similar challenge as the boundaries between affiliations to nation and the embrace of transatlantic or diasporic identity – simultaneous nationality, to again evoke Bhabha's idea. Danticat is right, then, to wonder "if in the intimate, both solitary and solidary, union between writers and readers a border can really exist" (16). The letter she writes to her protagonist, Sophie Caco, as an afterword to the novel serves as an indirect conversation with her readers – Haitian, Haitian American and all others – who look for personal identification among her fiction, who look for what Haiti is "really" like in the world of the text. She rejects the reliance on spatial definition and insists on the validity of the "singularly exceptional fictional person" (32). Yet the act of writing the afterword is itself an apology that

acknowledges a difficult position for the immigrant artist, one faced by Jamaica Kincaid and other immigrant writers of the Caribbean, that “the immigrant writer must sometimes apologize for airing, or appearing to air, dirty laundry” (Danticat 33). Again, aesthetics and politics remain uncomfortable bedfellows in the content and function of Caribbean literary discourse.

The readings I undertake in this chapter and throughout the dissertation confirm that acts and scenes of reading hinge on colonialism, nationalism and migration in understanding West Indian identity and the production of Caribbean literary history. George Lamming may see the achievement of “reading seriously” in the West Indies evidenced in the recurrence of reading as a narrative trope in novels analyzed in this project. So the question may be different than in Lamming’s essay: we may no longer need to ask where the readers are. This dissertation uncovers readers in classrooms, rural villages, libraries and sick beds in literary representation. Readers also surface at their personal computers and newspapers in various social spaces all around the world. No longer should Lamming wonder who and what this writing is for. We come closer to understanding the various functions of reading: reconstructing conventional knowledge, claiming national legitimacy, asserting diasporic authority or summoning empathy. Kincaid’s ideal reader, Danticat’s dangerous reader, Levy’s online reader or Lamming’s local reader might all be served in the form and content of writing produced in the region and the diaspora over the last century in which colonial master narratives are forsaken and Caribbean subjectivity is elevated as an intellectual, political and geographical right. But at the same time, the “pleasure and paradox” (Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile* 50) of the region’s multiple dimensions presents opportunities for

readers across nations or with various levels of interpretive expertise to confront their terms of engagement with the Caribbean.

Notes

¹ For a brief period, *Caribbean Voices* was also hosted by Jamaican-born author and poet Una Marson. For more on Henry Swanzy and the fate of *Caribbean Voices*, see Glyne A. Griffith, "Deconstructing Nationalisms: Henry Swanzy, Caribbean Voices and the Development of West Indian Literature," *Small Axe* 5.2 (2001): 1-20. See also Laurence A. Breiner, "Caribbean Voices on the Air: Radio, Poetry and Nationalism in the Anglophone Caribbean," *Communities on the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003: 93-108.

² The University of the West Indies was first established in 1948 with the Mona Campus in Jamaica as a subsidiary of the University of London. For more historical information, see <http://www.uwi.edu/aboutuwi/briefhistory.aspx>. Interestingly, the establishment of the University coincided with mass migration of West Indians to London with the Empire Windrush generation, which I discuss at length later in this dissertation. The investment of an intellectual culture in the region satisfied an extreme gap in the social, cultural and political infrastructure of the West Indies and the main campuses would later become sites of activism influencing the colonies' movements towards national independence.

³ The Caribbean Examinations Council is the premier institution for standardizing high school education in the English-speaking Caribbean. The CXC curriculum now includes the most cited and anthologized Caribbean writers, mostly their 'early' work. But contemporary Caribbean and Diaspora writers have yet to appear in the syllabus in many West Indian schools. See www.cxc.org.

⁴ Although most of the daily lives of Caribbean people revolves around having the news reported, elements of the literary occurred in the newspapers – serialized novels, narrativized gossip columns, and children's folk stories are popular examples. Belinda Edmondson goes into detail in her book, *Caribbean Middlebrow*, on the historical foundations of creative works in newspapers and magazines and their cultural currency, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, these literary inclusions in the newspaper have dwindled significantly in the contemporary moment.

⁵ Since my visit in 2005, some changes have improved the literary culture on the island. Namely, the *Nature Island Literary Festival* opened in 2008, fostered by the cultural elite of the island, with the intent of uncovering the talent and interests in literature and art of local people. The organization's mission is to use the festival to "to promote reading, increase interest in literature and demonstrate that the literary arts and publishing are valid, rewarding and viable career choices for our people" (*Nature Island Literary Festival*, 1 June 2011 <https://www.facebook.com/NatureIslandLiteraryFestival>). The NILF was surely prompted by regional and international festivals that flourished in the first decade of the 21st century. The most popular regional festival to attempt to bridge the gap between the "overseas" literature of the Anglophone Caribbean with the work of local/ residential artists is the Calabash Literary Festival in Jamaica.

⁶ Writings by Europeans about the region, from as early as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and others situate the Caribbean as either an unknowable, foreign location, or as a canvas on which European knowledge, particularly the forbidden or eccentric, can be enacted. These early representations of the New World continue to influence definitions of the Caribbean, and readers of Lamming's work and others, at times, measure their understanding of Caribbean identity against these earlier readings.

⁷ See Wolfgang Iser. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. 112

⁸ Glissant strongly defends oral culture's contribution to fostering literary culture, which, he argues, bears the true marks of resistance to European-imposed literary hegemony and canonization of regions and texts. From a Francophone standpoint, his recommendation to readers and writers of Caribbean literature is that, "the only way, to my mind, of maintaining a place for writing (if this can be done) – that is, to remove it from being an esoteric practice or a banal reserve of information – would be to nourish it with the oral. If writing does not henceforth resist the temptation to transcendence, by, for instance, learning from oral practice and fashioning a theory from the latter if necessary, I think it will disappear as a cultural imperative from future societies" (Glissant 101).

⁹ Swanzy, Henry. "The Literary Situation in the Contemporary Caribbean." *Books Abroad*. 30.3: 1956. 266-274

¹⁰ Edouard Glissant similarly calls for a national literature of the Antilles, which "must signal the self-assertion of new peoples, which one calls their rootedness, and which is today their struggle" (Glissant 101). Both Glissant and James view a notion of national consciousness springing from a peasant or working class that, paradoxically, may well be largely illiterate or whose educational access is limited.

¹¹ James literary and theoretical writings positing this idea foreground Simon Gikandi's seminal work, *Maps of Englishness*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), which examines the relationship between the development of English culture and the enactment of British imperialism in and outside of England.

¹² See Belinda Edmondson, "Race, Tradition and the Caribbean Aesthetic." *New Literary History*. 25: 1, 1992. 109-120

¹³ See Chapter Two, "Literary Men and the English Canonical Tradition" in Edmondson, Belinda. *Making Men: gender, literary authority, and women's writing in Caribbean narrative*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999. 38-57.

¹⁴ In the chapter "Literary Men and the English Canonical Tradition," (*Making Men*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), Edmondson describes the dialectical relationship between Victorian and West Indian society established in the nineteenth

century, in which the gentleman/ scholar subject represents the highest achievement of British Imperial success. This particular type of transculturation, to use Mary Louise Pratt's term in *Imperial Eyes* is one of the invented traditions that remained with West Indian middle class masculinity well into the post-independence era.

¹⁵ See Homi Bhabha. "Signs Taken for Wonders" in *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 145-174

¹⁶ Radway, Janice. *A Feeling for Books*. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

¹⁷ Bongie, Chris. "Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature." *Postmodern Culture* 14.1, 2003. 1-69

¹⁸ Other examples of Postcolonial novels that do this through reading include J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth*; Prankaj Mishra's *The Romantics*.

¹⁹ See Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (1993), in which he discusses the difference between the canonical and noncanonical, the latter being a result of the establishment of a counter-canon into the Western canon. He argues that as a result of emerging fields like postcolonial literary studies and feminist studies, which have forged counter-canons against Western literary traditions, the noncanonical ceases to stand for a rejection by the canon but becomes a site of active exclusion: "It is only *as* canonical works that certain texts can be said to represent hegemonic social groups. Conversely, it is only *as* noncanonical works that certain other texts can truly represent socially subordinated groups" (9).

²⁰ Barthes and Iser both discuss the phenomenological experience of reading in which the "work" (words on the page) only gets transformed to a "text" (words with meaning) when a reader's affective experience creates meaning from these words/symbols.

²¹ Although I do not actually close read these texts in depth in the dissertation, I cite them to illustrate the depth and breadth of the primacy of reading in Caribbean literary history.

²² See the Introduction, "In Search of Black Readers," in Elizabeth McHenry. *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History in African American Literary Societies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 1-22

²³ In Chris Bongie's essay "Exiles on Main Stream," he argues that the stance of postcolonial literature has appealed to a culture of assimilation, particularly in the US academic world and the middlebrow pseudo-academic communities, even as it must be politically resistant and anti-colonial. Speaking specifically of Kincaid, he questions whether the academy and the middlebrow community may be at odds with each other: "Does it make any sense to speak of a writer like Kincaid as exemplifying the 'middlebrow postcolonial,' given the apparent tension between the assimilative

connotations of the first term and the resistant ones of the second?”(6). Bongie’s question undoubtedly applies also to Naipaul, whose international success and award of the Nobel Prize situate him in the category of appeasement that Bonjie carves out. Yet the satiric elements of Naipaul’s works speak to postcolonial resistance. I will interrogate the categorical differences and contradictions in reading practices of characters and audiences throughout this project, most specifically in Chapter Three, where I respond more directly to Bonjie’s assertions about Jamaica Kincaid. For now, I focus on how these main characters in *Annie John* and *The Mystic Masseur* depict the ways in which this contradiction between middlebrow and postcolonial or lay and professional is enacted in and upon the Caribbean reader of literature.

²⁴ See Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

²⁵ In his essay, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Homi Bhabha aligns the expansion of the British Empire with the dissemination of the English book, both as object and as idea. The presence of the book in India, for example, establishes “a signifier of authority” (153) and he argues that the only way in which the book (through which the canon is constructed) takes on meaning is “after the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity” (153). Bhabha’s attention to this notion of colonial trauma and to the quest for origins is concurrent with Derrida’s and Spivak’s enunciations of the archive and points to a theoretical framework already at work in other postcolonial regions that needs highlighting in Caribbean literary studies.

²⁶ According to David Ormerod, in his “In a Derelict Land: The Novels of V.S. Naipaul,” (*Contemporary Literature* 9.1 (1968): 74-90,) “The West Indian writer, Naipaul asserts, has no interest in comedy because he has no social convention against which to highlight eccentric behavior, and his work can have little universal appeal because it is based on a narrow issue and a special society, so that it is always a witness and never a participant” (82). While the humor in *The Mystic Masseur* is more apparent in Naipaul’s work than in the work of others such as Wilson Harris, Sam Selvon and Lamming, his narrative still seems to exclude the reader as an active participant. Readers of the novel stand back from Ganesh’s psychic development because they have no knowledge of what he reads and the process by which the textual elements change him. Reader participation reveals itself in *Annie John*, however, even if comedy is not necessary to show a resistant or eccentric relationship to “social convention.”

²⁷ In “Archive Fever,” Derrida historicizes the notion of the archive in a close reading of Freud’s own archival oeuvre – his professional writings, his home-turned-museum, and, more thoroughly, the work *Moses*, which Freud designated a “historical novel.” The implication of history, memory, and fiction in Freud’s classification is the source of Derrida’s investigation of the archival structure.

²⁸ Ganesh's role in this environment speaks to Benedict Anderson's understand of national identity in *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1985. Anderson argues that a community "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). However, even as Ganesh's reading acts invite the community, including strangers, to experience this communion, the mystery of what he reads brings to mind Partha Chatterjee's critique of Anderson's ideas of nationalism in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Chatterjee suggests that anticolonial nationalism takes a different form than European nationalism, as examined by Anderson. He identifies the two domains of nationalism – the material and the spiritual – which apply to Ganesh's work in this novel. His reading practices invoke the material imperial power, while his mystic practice speaks to the work of his cultural identity. Ganesh's combination of both practices validate Chatterjee's idea that "the greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture" (6).

²⁹ See "Signs Taken for Wonders" in Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London : Routledge, 1994.

³⁰ The selection of titles in Beharry's gift reinforce Ganesh's amalgamated intellectual identity: one is the guide book to a colonial Emperor's successes and failures, another is an astronomical assessment of fortune and the future and others are grounded in Indian spiritual identity.

³¹ See V.S. Naipaul. *A House for Mr. Biswas*. New York: Vintage, 1961. *A House for Mr. Biswas* also engages the primacy of colonial education in Naipaul's treatment of the Exhibitions.

³² We are never sure that *The Niggergram* is a legitimate entity or publication. Suggestions in the satiric tone of the narrator lead us to believe that he is making a term for the ways in which local gossip functions. Why does he call it *The Niggergram*, though? The association of local gossip with the black community of Trinidad is one of many instances in Naipaul's works where he emphasizes the racial and ethnic fault lines in these colonial communities.

³³ Quoted in Belinda Edmondson. "Jamaica Kincaid and the Genealogy of Exile," *Small Axe* (1999): (73).

³⁴ Many Caribbean novels depict the scenes of formal education to highlight identity formation. These novels function in the genre of the Bildungsroman and frequently present the relationships between individual development and national progress. Some titles include Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, among others. While I am interested in the social and political effects of educational practices, my interest is particularly in the

epistemological implications of the act of reading, a practice confined for the most part to the classroom.

³⁵ Consignation, according to Derrida, does not only mean “the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate,” but here “the act of *consigning* through *gathering together signs*” (10). So it is not just about the accumulation of knowledge. The consignation of the colonial project also involves the collecting of different ways of accumulating knowledge as well.

³⁶ For a closer consideration of Kincaid’s intertextual use of *Paradise Lost*, see Diane Simmons, “Jamaica Kincaid and the Canon: In Dialogue with *Paradise Lost* and *Jane Eyre*,” *MELUS* 23.2 (1998): 65-85.

³⁷ See Chris Bongie. “Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature.” *Postmodern Culture* (2003): 1-69.

³⁸ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

³⁹ I discuss Derrida’s analysis of the archive at length in Chapter One. I continue to use his understanding of the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge throughout this project to argue for reading as a central methodology for articulating postcolonial epistemology in Anglophone Caribbean literature.

⁴⁰ See Wolfgang Iser. “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.” In *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. 274-294

⁴¹ Colonial nationalism in the British West Indies occurred primarily in the late 1930s. According to Eric Williams, revolution prompting national independence materialized through trade union organization that sought to regulate labor of the peasant class. In addition to labor regulations, adult suffrage became a significant point of contention between island nationalists and the British representatives (Williams 474). For British officials, suffrage was contingent on “the present standard of education on the islands [having] greatly advanced” (qtd. in Williams 474). I already discuss in the Introduction the irony and contradictions of colonial education that made it difficult for working class populations to advance intellectually, economically and politically.

Further, coinciding with various protests spurred on by the urgent tone of World War II, the West Indian Federation was founded and many Anglophone islands achieved associate statehood, a category of political betweenness in which islands were self-governed but “with Britain responsible for defence and external affairs” (475). Phyllis Shand Allfrey was an active member of the West Indian Federation in the 1950s and until the time of its dissolution in 1962. By this point, the larger islands – Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados – and Guyana were well on their way to full political independence, with the smaller islands following close behind. The late 1950s to 1960s indicated increased

recognition of the dire need for literacy and educational advancement among large masses of the population to secure national autonomy.

⁴² Although white writers such as H.G. deLisser (*White Witch of Rose Hall*, 1929) formed a critical part of the early journalistic and literary communities of the region before the great wave of migration, critics like Kamau Braithwaite made a strong case for the exclusion of some literary representations to be excluded from the canon if they did not include the “utilization of the Creole languages and certain principles of orality” (Edmondson, “Race, Tradition...” 114) that defines an “authentic” or black West Indian aesthetics.

⁴³ See Chapter Four, “Theorizing Caribbean Feminist Aesthetics” in *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narrative*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

⁴⁴ See McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

⁴⁵ Although my analysis does not centralize authorial identity, much of the criticism on these two novels frequently addresses the intersections between the authors’ lived experiences and the autobiographical tendencies of their writing. Although Michelle Cliff is of mixed race, and even though she has sometimes been labeled a white Jamaican, very little doubt or contestation remains about her revolutionary project to assert Jamaican individual and collective authority in her works. This realization results from the impact of the plot of her second and most famous novel, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), mostly read as a sequel to *Abeng*. On the contrary, Phyllis Allfrey has too seldom been given the same attention or even the benefit of the doubt that such a project may be operating in her novel. Braithwaite specifically says that her work falls outside the domain of Afro-Caribbean literary aesthetics because it has very little to do with blacks in the West Indies (See Kamau Braithwaite. *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

⁴⁶ O’Driscoll’s essay, “Michelle Cliff and the Authority of Identity” wrestles with the tensions in criticism of Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* between the postmodern postcolonial discourse of hybridity and the racial identity politics of Afro-Caribbean literary traditions. O’Driscoll uncovers the assumptions about Cliff’s personal identity in readings of the novel. In this chapter, I steer strongly away from any authorial interpretations and look more closely at the ways in which *Abeng* participates in creating an archive of resistance that may or may not fit into either the anti-colonial or postmodern categories of defining the Caribbean literary tradition.

⁴⁷ *The Orchid House* was actually written and first published before *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In fact, Allfrey comments at one point that Jean Rhys borrows the character of Christophine from her representations of Lally, the narrator of *The Orchid House* (See Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth. *Phyllis Shand Allfrey: A Caribbean Life*. New Brunswick,

NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Lally's relationship to the white family mirrors Christophine's role in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as the agent of control in Antoinette and Rochester's relationship. Although Lally is the narrator, and Allfrey gives her a voice to describe the actions of all the other characters, she still functions similarly to Christophine, as one who cannot be entirely knowledgeable. Spivak's reading of Christophine can be read against Lally who is in many ways "tangential to [the] narrative" that often works "in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (Spivak "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Colonialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 253). Although Lally's voice reveals information about all the characters, she enters and retreats from the world of the white family without compromising the sanctity of her own identity and history. Like Rhys' Christophine, she is a "free woman" who makes choices to give or withhold knowledge of her own place in the ordering of colonial or postcolonial history.

⁴⁸In Allfrey's biography, the author emphasizes for the small population of settler families and "born Dominican" whites, class, color and family boundaries were overly maintained to protect the small population's economic and social welfare. She notes of Allfrey's grandfather, "He was a social and political conservative who did his utmost to uphold the prevalent class and color structure, a pointless exercise as Dominica's white population was miniscule, and racial conservatism could only lead to isolation.... In his conservatism he was clearly rowing against the tide, as Dominica had an accomplished and colored elite with an increasing hold on the island's economy and government" (Paravisini-Gebert 13-14).

⁴⁹ See Gilles Deleuze. *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*. Trans. Richard Howard. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. 3-25

⁵⁰ In their community organizing actions and their Leftist ideology, and in their relationships with each other, Joan and Baptiste function according to Antonio Gramsci's definition of the organic intellectual. They emerge, each from their own race and class category, as "an élite amongst [their class, with] the capacity to be an organizer of society in general, including all its complex organism of services" (Gramsci 1138). By this logic, Joan and Baptiste stand in contradistinction to Father Toussaint, who is an example of Gramsci's ecclesiastic. The ecclesiastic, a type of traditional intellectual, that seems "to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms" (1139). By the end of the novel, it seems that the continuity signified by Father Toussaint's edicts stands within the society and that Joan and Baptiste are forced to yield to this power.

⁵¹ Edmondson rightly notes that Clare's intellectual challenges in school, represented in *No Telephone to Heaven*, is a result of the misappropriation and misplacement of her father's desires to white masculinity, a status that Clare can never achieve, especially in the context of US racial discourse where color lines are less fluid. She claims, "ironically, the confrontation with American-style whiteness and racism symbolically 'unmasks'

Clare's hidden, black identity, an identity that finally liberates her at the novel's conclusion" (Edmondson, *Making Men* 134).

⁵² Simon Gikandi, who reads *Abeng* through a modernist lens in *Writing in Limbo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), argues that the narrative structure and plot elements are part of Cliff's project to praise the concept of fragmentation in West Indian subjectivity (234-235). To that end, Gikandi characterizes *Abeng* as a "schizophrenic text, one in which subjects realize their knowledge through their 'split consciousness' and their suspension in a void between official language and the patois" (235). The style and contents of Clare's reading practices reveal another epistemological splitting that Clare seems to embrace rather than resist.

⁵³ The narrative structure and the acts of reading that come to define the structure of the novel create Wai Chee Dimock's concept-metaphor of "deep time" produced by "input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment" (Dimock 3) in American literary culture. Dimock's definition of the act reading as "[an NGO of sorts, an NGO *avant la lettre*, an unusually fine-grained as well as long-lasting one, operating on a scale both too small and too large to be fully policed by the nation state" (8) confirms my argument in this chapter, that acts of reading serve to provide alternatives to the restrictive fixity of place.

⁵⁴ Jack's aspiration to greatness through white purity becomes complicated by his affair with a South American woman of Amerindian descent. His self-education does not remain a white privilege because she has unlimited access to his reading material. The mistress, Inez, learns to read through the poetry of Byron (33). In the context of Inez, as in references to women throughout the novel, Cliff uses the language of sexual abuse to describe the interactions between white or creole men and the women that they contend. Words like rape emphasize the trauma of slavery and colonialism on the female body.

⁵⁵ See Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. 125-132; See also Sangeeta Ray. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009.

⁵⁶ Another character in the novel responding to masculine sexualized power is Mlle. Alli, a character popularly understood as a Nanny figure in the novel. In her role as community leader and revolutionary, Cliff disconnects her from patriarchal oppression by characterizing her as a homosexual whose relationship to sexuality is empowering in that community. Her role to teach slave women "to keep their bodies as their own, even while they were made subject to the whimsical violence of the justice and his slavedrivers" (Cliff 35) makes Mlle Alli understand the dimensions of colonial space and overcome it. Characters like Kitty Savage and Zoe gesture toward the freedom, mobility and power of Mlle Alli and the Nanny figure, but only through a world of reading.

⁵⁷ For more on *Abeng*'s relationship to African American literary discourse, see Sika Alaine Dagbovie. "Fading to White, Fading Away: Biracial Bodies in Michelle Cliff's

‘Abeng and Danzy Senna’s ‘Caucasia’.” *African American Review* 40.1, 2006: 93-109. Other works addressing the relationship between education and resistance in the novel include Kim Robinson-Walcott. “Claiming an Identity we Thought we Despised: Contemporary White West Indian Writers and their Negotiations of Race.” *Small Axe*, 7.2, 2003: 93-110; Jennifer Thorington Springer. “Reconfigurations of Caribbean History: Michelle Cliff’s Rebel Women.” *Meridians*, 7.2, 2007: 43-60; H. Adlai Murdoch. “A Legacy of Trauma: Caribbean Slavery, Race, Class and Contemporary Identity in *Abeng*.” *Research in African Literatures*. 40.4, 2009: 65-88.

⁵⁸ Walter Adolphe Roberts (1886-1962) is a Jamaican-born poet, novelist and historian whose passion for West Indian history, particularly Jamaican history, was evident in his literary and critical works.

⁵⁹ See Stanley Fish. *Is There a Text In This Class?*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980. John Guillory also distinguishes between lay and professional interpretive communities in his essay “The Ethical Practice of Modernity: The Example of Reading.” In *The Turn to Ethics*. Eds. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca Walkowitz. New York: Routledge, 200. 29-46

⁶⁰ In the novel, Miss Mattie finds courage and will in her association with the biblical Ruth, who formed allegiance to a community of women in the face of social and political odds, “Ruth and Naomi, women left to fend for themselves. All her life Mattie Freeman had fended for herself. Even in marriage” (Cliff 142). Even under the security of heteronormative institution of marriage, Mattie was still subject to the ills of exploitation in a post-emancipation society.

⁶¹ See H. Adlai Murdoch. “A Legacy of Trauma: Caribbean Slavery, Race, Class and Contemporary Identity in *Abeng*.” *Research in African Literatures*. 40.4 (2009): 65-88. See also Jennifer Thorington Springer. “Reconfigurations of Caribbean History: Michelle Cliff’s Rebel Women” *Meridians*. 7.2 (2007): 43-60

⁶² See the chapter, “The Novel of Revolution and the Unrepresentable Black Woman” in *Making Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) , 105-138.

⁶³ *Read Small Island 2007*. www.smallislandread.com. Accessed July 25, 2007. This website is now defunct.

⁶⁴ *Read Small Island 2007*. www.smallislandread.com. Accessed July 25, 2007.

⁶⁵ See also Fatima Ahmed, "Postcolonials," *The New York Times* 3 April 2005. www.nytimes.com. ; Bonnie Greer, "Empire's Child," *The Guardian* 31 January 2004.

⁶⁶ Black British author Caryl Phillips’ narrative engagements with the Caribbean are well established and Phillips readily acknowledges the heritage of West Indians, Africans and Britons in his personal and professional self-fashioning. Phillips has consistently

acknowledged his West Indian heritage – born in St. Kitts – and his work aptly reflects an impulse to engage the diasporic nature of West Indian history and contemporary West Indian life. In his frequent representation of the triangulated movements of people between Europe, Caribbean and Africa (or Europe, Caribbean and the United States), Phillips has depicted physical space and emplacement as critical to West Indian identity formation and, in the contemporary moment, transnational or diasporic sense of self.

⁶⁷ Read *Small Island* 2007. www.smallislandread.com. Accessed July 25, 2007.

⁶⁸ Phillips also experiments with narrative structures that manipulate time, narrator and place in other novels, including *Cambridge* (1991) and *Crossing the River* (1994).

⁶⁹ Anderson distinguishes between bound and unbound seriality to analyze collective subject formation, how nations or communities understand nationalist, ethnic or cosmopolitan sensibilities. Bound seriality, found in the census for example, encompasses homogeneous space and time, while unbound seriality, found in sites like the newspaper, which “seeped through and across all print languages, by no means necessarily in a unidirectional flow” (Anderson 33). The online discussion of *Small Island* functions as type of unbound seriality.

⁷⁰ These oral histories include *The Lion Roars at Wembley* by Donald R. Knight and Alan D. Sabey; *What Did You Do at the War, Mum?* by Carol Crumie; *Lest We Forget: The Experience of World War II West Indian Ex-service Personnel* by Robert N. Murray; *Jamaica Airmen* by E. Martin Noble; and *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* by Mike and Trevor Phillips. James also cites one of the narrative inspirations of Levy’s work *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, As Related By Herself, 1832*.

⁷¹ In his essay, “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation” in *The Location of Culture* (London : Routledge, 1994), Homi Bhabha attempts to justify the legitimacy of the migrant in the narrative of the nation -- how and why the nation must be represented in cultural and literary spheres. His emphasis on the relationship of the lost nation’s ability to sustain multiple narratives simultaneously indicates a fear, as a migrant intellectual, that his place in the nation will be lost. Bhabha is particularly concerned with resisting the historicist mode of viewing the nation, whereby only a teleological trajectory for this multinational subject can exist. Instead, he asserts that the way in which nationness is represented literarily must necessarily involve a temporality that accommodates the subject within the borders of every nation-state he occupies, whether physically or psychically. In other words, this migrant must claim ownership of and operate within every nation simultaneously.

⁷² See James McLeod, "Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption," *Critical Survey* 8.2 (2006): 45-55. McLeod conducts an extensive survey of adoption in migration narratives and reads the adoption in *Small Island* as a reinforcement of racial inflexibility in the identity politics of WWII Britain.

⁷³ Although Caryl Phillips' novel *Crossing the River* (1994) does fictionalize the events and effects of World War II on race relations, he does not directly engage a West Indian setting in the way Levy does.

⁷⁴ In her third novel, *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Levy looks at the story of one British woman who investigates her ancestry by traveling to Jamaica.

⁷⁵ See Simon Gikandi. *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

⁷⁶ Ray responds to Homi Bhabha's articulation of migrant mobility as presented in his essay, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *The Location of Culture*. London : Routledge, 1994.

⁷⁷ I am interested in the adaptation of chaos theory to explain the emergence of cultural patterns in the region. Benitez-Rojo invokes the notion of repetition, a term that I have used to characterize colonial identity formation, to convey "the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that entails a difference and a step toward nothingness...; however, in the midst of this irreversible change, Nature can produce a figure as complex, as highly organized, and as intense as the one the human eye catches when it sees a quivering hummingbird drinking from a flower" (3). It is this paradox at work in the seemingly chaotic combination of tropes and narratives of Caribbean literature emerging from *Small Island*, which reveals contemporary Caribbean literature as a diasporic formation.

⁷⁸ See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Iser uses the term to refer to the interaction between text and reader in the process of meaning making. He argues that the virtual dimension is the "coming together of text and imagination" that allows us to apply our own mental and creative resources to a text in order to "recreate the world it represents" (279). I argue that the elements used in this reading campaign constitute an employment of the cultural imagination that produces *Small Island's* virtual dimension.

⁷⁹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1985.

⁸⁰ See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.

⁸¹ See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.; Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, trans. James E. Maraniss. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

⁸² I have already cited such festivals in Chapter One, including Dominica's Nature Island Literary Festival and Jamaica's Calabash Festival. Others include Trinidad and Tobago's Bocas Lit Fest and the Antigua and Barbuda Literary Festival.

⁸³ Some of these include the Caribbean Publishing House in Guyana, Ian Randle Publishers in Jamaica, and Papillote Press in Dominica.

⁸⁴ "NPR Books." www.facebook.com/nprbooks. Accessed August 25, 2011.

⁸⁵ Pauline Melville is no stranger to the intersections of spatial hermeneutics and identity formation in Caribbean literature. As another mixed race writer who grew up in and outside the West Indies, her writing frequently contests the dominant narratives – both colonial and theoretical postcolonial – of ownership and mastery of the Caribbean physical and cultural landscape. In her novel, *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, she interrogates both Joseph Conrad's master colonial narrative *Heart of Darkness* and its West Indian revision *Palace of the Peacock* by Wilson Harris privileging the indigenous female as the origin of knowledge production.

⁸⁶ Ray's terminology describes the rhetorical aim of Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, a seminal critical work that bolsters many branches of the argument in this dissertation about the relationship between reading and knowledge production vis-à-vis postcolonial theory and culture.

⁸⁷ Although Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti, a francophone nation, I include her in this chapter as an Anglophone writer of Caribbean descent. Danticat's work as a Haitian American writer who writes primarily in English and is inculcated in US ethnic literary discourse places her at the strange intersection of debates over entitlement to national, linguistic and geographic identification. This dissertation treats the act of reading as a point of reconciliation of these debates and Danticat's most recent work gives evidence of her inclusion in this discourse while also providing a point of entry for critics of Francophone literature to employ the model laid out in these pages.

⁸⁸ See R. Mark Hall "The 'Oprahfication' of Literacy: Reading Oprah's Book Club." *College English*. 65.6 (2003): 646-667

⁸⁹ Only a few of the titles – usually from already celebrated authors such as Toni Morrison – were actually featured on the Oprah show. The Oprah's Book Club website (www.oprah.com/obc_classic/obc_main.jhtml) was the main location for participating in discussions about new or unexposed fiction and their relevance to socio-political issues or its literary value. The website featured links to study guides and discussion questions on the text, as well as chat rooms and blogging spaces where readers could share their personal reflections on the work. Oprah's Book Club was brought to a close in 2002. See "Book Publishers Mourn the End of the Oprah Book Club." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. 36 (2002): 69.

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