Chapter Three

'Powder for War': The Child in the Caribbean Novel

The child can play a part in the emergent West Indian literature... because in a culture seeking independence, the child enjoys a natural if precarious enfranchisement. He provides a fresh point of view; a Gulliver without fantasy, a Christopher Columbus of the present exploring the islands of manhood, remaking maps. ¹

-Louis James-

The child occupies a seminal and most visible position in the fiction of the Caribbean. In fact, if the Caribbean novel is to be associated with the establishment of any regional tradition, it may well be the distinctive creation of the childhood novel. A large number of short stories and novels not only talk about childhood but also use the perspective of the child as the primary narrating consciousness. It is for this reason that these invite special critical scrutiny in this study which aims to analyse the stratagem of using the child as the site of postcolonial questioning and psychological 'warfare'. Some of the novels which form the basis of the investigation in this chapter are: In the Castle of My Skin (1953) by George Lamming, Christopher (1959) by Geoffrey Drayton, Miguel Street by V.S. Naipaul (1959), Crick Crack, Monkey (1970) by Merle


‘Almost another world’²: Historical Background

The frequency with which the child is used in Caribbean fiction suggests that there must be important social, historical, political reasons for this literary phenomenon. The effort, in this chapter, will be to speculate on these reasons in order to understand the design behind the foregrounding of the figure of the child and the theme of childhood in Caribbean fiction. By representing the experience of childhood the novelist can actually recreate and pursue the rise of a particular Caribbean consciousness, and demonstrate how it is forged into a unique and characteristic pattern by the social, political and geographical realities it faces. With reference to literature, Louis James makes a very succinct comment on the significance of the child quoted in the epigraph above, finally concluding that ‘the West Indies that the Caribbean child discovers is himself.’³
A noteworthy fact about the status of children in the Caribbean is that a large number have to assume some of the responsibilities of adults while quite young. Also, the close family ties prevalent amongst the people, tend to lessen the cultural division between adult and child. This divide is less marked in the Caribbean than elsewhere in the world, especially in the Western societies. James insists therefore, that 'it is still true to say that in the Caribbean, the child's point of view has a natural acceptance that can be distinguished from both the stress on 'maturity' and the more self-conscious and intellectualised Romantic cult of childhood of the European tradition.' It is for this reason that he magnifies 'the relative importance of children in Caribbean communities'\(^4\) quoting it as the main factor responsible for the large number of novels about childhood and children.

There are some basic points of divergence between the Caribbean and other colonial histories as those of Africa and the Indian subcontinent, the first being the marked lack of rootedness of the people because nobody is indigenous to the area.\(^5\) The absence of moorings of these transported slaves becomes the screen against which the drama of the interactive trope of the child and the *topos* of childhood, is enacted. The use of these is one of the ways in which the novelists can effect a 'journey to roots'\(^6\) because they

\(^4\)Louis James, op.cit., p. 136.

\(^5\) Whatever indigenous population there had been, was exterminated by being mercilessly exposed to a combined battery of forced labour, murder and diseases imported from Europe. This resulted in the rapid disappearance of the native Carib Indians. Hence, the need to bring in slaves as substitute workforce to work on the extensive plantations that were set up. For historical details on slavery and colonisation refer to Julio Finn, *Voices of Negritude*, London: Quartet Books, 1988.

supply some tools by which the dislocation can be analysed and countered. Moreover, with its essential component of slavery, the colonial history of the Caribbean became even more singular and hence, more disparate from that of Africa and the Indian subcontinent. In addition, the African slaves originally came from different parts of the continent and therefore never subscribed to a homogenous culture. The later induction of Indian labourers, indentured for the sugar plantations led to a heterogeneous composition of people, the mix becoming another point of vital difference between the histories.

Against this backdrop, the problematic of identity becomes even more crucial and difficult because it entails a complete loss of racial, historical, national, linguistic and cultural individuality. It is to be noted that at least two child narrators are not given names to denote the lack of identity: the narrator of *Miguel Street* is nameless and that of *In the Castle of my Skin* is only given a vague 'G' as a name. Colonialist strategies of subversion of the subject races in the Caribbean were aimed at the ultimate erosion of their sense of history and territory, both of which are the prime signifiers of a people's identity as a nation. Others located in India and in Africa were able to reject the cultural dimensions to quite an extent because they were fortunate to have a historical identity, a cultural past, and a language of their own. As already indicated, in the Caribbean, the problem was aggravated by the fact that the situation went a step beyond colonialism. The 'slave' status presupposed the history of the blacks being forced to move away from

8 George Lamming, *In the Castle of my Skin*, Essex: Longman, 1953. Henceforth, all references are to this edition. It will be referred to as CS and all allusions will be made within the body of the study.
Africa and to be separated from the land of their birth for good. Wrenched from their territorial inheritance, and bereft of a continued native history, the displaced blacks had to carve out and re-scribe their history, and engage in fresh cartography and territorial realignments.

Quite often, the pivotal *topos* of the child’s search for an identity is subsumed in the quest for a larger identity. As Shiva Naipaul talking of ‘The writer without a society’, points out

The average Englishman...still seems to have kept a fairly comprehensible idea of himself...
The West Indian does not have any such idea of himself and has never had. He is amorphous and ill-defined; a vacuum.¹

In such a rudderless situation, even the foundations for a new, independent identity had to be laid. Consequently, one would have to agree with Erikson’s premise that ‘the study of identity, then becomes as strategic in our times as the study of sexuality was in Freud’s time.’¹⁰

The use of the child therefore, becomes one way of asserting that a fresh beginning is being made and it breaks the path for the construction of the self. When Maryse Conde declares

During my childhood, to be a West Indian was a misfortune, a disease of sorts. Coming from


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that background and returning to a country where people are proud to be West Indian requires the acceptance of the culture on its own terms. 11

she is laying her finger on the necessity for a reassessment, and a consequent reworking of the quest. Since the postcolonial project is primarily a political one of becoming the centre, this process of self-determination implies a refiguration and a reconstitution of an authentic, self-liberating independent history and identity as Caribbean, just as it must be with the Indian and the African.

'The Vagaries of Childhood' 12: The Use of Autobiography

Obviously, in their effort to garner a cohesive sense of identity, the personal experience of these West Indian writers impels them to pose questions about the nature of life in the postcolonial Caribbean. It is for this reason that the element of autobiography plays an important role in the childhood novel. The novelists using the twin motifs of the child and childhood often deploy the first person narrative or the perspective of the child because most of the lessons they have learnt are learnt during childhood. This strategic deployment of the child and childhood in fiction quite often manifests itself in an 'anti' stance. Numerous writers have felt that it is an effective means of questioning and attempting to find solutions to the nagging problems that beset


them as a result of the political, historical and social conditions in which they find themselves. C.L.R. James was one of the first writers to realise from his own life the importance of childhood experience. In Beyond a Boundary, he says

In reality my life upto ten had laid the powder for a war that lasted without respite for eight years, and intermittently for some time afterwards-- a war between English Puritanism, English literature and cricket, and the realism of West Indian life... I had nothing to start with but my pile of clippings about W.G. Grace and Ranjitsinhji, my Vanity Fair and my Puritan instincts, though as yet these were undeveloped. I fought and won.\(^{13}\)

This is the ‘powder’ that each novelist locates in the child and uses as his personal arsenal against the overwhelming powers that ironically supply them the literary ancestors they need to dismantle and challenge. The open consciousness of the child privileges marginal status and ensures an oppositionality which can pose acute questions in the coming of age narrative of the postcolonial Caribbean. Inadvertently, recognising the discursive logic of the colonisers in making the child the brunt of their controlling strategy, they turn it around for their own purpose.

As the reference to C.L.R. James above has shown, very often it is while the individual is still a child that the postcolonial

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\(^{13}\) C.L.R. James, Beyond a Boundary, London: Hutchinson, 1963, p. 63. The emphasis is mine.
ideology of opposition takes root. In *A Small Place* (1988), Kincaid reveals that her dislike of colonialism was already developed by the time she was nine.

> When I was nine, I refused to stand up at the refrain of 'God Save Our King'. I hated 'Rule Britannica'; and I used to say that we weren't Britons, we were slaves. I never had any idea why. I just thought that there was no sense to it—'Rule Britannica, Britannica rules the waves, Britons never shall be slaves'.

The consciousness of this colonial aim of making inroads into the impressionable mind of the child colours the writing of these novelists. These novels are not 'autobiography' but use the techniques of the 'autobiographical novel' using either the first-person narrator or material culled from the author's childhood just as African novelists like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ben Okri, Nuruddin Farah, Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga had done. V.S. Naipaul makes a pointed comment on this distinction and emphasises the importance of autobiography with reference to the postcolonial novel in the West Indies. Fine tuning the distinction between autobiography and fiction, in 'The Killings in Trinidad', he says: 'An autobiography can distort; facts can be aligned. But fiction never lies; it reveals the writer totally.' Also, he implies, it sets the stage for the battle. In *A House for Mr Biswas*, Mr Biswas, Anand and the Tulsis owe much to the lives of V.S. Naipaul and his father

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Seepersad Naipaul. So do the novels which make use of the first-person narrative viewpoint of the child. Like Francis in *The Year in San Fernando* 17, Michael Anthony too had spent a similar year in the city between after Christmas 1943 to just before Christmas 1944. In the novel *Annie John* 18, the child heroine has much of Jamaica Kincaid. The links between the life of the author and the novel are many and it is in the transcendence of the 'merely' autobiographical that the critique of the postcolonial situation becomes possible.

Almost all the novels chosen for study rely on the first person narrative technique. The anomaly of the adult creator constructing the perspective of a child is bound to create tension. In *In the Castle of My Skin*, the 'I' of the narrator disappears from the pages of the text for a considerable period with the omniscient author taking up the narrative especially when Ma and Pa come into the picture, or when dramatisation of the events at school is done. This management of the narrative serves a pertinent function. The lack of identity in the Caribbean has already been dwelt upon. The disappearance of 'G' from the text, only serves to accentuate this situation; it is, as if his presence or non-presence makes no difference. It is this erasure of identity that the child has to combat. As already pointed out, it is significant that the narrator is nameless.

Definitely, this point of view lends a great deal of authenticity to the remembered experience of the child. It is not easy to totally recollect childhood which is long past; to put oneself

in the shoes of a child. In Crick Crack Monkey\textsuperscript{19}, Tee cannot even speak clearly when the novel begins with the death of her mother while giving birth to her younger brother. She talks of school experiences at the age of six, referring to the Little Ones as 'those who were but five to our wizened six.' (CCM, 40) In Miguel Street the narrator is about eight for the most part. Beka in Beka Lamb is fourteen but all the events of the novel take place before she turns this age. 'G' is nine when In the Castle of My Skin opens. In The Year in San Fernando Francis is twelve. Howard Prescod in No Man in the House\textsuperscript{20} and Annie John in the eponymous novel are about eleven; Howard is about the same age at the close of the novel though Annie sails away as a fifteen-year old. One hallmark of the Caribbean novel is the fact that the children never become dramatised adults. Entry into adulthood generally marks the end of the novel. So, the final picture of the narrator or protagonist remains that of a child.

The point of view of the child is used to much advantage in The Year in San Fernando where as Paul Edwards and Kenneth Ramchand say the reader is 'both inside and outside the boy's consciousness'\textsuperscript{21}. The confusion and bewilderment with new experiences like simply coming to a strange big city, or a first visit to the market or to the wharf, are dramatised without any adult intrusion. No judgement is passed either on the child or the events

\textsuperscript{19} Merle Hodge, Crick Crack Monkey, London: Heinemann, 1970. Hereafter CCM.

\textsuperscript{20} Cecil Foster, No Man in the House, USA: Ballantine Books, 1994. First pub. 1991. Henceforth all references are to this edition and they will be made within the text of the study as NH.

and characters of the book. Francis feels hate and love for the same person alternately, sometimes in quick succession. At the end of the novel, his childhood is still continuing though he may have learnt much about some adult experiences like sexuality and death.

In *Crick Crack Monkey* where childhood memories are vividly evoked, both the points of view, the child’s and the adult’s, are made to coalesce at several points in the novel. The novelist’s tremendous control over this narrative technique is apparent in the fact that the shifts between the two perspectives is not even noticeable. The strength of the novel lies in the depiction of the child’s inner world, and in her response to the outer. So, the polarity between Tantie’s spontaneous, fun-filled world and Aunt Beatrice’s sterile world of propriety, is clear in her exact observations of how all of it appears to her. The creation of a split double, ‘Helen’, shows the effect on her pliable, innocent mind.

*Outside Children*: Fatherlessness and Bastardisation

A prominent feature of the Caribbean novel is the prevalence of bastardy which is a direct offshoot of the prevailing historical and sociological conditions. As Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra assert in *Dark Side of the Dream* (1992), ‘the impure, the hybrid, the bastard are such threats to the system that they become taboo, objects of excessive hatred and disgust.’ Where bastardisation had become an important constituent of colonialist control, the postcolonial novelist had to combat it roundly to erect the edifice of a new postcolonial identity. According to Alfred Adler, it is

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obvious that the one who has to bear 'the burden of illegitimacy' most and 'the one who pays the greatest price is, of course, the child'\textsuperscript{23} The lack of sure, safe moorings and a confident personal identity, makes this child an extremely fitting trope for the uncertainty that overrides the postcolonial scene. The dubious parentage of the bastard child thus mirrors the ambiguity of the postcolonial scene. Giving another cogent reason for the frequency with which bastards appeared in postcolonial fiction, Hodge and Mishra insist that 'they are disturbingly attractive, the locus of pleasure and power, where change and growth are still possible.'\textsuperscript{24} This not only highlights how the malady can be critiqued, but also hints at the possibilities inherent in the trope which allows the sounding of an optimistic note of solution.

Tutored in a demeaning school, the 'outside' children (dialectical variant of bastard in the West Indies) are not only outside power, they are outside history as already highlighted, and therefore outside meaning. The sense of dislocation by which he was afflicted was further deepened by the colonialist project of embracing divisive tactics of slavery. It forced men to work miles away from home or to emigrate in search of a living, resulting in the severance of the family. In fact, in the hands of the coloniser, this becomes an uprooting, alienating strategy of 'defathering', of bastardising, becoming a weapon with the unkindest cut. The child protagonists, "G" in \textit{In the Castle of my Skin} and Howard Prescod in \textit{No Man in the House}, lack fathers which is symptomatic of the lack of both personal and national identity. Francis' father in \textit{The Year in


\textsuperscript{24} Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, \textit{Dark Side of the Dream}, op.cit., p. 51.
San Fernando is dead; the narrator-protagonist of Miguel Street is fatherless. Probably, his father is dead too. In Crick Crack Monkey, Tee’s father disappears across the seas. In this situation, the child is left with many unanswered questions. The lack of a father and relations means that there is no psychological or moral stability of the type provided by the family, available to the child. In fact, fatherlessness seems to be the hallmark of Bajan Society where fathers are either absent, untraceable, unidentifiable, or unacknowledgeable.

Most children are born out of wedlock, bastardy seeming to be the accepted norm. In the deployment of this narrative strategy one fact that cannot escape recognition is that a majority of the fictional children are ‘fatherless’ and a majority of this majority are ‘bastards.’ A case in point is Olive Senior’s collection of stories, Summer Lightning and Other Short Stories (1986) which has a total of ten stories. Only two of these are about adults who are yet seen in their roles as children of parents. Eight use the point of view of the child. All the children are fatherless. Three of these might have been born of lawfully wedded parents, though nothing is specifically mentioned about that. Five of them are definitely bastards. This is a fair representative of the predominance of the motif of bastardy in the West Indian novel.

The forced co-existence of different races with unequal power, resulted in illegitimate offspring from colonised women forced into sexual subjugation, one method of making authority absolute. Bastardy was a problem which percolated down to the postcolonial scene: the Caribbean was replete with ‘bastard’
children because, as Maryse Conde testifies, 'men went about fathering children outside the institution of marriage.'

The Collins dictionary defines the bastard as a person born of unmarried parents, with informal connotations of an obnoxious, offensive, or despicable person accruing to it. As an adjective it stands for something irregular, abnormal or inferior, even something counterfeit, spurious. All these reverberations are felt in the children of the West Indian novel as must have been attributed to the real, historical children by the white coloniser. Thus, one predominant psychological fallout of this situation is an emphasised feeling of inferiority among the black people.

The above-mentioned strategy of bastardisation thus resulted in the deterioration of the position of the child in society under the effect of slavery. 'Bastard' is a word that carries inevitable cultural and historical associations. In India, where the sanctity of the family has always been a prime cohering factor, illegitimacy is a demeaning slur—a kala dhabba—which nothing can erase. But in Africa, the dark continent from which the majority of the population of the West Indies originally came, 'illegitimacy' was never a major problem. I am aware that the family code, in its totality, was not a homogenous one for the vast originary continent comprising of so many tribes. But this was a fact which was more or less true for all who hailed from the continent. The organisational principle was 'effective' rather than 'affective.' Children born out of wedlock never lacked fathers in a society where 'motherhood' was the single most unifying factor. There was always a brother, or

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25Maryse Conde, 'in Imagining Home, op.cit., p. 64.
26Hindi for 'demeaning slur'. Literally, 'a black stain.'
family or even a husband to take charge of a child born outside marriage. 27

It is with the forced move to alien shores across the waters that the 'new' concept of illegitimacy enters into their world-view. The shadow of separation dogged the family, disrupting, but never completely destroying it. When two people, or more pointedly, two slave-subjects considered marriage, they were always aware that they might be separated. Nevertheless, they also felt that economic, if not moral and ethical reasons might force the owner to keep them together. In this hope, the two decided to marry. As Uma Alladi stresses, 'Such a marriage, not legal but performed according to their own rituals, like jumping the broomstick, often lasted many years, as many as circumstances allowed. Both man and woman distinguished pre-nuptial intercourse, a prelude to marriage, from licentiousness. The woman felt the need to have a husband before the birth of a child...’28.

One of the requirements of the white master was that the black woman actually 'breeds' for him, a 'good breeder' fetching a

27 See Colin Turnbull, Africa and Change, Tenn, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1973 for details regarding the organizational principles of the family. The government handout of Nigeria, entitled Perspectives of Nigerian Culture talks about illegitimacy. 'Traditionally, polygamy was widely practised in Nigeria, and still remains the norm in many communities. Among Moslems for instance, four wives were permitted, while it is traditionally accepted among all Nigerian peoples that polygamy is natural and conducive to social harmony. At present however, monogamy tends to be the norm as a result of exposure to western culture, but there is no stigma attached to children born out of wedlock.' My emphasis. See also, the chapter on the African novel for more details.
higher price than others. She was expected to guarantee a future generation of slaves who were often sold away while still infants. Like animals, the slaves were 'mated' for a healthy, able-bodied progeny. Children were thus separated from their families almost as soon as they were born. They were often 'bastards' and almost always 'orphaned' by this separation.

Further, the coloured woman was never in a position to deny the white man access to her body. For, as slave-owner, as white master, he had complete control even on her physical being. An obvious result was the mulattoisation of children, the birth of bastards, who were neither completely black nor completely white—neither 'here' nor 'there'. In addition, forced separation of the partners resulted in an increase in the birth of illegitimate children as it left the woman prey to extra-marital attention and desires. Later, with indenture, the rapes and the resultant illegitimacy continue. The rapes of Shanti, Rosa and Gladys in Itwaru's Shanti29(1992), the text emphasises, are not mere departures from the rule.

Thus, the figure of the fatherless child becomes a recurrent trope symptomatic of the lack of identity both personal and national, in the fiction of the black West Indies. As borne out by the above argument, this tropological construction is a direct offshoot of the long, dark, chastening history of slavery and colonisation. This idea of illegitimacy was therefore an alien concept injected insidiously into this society by the discursive regime of the white

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colonial masters. Even in *Christopher*\(^{30}\), a novel by a white West Indian, Geoffrey Drayton, the reality of bastardisation is recognised. Through the special experiences that fall Christopher’s way on the road to growing-up, he will also be psychologically assaulted by a black beggar who will leer at him on being refused alms,

“No need to be grand with me, because I’m black,” he said. “Your grandpappy got children black like me.”

Christopher began to feel dirty. His skin crawled...

(*Christopher*, 60)

Though ‘one could not talk about such things—certainly one did not talk about white gentlemen having black babies’ (*Christopher*, 63) yet it reveals the unpalatable underside of inter-racial relations to which the sheltered child is cruelly subjected. The bastardisation already stressed earlier is witnessed by the yet untainted mind of the child. Innocently certain that without marriage no child can be forthcoming, he will also have to bear witness to his unwed cook’s pregnancy. While on the one hand, this just goes to reveal the innocence of the child, it also draws the curtain from an unsavoury social truth.

This overall strategy of illegitimation thus came to be employed to disempower the blacks, legitimacy becoming a twisted

signifier of the biological and cultural superiority of the ruler. This engendered a deep-rooted sense of marginalisation resulting in a progressive de-individuation. As already stated, the problematic of identity becomes even more critical and agonising because of the total loss of racial, historical, national, linguistic, and cultural individuality that it involves. Total power—political, economic and social—was vested in the white ‘master’ who took the entire profit of black labour, with the ‘bastardised’ black pushed to the limbo-like fringes.

This sense of illegitimation was further deepened by the modus operandi of the Church. Far from checking the act of slavery, it acted as a profiteering partner in Europe’s quest for world domination. It was rewarded for its services with a sizeable share of the spoils. The first record of its sanctioning of crimes against black people was its condoning of the marketing of slaves in Nigeria in 1444. From the very beginning, the Church partook in the act of slavery and European thinkers, following in its hallowed footsteps, reinterpreted the Bible to suit their needs. Their aim was to make the black people ‘accept bondage willingly; to coerce them to deny their own values; and to ensure that African religion was not used as rallying point for rebellion’ says Julio Finn in *Voices of Negritude.* 31 Michel Pousse further emphasises this point when he observes that ‘religion guarantees the mental imprisonment of the children.’ 32

The relationship between the colonised and the Church was a 'no-win' one. Refusal to embrace the tenets of the Church anyhow placed the subject 'outside' the pale of 'society'. The outcast who was born outside the hallowed umbrella of the true religion would be liable to punishment for the condition of his soul; he would be denied the means of achieving salvation. Even if he did accept Christianity, it did not guarantee him legitimacy. Much like the bastard in the manor in England, his standing continued to be dubious for it gave him no legal rights. The English bastard at least had food shelter and clothing provided for him. In this case, he did not even merit that! Further, in the eyes of Christianity with its foundational principle of monogamy, all marriages outside the church were illegitimate. Marriage could only be performed after getting permission from the white master. Quite often, rather than approach an unsympathetic master, the slaves would opt for the 'broomstick' marriages which resulted in a whole race of illegitimates.

Concerted religious indoctrination convinced the child that colonisation and the resultant inequality of the races had a religious sanction. The Christian tenet 'Make me a captive, Lord and I shall be free' is perfectly deployed to the continued advantage of the colonial scheme. As Fanon says, 'The church in the colonies is the white people's church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor.' The Church reinforces this sense of being fatherless by weighing the little minds of the children with the guilt of having been born what they were -- 'bastards'. Laura in 'Bright Thursdays'

33 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980, p. 32.
in Olive Senior's *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, voices this guilt clearly

...The Jesus of their church was a man who had come to judge and punish sinners, these pictures only served to remind her that she was a sinner and that God would one day soon appear out of the sky flashing fire and brimstone to judge and condemn her.

(‘Bright Thursdays’, *SL*, 46)

Her only sin is that she is an illegitimate child. She will feel guilty (for how else could she explain ‘this discomfort, this pain it caused her’.) She will lack confidence which can only come with

a mother and a father who were married to each other and lived together in the same house, who would chastise and praise, who would send you to school with the proper clothes on... you would (then) fit neatly into the space life had created for you.

(‘Bright Thursdays’, *SL*, 37)

The ‘bastard’ feels no ‘space has been allotted her’. She has been reduced and nullified. ‘Life had played her tricks’ Thus, religion

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becomes a frightening, imprisoning entity for the children and keeps them from facing other horrifying realities of the world and the hopelessness of their situation squarely. These mental shackles, like the ones imposed on the children in Blake's 'London' are guaranteed handmaidens of the coercive regime.

'Readers and Learners': Education in the Caribbean

Parallel to the importance given to education in Africa, another characteristic of the ethos of the Caribbean is the major preoccupation with the educational process to which the child is subjected. This may be directly linked with the importance of children amongst a people struggling to evolve an independent identity for themselves. In the context of bewildering social and political uncertainties which characterise the postcolonial scene in the Caribbean, the lack of identity comes to symptomise a state of infancy or childhood. Just as a child has to grow towards maturity, to work out an independent identity, so too do the island nations have to engage in a concerted struggle to define themselves. It is not difficult to see how education becomes an important concern as a vital means of arriving at this end. Unfortunately, conditions of slavery, forced labour, indenture allowed no freedom for an easy evolution of identity. Education came in handy to combat these obstacles.

It follows that the child becomes a ready metaphor for the clean, new, independent identity the nation aspires to create. The child as the recipient of education moves into the spotlight because

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35 V.S. Naipaul, A House for Mr Biswas, op.cit., p. 432. In this novel which teems with children this is part of the title of a chapter.
of the importance of the educational apparatus in the forging of the mind. On the one hand the colonisers used a minutely doctored system of education to contain the subject populace, on the other, as is already clarified, the subjects themselves saw in it a means of self-improvement and ultimately, as the instrument for achieving identity of an emancipating identity. Thus, from either perspective, that of the coloniser or of the subject, it is through education that the contrary ends can be achieved. Novels of the past five decades in the Caribbean unveil both these points of view at great length. Hence, the importance of the idea of the growth novel, the *bildungsroman*, recalling the importance of the educational process in most Victorian novels of growth. As in *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, *The Mill on the Floss*, the Caribbean novel emphasises education as the moulder of identity and as the nurturer of the growth process.

As is clear from the concerted effort of the colonisers to erase notions of history and geography, the child’s vulnerable mind was a ready and natural target for the coloniser’s stratagem of limiting and containing them by this erasure of the past through carefully monitored lessons of history. As if this were not enough, they had to combat the active and concerted effort of the colonising masters to drive home the demoralising awareness that they had neither any history nor territory to which they had a legitimate claim. This task was made easier by the fact that territory was an almost non-existent and therefore, incomprehensible concept for the child. The analysis of this strategic focus on the mind of the child as represented in West Indian fiction, and the vacuum created by the peculiar colonial situation in the Caribbean vis à vis territory and
history, is thus crucial to a full understanding of the role of the child in the literature of the West Indies.

The only history that the children were taught, and therefore allowed to know, is the history of England; the only geography that of England. They know about Sussex and Yorkshire, the Queen and her dour-faced consort. But they know nothing of the island on which they live, or of the past of their own people. Even slavery, which has been the original controlling principle of black Caribbean reality, is a distant, shadowy, fairy-tale event for these children who have no first hand experience of this historical experience. Of the children in *In the Castle of my Skin*, Lamming says:

They had *read* about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundred years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that. It was too far back for anyone to worry about *teaching* it as history. That’s really why it wasn’t *taught*. It was too far back...Probably it never happened at all.

(CS, 58. My emphases.)

It is obvious that the emphasis is on the doctored and controlled dissemination of historical knowledge, and in effecting this, the role of the school and the teachers is paramount. As Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* has said, ‘a perversion of logic marks a return to the past of the oppressed people and distorts; disfigures and
destroys it.'\textsuperscript{36} V. S. Naipaul's \textit{The Middle Passage} (1962) too accents this warped sense of chronology.

Our own past was buried and no one cared to dig it up. This gave a strange time-sense. The England of 1914 was the England of yesterday; the Trinidad belonged to the Dark Ages.\textsuperscript{37}

Reality is England, Barbados nothing but

...small British colony, the oldest and the least adulterated of British colonies: Barbados or Little England as it was called in the local \textit{school} text.

\textit{(CS, 25. My emphasis.)}

Even, Mr Hinds, Tee's first teacher in \textit{Crick Crack Monkey} believes and teaches of English historical experience as the only worthwhile experience. He goes out of his way to affirm that the only heroes are the ones from England.

High on the wall Mr Hinds hung a large framed portrait of Churchill. It was Mr Hinds' daily endeavour to bring the boys to a state of reverence towards this portrait.

\textit{(CCM, 24)}

\textsuperscript{36} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, op. cit., p. 170.
\textsuperscript{37} V.S. Naipaul, \textit{The Middle Passage}, London: Andre Deutsch, 1962, p. 43.
It is the child who offers the reductive postcolonial critique of this mindless acceptance of colonisation by demoting this ‘great historical personage’ Churchill, to the level of a crab in referring to his ‘crapaud face’. (CCM, 24) In No Man in the House, the student was taught that

Barbados derived importance from being a colony of Britain and each citizen's belief that our small country could become as great as England to live and learn in their system and by swearing our undying allegiance to their flag.

(NH, 54)

His identity, as also the identity of Barbados, is dependent on England, the imperial power.

‘History is lies agreed upon’, goes the aphorism. The above colonialist view of history marginalised the coloured Caribbean by relegating him either to the ahistorical or the prehistorical. As already stated, this was a colonialist construction to keep the colonised firmly in check. The debilitating experience of the horrifying Middle Passage robbed the enslaved, displaced blacks of the comfortable sense of belonging, a protective ‘paternity’ to fall back upon—the loss of space, their land symbolised by the loss of a
world which reached him through unfamiliar distancing images. Thereafter, slave laws emphatically so distanced him from his own culture, that it became a mere shadow on the blurred canvas of a hazy past. In order to combat this colonialist imposition, the West Indian was called upon to create an alternative history through an imaginative reworking. The Western notions of causality had to be defied by a rejection of this chronological historicism. Michael Dash in his introduction to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* presents the problem very graphically and poetically thus: 'The "unhoused" wanderer across cultures must be "rehoused" in the fissured history, the exposed sands, before the surging sea.'

The child in his baffled innocence, grapples with an inescapable sense of exile of belonging neither 'here' nor 'there' and seems to be catapulted into a treacherous twilight zone where

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\text{It made no difference whether it was noon or night.... My eyes opened and the phantoms were still there. Every night these phantoms that populated my brain came out to frighten me with the freedom which the night had brought them. My eyes opened and closed, opened/closed, opened/closed opened/closed, but they wouldn't go.}
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(CS, 13)

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The child loses touch with the reality of the world. Society and the education imparted, add to the confusion in the child's mind. This necessitates an effort to understand the self, to come to terms with it, and where, and in the manner necessary, to attempt a remedy for the situation. This growth of the awareness of the self is best paralleled in another growth pattern, that of the child. Uprooted geographically, there is an acute feeling of deprivation, an obliteration of personality, and an irrevocable loss of cultural identity. Now, the child finds himself buckling in the face of a system which was diametrically and intrinsically opposed to his sensibility and requirements. He is coerced into embracing a totally foreign culture, counter to his tradition and race. This willy-nilly, had the effect of marginalising him and ensuring his subservience. In *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1980) Selwyn Cudjoe effectively concludes 'the purpose of colonial education was to prepare obedient boys and girls to participate in a new capitalist enterprise.'

The imposition of white cultural patterns on these displaced subjects was followed by careful 'nurture' through education, the ultimate aim being to undermine and replace any remnants of African, Indian or Chinese traits and tradition with alien ones imported from England. The final aim was to establish and continue a condition in which the colonised was taught to hate and to scorn himself. He was forced into a recognition that the only outlet of social progress was in the successful aping of his English rulers. The more adept he became at this task, the wider became

the alienating chasm between himself and his own people. The child-protagonist in the role of a student in a school becomes an unwitting functionary in this strategy to uncover the unequal relations between the two classes, the ruler and the rootless subject. Already, the education system had become the handmaiden of the coloniser in its aims of completely demolishing the meaning of their existence and their historical identity. This made him more inextricably dependent on the English rulers who retained the only ‘potent’ power. The topmost rung in the limited ladder of possible success was defined by hollow trappings of power vested in a hypocritical ‘overseer’ class of perfidious pretenders.

These alienating principles are designed to perpetuate a situation where the native despises himself and sees imitation of his English masters as the only means of upward mobility. The greater the success he achieves in this misguided endeavour, the greater the degree of alienation from his own people, the greater the antipathy for his own history. His dependence on the white colonisers is complete. As borne out in *In the Castle of My Skin*, the system sinks to the inhumane in the hands of the white school teachers, who constantly beat their black students to keep them in check. Boys mess their pants, bleed profusely and faint under the unfeeling lashes.

The teachers are more often than not a despicable lot: slimy like Slime and subserviently colonial like the Headmaster in *In the Castle of My Skin*; utterly lacking interest in the children, as Mrs Hinds in *Crick Crack Monkey* who continues to embroider when in class, unmindful of the little impressionable children who have come to learn in the school. These five and six year olds have a poor
alternative in her husband who suffers from a massive colonial hangover. The list of teachers who fall short of the ideal does not end with the Hinds. In senior school, where Tee has been admitted after winning a merit scholarship, there is the Hitlerian headmaster, 'Sir', of whom the children and teachers are in mortal terror. The incident involving the teacher and the student who share the same name, Gloria uncovers the spinelessness that afflicts the teachers. When the headmaster barked

'Gloria! Come here!' and both Gloria Foster and Teacher Gloria came running and Sir looked as if he would have liked to swallow his tongue but recovered and barked at Gloria Foster 'I said "Teacher Gloria will you kindly come here"!' and Gloria said that she had heard him say Gloria and Sir gave her a licking with the whip for rudeness and said her ears were too big and he would see and cut them for her. And we had all heard him call Gloria, and Teacher Gloria didn't say a word.

(CCM, 46)

Even the little children can see the moral lacunae in both the teachers' behaviour; both emerge as liars, inflicting and endorsing the cruel punishment on the child. They brand Teacher Gloria as an unfeeling 'traitress', and Sir, preaching much that he does not practise, reveals the hollowness and hypocrisy of the whole system.
In *No Man in the House* Howard Prescod chafes under the dehumanising thrashing that Burton gives him for no fault of his and is immediately fired by the urge to write to his father to redeem him. This is the unspoken need for personal and national identity which will allow him to stand up for himself. Thus, wielding the alienating weapon of the educational system the coloniser reinforces his colonising grip, maintaining his superior status. The child, then becomes 'the ultimate colony' for, in his tenacious sway over the untutored mind of the child, the coloniser achieves total control. As pointed out earlier, through the incisive religious drill, which is part of the educational strategy, the child is convinced, that there is a religious legitimacy in colonisation and that the disparity between the ruler and himself as a subject is divinely ordained.

The child views the white man with a numb acceptance of his superiority and a dumb, ineffectual recognition of his own inferiority thus duplicating the master-slave relationship. The internalised myth of inferiority corrodes the fabric of the social and cultural life of the colonised. The discrimination that Tee faces in school upsets her and makes her feel 'that the very sight of me was an affront to common decency.' (*CCM*, 97) This is the unspoken aim of this education. The latter further reinforces his position by shutting the blacks out of his geographical domain by high walls with broken glass tops which only serve to whet the curiosity of the black children in *In the Castle of My Skin*. The mystical aura that surrounds him makes them eager to find out what lies behind it. Fascinated by that which is 'denied', any rent in the enclosing fabric is erroneously viewed as a glimpse into the forbidden Garden of Eden.
This has an effect on the relationship of the children with the adults who serve as middlemen, blacks like themselves, who are bought out by the white masters. They become 'the image of the enemy'. The 'overseers', people granted special favours by the Whites in *In the Castle of My Skin* have turned 'fierce, aggressive and strict' because they believe 'their own fold were low-down nigger people...' who were jealous of those people who had done well for themselves. This tension fosters the myth of the villager as the enemy which 'like rumour drifted far beyond the village' (CS, 26) The young narrator is visibly upset by the incredibly frustrating situation of the enemy being his own people. (CS, 27) Most of the teachers like Slime and the headmasters in various novels, occupy the comprador status in their subservience to the white man and their meanness to their own kind.

This immensely successful divide-and-rule policy of the British imperialist results in the breakdown of trust among those ruled by them. The overseers hate and distrust the villagers and vice versa. Bambino and Bots co-existing in a bigamal, conjugal harmony with Jon, can become sworn enemies, conniving, plotting stealing and hitting out at each other. It is significant that this disruption specifically takes place when the question of a church wedding comes up. (African family laws allowed polygamy.) Boy Blue and the narrator, formerly good friends, learn to spy on each other. *No Man in the House* has 'Brutus' Waite expressing his enmity against Pretty and Grandma by trying to inflict physical injury on Howard, the child protagonist. The young black students are fraternised under the umbrella of a 'we' against Mr. Bradshaw, the
first black principal of the school.

Instead of his colour being a badge of honour, something that all of us could celebrate as a community achievement it was a widespread cause of suspicions and fear. For although we knew that at least on the surface, he was like any of us in the district, we feared him perhaps more than any other headmaster simply because he was one of us.

(NH, 73, My emphasis.)

Much of the education imparted in the schools has a very dubious relevance to the growth of the child. The inappropriateness of the learning is brought home in the irrational requirement of the five and six year olds to learn about things, events that are unreal for them. The 'Little Ones', as they are labelled, have to identify apples, a fruit they have never seen, and learn the spelling of 'sleet' which they will never see in the West Indies. (CCM, 40) They are expected to reach god by learning the Lord's prayer by rote, the meaning of which totally eludes them. They are asked to exult in the glory of the Empire. Mr Biswas' school experience, etched in great detail across the canvas of A House for Mr Biswas, further emphasises the inappropriateness of much of the education imparted. The school texts have no bearing on the immediate reality of the child. Mr Biswas is forced to learn many English poems from the Royal Reader. He has to learn the meaning of strange terms like 'osis'. He
declaims on 'Bingen on the Rhine' from the Bell's Standard Elocutionist. He sings meaningless songs

In the snowy and the blowy,
In the blowy and the snowy.

These words and tune, based remotely on 'Roaming in the Gloaming' were taught and sung at Lal's school not for any educative value but 'to entertain important visitors from the Canadian Mission.'

(HB, 131)

The educational process then, works to distance the child from his experiential reality by constructing lopsided reference points in England. This kind of a school experience communicates negatively with the lesson that 'ought oughts are ought, ought twos are ought.' Whatever the nature of the input, life is ultimately an ought. Even Anand's curriculum has much that is of no use either to him or to his father, the one person who is an active participant in his education. Anand is also directed to write on exotic visits to the seaside with laden hampers, a very English form of recreation. The unnamed school-going narrator of V.S. Naipaul's Miguel Street has telling reports on the meaning of school for the inhabitants of the street. Apparently, English 'litritcher and poultry' (Miguel Street, 34) forms a major part of the curriculum. What relevance it can have for them remains blurred.

What was unspelt in Miguel Street is clearly voiced in Itwaru's Shanti. Shanti, the schoolgirl is a discerning questioner who is awakening to her circumscribed reality as a subject. To her
the irrelevance of this programme of education is amply clear.

They were questioned on their knowledge of the English language. They had to compose essays on alien topics. They were required to demonstrate an understanding of set texts of English literature, the history of the British Empire, the biology and botany of English fauna and flora, geography by English geographers, hygiene as promulgated by English authorities, and arithmetic in which many of the problems were set in pounds, shillings and pence, despite the fact that the currency of their experience was in dollars and cents.

(Shanti, 40. My emphasis.)

The sarcasm underlying the repeated 'English' is shared by both the character and the author. The young girl-prostitute in Itwaru's The Unreturning\textsuperscript{41}, very realistically shows the limitations of education. In response to a query about why she does not go to school, she scoffs, 'School? Mister you must be jokin! School don't put food in nobody mout.' (The Unreturning, 104) Naipaul's Anand too rejects the constraining guidelines of the essay on a visit to the seaside to write about reality as it is. That there is a possibility of recognition amidst timeworn attitudes is proved by the excellent grades that

Anand secures. It is therefore creditable that Anand 'escapes' as part of his plan of betterment through education.

Another fallout of this educational system, introduced and set in motion by the erstwhile colonisers, is the tremendous pressure it exerts on the children. Novel after novel dwells on the schizophrenic existence that is forced upon them by the fissure between the life at school and the tenets it seeks to inculcate, and life at home, which is absolutely different in its cultural and economic trappings. In Beka Lamb, both these worlds are presented as diametrically opposite kinds of worlds, the clash between which often ends in catastrophe.

In those days, St Cecilia's was almost another world from the rest of Belize. The majority of students, among whom were the poor, the rich, the brilliant and the mediocre, acquired the art of suppressing segments of their personalities, shielding the lives they led at home the minute they reached the convent gates. They managed, somehow, to leap through the hoops of quality purposely held high by the nuns, rarely however, without awkwardness, determination and intense effort. There were others, many times of the highest intellectual capacity who could not, did not, would not, for a variety of reasons, learn to switch roles with the required rapidity.
Their upbringing, set against such relative conformity, was exaggerating into what was perceived to be vulgarity, defiance, ingratitude, lack of discipline or degradation. These were the ones who stumbled and fell, often in utter confusion and sometimes expelled from school.

(Beka Lamb, 112)

This confusion also manifests itself in the child’s sense of shame at his background. This feeling of inferiority had been actively fostered by the colonisers’ positing their way of life as superior and as the only correct way. Aping the masters, they aspire for an alienating way of life and thus become prey to alienating mores. Biswas, and his classmates whether they are of African, Indian or Chinese origin, do not want to reveal their addresses to anyone for the revelation of their squalid homes would annihilate whatever advantage they might have amongst their peers at school. Anand too, seeking to maintain a superior position, is upset when a schoolmate relegates his father to the level of a servant, a subordinate allowed entry to the master’s house only through the back door. The children do not want to be called country children because it makes them the butt of much laughter in school.

Crick Crack Monkey, which traces the growth of the child Tee from the age of five till she is eight or nine, is a dramatic enactment of the psychological divide that such a system fosters. The two worlds represented by the two aunts Tantie and Beatrice are
counterpointed. Tantie stands for a spontaneous, loving, natural world while Aunt Beatrice represents the stifling kind of life approved and fostered by the school. These exercise divisive pulls in the mind of the little girl which leads to the creation of a split personality: Tee creates a 'white' double, Helen, for herself. Helen has all the gentleness that school is trying to teach her. This split personality trait reveals a sense of incompleteness, a lack of a coherent identity and a gnawing feeling of shame at the black ancestral heritage. It also implies that this kind of a child can be manipulated. 'I was disarmed beyond all resistance, in an uncomfortable, alien way,' laments Tee silently. (CCM, 84)

Moreover, this schism engenders a class system which tears the social fabric. Though it has a direct link with the status of the second class citizen imposed on the coloured subject by the coloniser, the economic disparities are obviously a major impetus for its manifestation. Generally, all the child-protagonists come from families who do not have enough. In fact the main concern of these people is to work up the economic ladder using education as the first step, and so to effect a niche for themselves. The school system is guilty of creating additional parameters for further class distinctions. There are different schools for the rich and for the underprivileged who receive subsidised education. The noble impulse behind the latter is completely lost in the relegation of the students to a secondary status with them being looked down upon as if they were inferior.

Furthermore, the child has to negotiate with the sham and the corruption that underlie the educational system. Scholarships, promising escape to lands of opportunities, can be bought for a
price. When the boy-narrator of *Miguel Street* grows up, his mother buys a scholarship for a degree in drugs and he is sent abroad at the end of the novel. He has no interest in the subject but since that is the only one available, he takes it. Once again, the irrational and meaningless basis of such an accidental education is magnified.

To compound matters, the system is blind in its heavily patriarchal tilt which castigates only the girl for the offence of which even her male classmate is guilty. In *Beka Lamb*, Toycie is expelled when she is made pregnant by Emilio Villaneuva who is not even reprimanded just because he is a male from an affluent family. Toycie is an excellent student and this injustice plunges her into a mental breakdown. In her craziness, Toycie does not evince any anger against the sexual and emotional perfidy perpetrated by the male. The real wound has been inflicted by the rustication from the school as is evident in her crazed posture of continuously pretending to study (*Beka Lamb*, 134). This act has destroyed not only her life but also that of her guardian aunt, Mrs Eva who dotes on her and whose life revolves around her. The Lamb family is also not untouched by this, the greatest impact being felt by the child protagonist, Beka Lamb. Beka and Toycie have been bosom friends and have grown up together though the latter is a little older than Beka. Though Toycie's reaction may be extreme, yet it reveals the high premium placed on education in the Caribbean.

Plus, through the standards set by colonial education, the desire for emigration came to be branded on the consciousness of the colonial ever since he was a child. As it is, historically, they are already part of a forced diasporic movement due to the colonial
and planted on an alien soil in the massive slavery scam, they cannot even begin to feel at home on the islands. In the face of the ominous danger spelt by the colonialist visitations highlighted above the only dream that can be fostered here on the island is the dream of escape to a more congenial land and clime is made more real through the books they read than the actual world they inhabit. This dream can only be realised through education.

This emigration was the only escape from cultural nothingness to a sense of belonging to a world that matters. Hence, the mass emigration of the postcolonial generation from the islands to the United States, Canada or to England. Anand Biswas, Annie, 'G', Trumper, and Prescod are all nurtured with the aim of moving away to the 'moder kontry' or some distant white shore where they would live like white people, almost 'be' white. This is part of the incessant West Indian quest for identity the seeds of which are planted in childhood. It is significant that this is also the trajectory followed by the writers themselves: Sam Selvon, Caryl Phillips, the Naipaul brothers, Olive Senior, Arnold Harichand Itwaru, Cecil Foster, Dabydeen, have all moved from the Caribbean to live in metropolitan cities of the West.

All the child protagonists have to confront this centrifugal force which ironically would move them away from home so that they can recover the self. Only Prescod rejects a physical move away from the island. Annie sails away to England, Trumper to America and 'G' to a successful job abroad. Biswas yearns to escape; Anand does. Tee, too will be called to England. The varying degrees of affinity the children reveal towards their 'home', lays bare the tension of trying to inhabit two worlds. As George
Lamming puts it in *The Emigrants* (1953), the 'West Indies people, whatever island you bring them from, them want to prove something.' Schoolgirls, when asked to write an 'autobiographical essay' in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* variously evince the pull of emigration. 'One little girl wanted to go to England to live with her aunt' (*AJ*, 40). Another revels in memories of tea with Lady Baden-Powell in a Girl Guide jamboree, and yet another imaginatively lives a day with her brother in Canada. As soon as Mikey decides to go to America 'he had ceased to belong to us' notes Tee the little narrator of *Crick Crack Monkey* simply presenting the truth about the effect of the aspired emigration. Even Tee's teacher who has been either ignoring or denigrating her as a poor cousin of her pet students, suddenly performs a *volte face* when she gets wind of Tee's proposed movement to England. On being told that her father has been abroad for the past seven years, she cosily reproaches Tee: ' Seven years! But you never told us, you naughty girl, you never told us your Daddy was abroad!' (*CCM*, 110)

Despite shortcomings, education remains a channel for success as it was for the African Tambudzai in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, or Obu in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Potter's Wheel.* Mr Biswas finally lands the job of a respected journalist only because of his education. Like all other West Indians, he sees that the only promise of a positive future is through education. Even in *Miguel Street* which is really a battery of cameo sketches, it is ideas like this that hold the novel together. Education as a social preoccupation, as a national mania almost, as a means to

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'escape', underlies almost all the novels that use a child protagonist. *Beka Lamb*, *Crick Crack Monkey*, *A House for Mr Biswas*, *Annie John*, *Shanti*, *In the Castle of My Skin* all have education as a major, if not the main, concern.

The Caribbean preoccupation with education is clearly brought out in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. The central concern of this novel is the transforming power of education. At the same time it also dwells on the inherent anomalies and injustice of the system. The novel opens on the occasion of Beka's award of a first prize in an essay competition thanks to which 'Beka changed from what her mother called a 'flat-rate Belize creole' into a person with a 'high mind'. (*Beka Lamb*, 1) The whole novel is a build-up on the fourteen year old Beka's coup and the complete action of the novel takes place in recall. Change is already in the air and the first place that this becomes apparent is in the schools. A hitherto unknown feeling of pride in being Belizean stirs in the breasts of the young folk and the school seems to be the reference point:

The young people within and without the gates of St. Cecilia's were local models of whom to be proud. If Father Nunez had been a little more open a little more understanding, a little more self-confident, a little more Belizean, it is possible that he could have performed a miracle...

(*Beka Lamb*, 89)

This yearning for new local role models spells out the vacuum that has been threatening to engulf them and vocalises a nationalist
impulse. That things are changing in the socio-political field is clear from the fact that Beka is the first black child to win the essay competition.

As already iterated, education is attributed with tremendous regenerative and transforming powers. Shanti's mother 'like most of the villagers' (Shanti, 19) realises that the only way in which a positive future can be wrested from the uncongenial socio-political conditions of the country is through education. ‘Shanti,’ her mother would say, ‘lemme tell you dis, me daughta. Yuh mus guh to school. You mus learn, me daughta. Learn. Dis nah life fi yuh, me tell yuh.’ (Shanti, 5) For the intelligent Shanti school is 'a precious world' (Shanti, 6) beckoning with the forceful lure of possibility, of transformation, of becoming 'something other and better than she was.' (Shanti, 29) In The Year at San Fernando the boy, Francis, is taken to San Fernando to serve as a servant-companion in the house of an old lady. It is the promise of education which prompts the mother to send her son away from home. ‘She [mother] had said, Stay and take in education, boy. Take it in. That’s the main thing.’ (SF, 80) The urge for education is strong because of the possibilities of escape and of betterment and the child is socialised with this idea right from the beginning. Tee is so fired with this urge that she says

I looked forward to school. I looked forward to the day when I could pass my hand swiftly from side to side on a blank piece of paper leaving meaningful marks in its wake.

(CCM, 20)
It is indeed ironical that this education which was being used by the coloniser to control the subject, becomes a tool not only of empowerment but also of interrogation. In her ability to question this educational system and to formulate her conclusions regarding the unthinking reception by the colonised subjects of the country, Shanti becomes the prototype of the subversive potential of the system:

Her vision grew keener, and she began to wonder. Were her teachers wrong? Were the British really honourable? To her they were marauders, they were invaders, they were destroyers. She found nothing brave about condemning people who were different from them, nothing wise or kind about enslaving people, nothing fair about making people servants in their own land, nothing heroic about punishing those who complained.

Her teachers were wrong. The history was wrong. This education was wrong. Did these teachers not see where the other people lived? What kind of teachers were these? What kind of an education was this? Why must she learn these blatant lies?

It was the British who had destroyed her father. It was the British who had made her
mother a living dead, a curse. It was the British who had robbed them of everything. It was the British who had violated her. Why must she sing 'Good old roast beef of England? What was roast beef, and why must she sing of it? Why must she sing 'Rule Britannia, Rule. Britons will never be slaves?' Why must she be the British Queen's loyal subject? What had the Queen done for her?

(Shanti, 56. My emphases.)

It is through her that the winds of change, the growing seeds of discontentment are spelt out.

'Just as I was goin' born the light went out'44: Race and Colour in the Caribbean

The child grows up with the acute mutilating awareness of an inequality related to colour. So, it becomes essential to identify and clarify the concepts of race and tradition in this scenario where all such signifiers have been wilfully and autocratically erased. Thus it is that notions such as 'blackness' become important in this war. He, along with other blacks will fawn and scrape when talking to whites - an attitude insidiously inculcated by the colonial masters.

Every child in the village had a stock response for the colour black. We had taken in like our daily bread a kind of infectious amusement about the colour, black. No black boy wanted

44 From George Lamming, In the Castle of My Skin, op.cit., p. 128.
to be white, but it was also true that no black boy liked the idea of being black.

(CS,127)

Learning from their colonialist teachers, the children use the term 'black' as 'a weapon against interference. If [they] lost [their] temper [they] would charge the other with being a black fool, or a black ass.' Boy Blue, several shades darker than the rest of his friends, sheds poignant light on this issue of colour forcing a hurtful recognition on all the children.

When you asked him why he was so black, he would answer with serious conviction: 'Just as I wus goin' born the light went out.' Nobody could reply to that. The light, we admitted had out for many of us.

(CS, 128)

In response to her daughter’s complaint that in school ‘they only pick the ‘fair’ girls anyway...’ to participate in key programmes, Beatrice, her mother has harsh words to set the perspective in Crick Crack Monkey

‘Look, my girl, it's not my fault that you are dark; you just have nothing to reproach me for. But the darker you are the harder you have to try, I am tired of telling you that! What you don’t have in looks you have to make up otherwise!’

(CCM, 83)
Whereas, not one child wanted to have black skin, each hankered after whiteness. When awakening comes he has to realise that the skin is really a castle which houses his distinctive identity. The child has to find this singular identity for himself. The task is not easy because of the total erasure of identity of the erstwhile slave that the colonial masters had sought. As already iterated, the child through whom this erasure was sought to be established, is the one best suited to forge this singular identity.

Daughters of the Empire

As already clarified, it is in the illustrations of childhood that the early emergence of an 'other' status becomes apparent with reference to race and culture. This is manifest more pointedly with relation to gender. Hence, another noteworthy aspect of fiction writing in the Caribbean, is the relatively large number of women novelists who have used the viewpoint of the child: Zee Edgell in Beka Lamb, Jamaica Kincaid in Annie John, Olive Senior in her short stories and Merle Hodge in Crick Crack Monkey.

The importance of the mother apparent in the African novel finds an echo in the central position accorded to her in the Caribbean. But unlike in Africa where the mother was almost unequivocally associated with nurture and care, in the West Indies she is quite often identified as an unwitting accessory of the

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colonial powers in the process of colonisation.

For this infection, if we may so regard it, is derived from a mother who becomes an innocent accomplice of the foes ranged against her child—an accomplice who is unaware of the role she plays in her child’s frequent defeats, because she stands a sincerely staunch and valiant ally to his cause at the same time...But she carries a deadly virus; the child is infected from the cradle.46

She is the agency through which the 'archaic ideal'47 of an alien race is instilled into her children's consciousness. She eggs her children to approximate to this white ideal as they can so that they can prosper, and transcend the curbs imposed by virtue of their being black. This proves to be the biggest stumbling block to complete awareness in the child. She, because of her limited understanding, (wilfully kept limited by the system of education.) little gauges the harm she is doing them. This canker, unknowingly planted from within, seals the doom of the children, the future generation of the land. In this capacity, she comes to be identified with the comprador, a case of the enemy being 'my people' once again. It is only when this insidiousness is subjected to postcolonial questioning that effort can be made to redress the situation.

47 Ibid., p. 310.
For this woman novelist, the perspective of the child becomes the prime weapon with which she can counter the dual colonisation to which she has been subjected. The woman occupies a pivotal position in this society as is proved by the colonialist bastardising strategy which forces a large number of women, mothers, grandmothers, aunts to take on the onus of rearing children on their own. Tee’s aunt Tantie takes care of her with love; Howard is brought up by his grandmother; the Miguel Street narrator, Francis, ‘G’ all have mothers bringing them up singly, on their own. Though this may denote their strength, at the same time it reveals another front on which she gets a bad deal. Not only has she to work hard to bring up her family, she is also shorn of regular emotional support that might be normally hers with a man around. Further, she has to steel herself to shoulder the burden alone in this inhospitable world. This she does by keeping a tight check on her emotions. Lack of emotional display of love and affection has the detrimental effect of distancing her from the children for whom she is undergoing this pain.

Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior, Zee Edgell dramatise the pain of this knowledge through the use of the child. Annie John shares all the animus against colonial masters with the male counterparts in In the Castle of my Skin and No Man in the House. The part that education played in alienating the boys from their history, their people and their selves, is also played out with the girl children. Annie, in Annie John hankers for the ‘white’ benefits and ultimately her education makes her leave the island in search of greener material pastures. It is her mother who has been training her for it. Paradoxically, it is the mother who receives the brunt of a hate campaign. It is as if the colonial project makes the mother an
accomplice, a comprador, of the regime and this Annie has to resist. How far she is successful working within the confines of colonial hamperings is not, in the final analysis, as important as the fact that she is conscious of the urge to escape.

Olive Senior's bastard girls represent the oppressive brutalisation by colonialist powers. The effect of colonial education on the girl-narrators is seen in the constant efforts of the mothers, and therefore later, of the girls themselves to come as close to the white ideal as possible. The dreams that they are fed with are dreams of escape to the mother country. These exercise a pressure that none of the children escape. But for the girls it is a more difficult battle because of the double handicap—her political position as subject and the social position as a woman, and finally having to wage a psychological battle against the one to whom she is the closest, her mother.

While talking of the Caribbean novel, critics like Laura Niesen de Abruna Alison Donnell Collins, Patricia Hill and Moira Ferguson fall back on Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory which perceives female identity as residing in the close relationship between the mother and her female child. Boys need to reject the femaleness represented by their mothers to become 'male'. Girls will find their identity on embracing this femaleness. Nevertheless this is a problematic identity because it means identification with the weaker sex in a patriarchal society. This would make this identification both life and death for the girl. It goes without saying that this is an alien ideology imposed by the bourgeois, Victorian attitude to the female body as something which has to be possessed and controlled. This relationship becomes the stage on which
colonial paternalism and its accompanying patriarchy can be countered.

After the initial close, total, and exclusive relationship with the mother, the girl has to be subjected to a separation which will be painful. Further, the utterly inappropriate education that she is subjected to will ensure the worse than death kind of alienation for it means an estrangement from the self. Even here, it is the mother who pushes her to it and as already emphasised becomes the colonial carrier of the poison.

Moira Ferguson clarifies this strategic location of the girl child while talking of the novel Annie John. She says that here, 'Kincaid inflects the gradually seesawing and ultimately agonised mother-daughter relationship with commentary about growing up as a female dominated by colonisers and their allies who administer the patriarchal dictates, the law of the father.' Hence, it is with the child Annie John's dissatisfaction with the situation in postcolonial Antigua, that the import of her position comes out. In the rejection of the mother is implied a rejection of colonial past. Annie John reveals the contrary pulls that the mother goes through in her pre-colonial African memory of a matrilineal tradition and the enforced colonial patriarchy.

As pointed out earlier, the comprehensive sway of colonialist control emerges most sharply when they are sexually violated. Judgement is passed against Toycie in Beka Lamb for becoming pregnant while the boy who impregnated her goes scot-free. The

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48 Moira Ferguson, Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1994, p. 44.
reasons are clear in the exchange between Beka’s Dad and the Sister Superior

‘Toycie is an excellent student. She alone is not to be blamed for this accident, and Mr. Villaneuva’s son will not be expelled from the school...’
This country remains Victorian in a number of ways, Mr. Lamb...’

(Beka Lamb, 119)

It is to be noted that in *The Year in San Fernando* it is Francis, a son who is singled out for the education that Mr. Chandles promises, recalling the discriminatory attitude to Tambudzai in the African novel, *Nervous Conditions*. Giving him news about his sister Anna, his mother says ‘... she went up to the sixth. Time for her to leave school though, and learn some sewing. (*SF*, 74)

This unfair sexual discrimination crops up even in *Shanti*. Shanti is subjected to rape while still a little girl by the black overseer and is initially rejected by her lover because of this loss of virginity. The double standards of the society are devastatingly unveiled in the treatment she receives from her headmaster who too has been secretly indulging in sexual fantasies about her. She secures the top position in the competitive examinations in the whole country and is yet denied a job because of her supposed transgression. Latch, the lover who misjudges her but ultimately marries her, gets the job because he is a male and is therefore not
answerable to society in the same way.

...you topped the whole country, the Education Officer wants to interview you. But I'm afraid that won't help you. Not around here, anyway.'

'Why not?'

She held back the urge to spit in his face, to pound in his sneering ugly lips.

'Why not?'

(Shanti, 91)

Through the childlike innocence of the children the injustice of the misdirected colonial education system is exposed.

Finally, even in this quarter, there is the location of a new confidence. In Crick Crack Monkey there is no evidence of overt feminism of the querulous kind evident in Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions. The notion of the strength and importance of the woman is accepted without question though she may be a loser in this. It is the woman who comes forward to shoulder the responsibilities that are thrust upon her as Tantie does, and she does it competently and squarely. It is the males who falls short of the norm—Tee’s father disappears after his wife’s death leaving a female to take care of his children; Mikey leaves for greener pastures without any thought of the pain his departure
might cause Tantie. Even Beka is strong and finally finds faith in her own abilities.

It was only a small beginning, but Beka felt she had handled the job like a woman and in Belize, to be able to work like a woman was an honourable thing.

*(Beka Lamb, 27)*

The ability to take the reader inside the growing girl's mind, imbues the childhood novel of the Caribbean with a complexity which pushes them beyond being mere metaphors of the country's growth.

*The Winds of Change*

But the children can also be the mirror to scotched promises and unrealised hopes. Cecil Foster in his short story 'Spoiling It' paints a clear picture of these dying dreams and their rejuvenation or the hope for it. The protagonist recalls his childhood: ""We were the "Independence Students", our claim to uniqueness. A generation ago, we were the hopes of a new nation." (‘Spoiling It’, 23) Weighed down by heavy expectations and by the guilt of not being able to achieve it because of the 'taint of colonial education' and by the fact that their 'horizons' were 'prescribed by foreigners in some 'mother country', they lost out in their postcolonial battle to

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shake off the effects of colonisation. They began with a surging confidence

The post-colonial era was ours to conquer, the same those following Columbus had found virginal land to deface or develop. By succeeding against innumerable odds we were going to turn the tables on the colonial powers that had subjugated our people for centuries, the same way our brilliant cricketers had kindled the thoughts of independence in our minds by proving we could master the very games the colonialist invented and taught us.

("Spoiling It", 27)

But somehow some of the shackles have remained with them in the postcolonial era. Dreams seem to die daily, promises remain unfulfilled. The child’s perspective becomes the touchstone for this failing and so, in spite of this cold douche, the child remains the only hope, the only rejuvenation of the idea.

Stigmatised and categorised, the bastardised child will spontaneously seek ways to redeem the schizoid situation of being neither ‘here’ nor ‘there.’ The feeling of inferiority in the colonised people which had seeped into the fibre of their social and cultural life, has to be erased. The warping of natural affinities by the hate and distrust bred into the society by the divide and rule policy of the white rulers, where the enemy is imaged by ‘my people’, has to be righted. The awareness of inferiority related to colour, verbalised by the Fanonian formulation ‘turn white or disappear’
has to be recognised as the strategy of the colonialist regime to keep the 'natives' in place. Once this aim of 'deculturation through the process of a systematic elimination of a raison d'être for the colonised'\(^{50}\) is uncovered, the tables are set for reversal.

Thus, in the child's unsuspecting reception and intake of colonial edicts not only is the modus operandi of the colonisers highlighted, but by accenting the helpless innocence of the children as the site of final control, the ultimate degrading implications of colonisation are brought home. Hitherto, the most silent, disempowered, the most marginalised of colonial subjects, the child becomes the location of a major political and ideological battle. The common denominator of colonial consciousness in the novels, shows subtle but marked development. The rumblings of instinctual violent insurgence in the 1953 novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* sees independence becoming a reality under the able guidance of intellectuals. Freedom never dreamt of in *In the Castle of My Skin* becomes a realisable dream in *No Man in the House*. Thus, the novels attributing a central position to the child’s consciousness are not just a curious humming of postcolonial stirrings but part of an ongoing process. Through the deployment of the child, the West Indian novelist is finally able to focus on what the West Indian historian, Nettleford calls the 'task of restoring to the black man his manhood, his dignity and gaining for him real ownership in the society which was supposed to be his own.'\(^{51}\)

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\(^{50}\) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, op.cit., p. 170.

The possibilities discerned in the African child appear even in the Caribbean. As both Lamming and Foster show with amazing perspicacity, it is within the mind of the innocent child that the seeds of change of revolution are engendered. As seen in the case of the African novel, like the little Child exposing the King's vanity in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale, 'The Emperors' New Clothes', the courage of innocence is the first to take any steps.52 Early in In the Castle of my skin the boys will irreverently wonder about the colour of the Queen's bloomers, and Bess's grandson will stick the backside of a fowlcock in the face of a white man which will mess on him. In the excited task of scrambling wildly, flashing the fine narrow blades created out of pins and nails, the origins of a revolution can be discerned.

Three - Thirteen - Thirty Boys
Three - Thirteen - Thirty Knives

(CS, 31)

The children become symbolic of those who can, and will engage in the active struggle for independence. Prescod and the other children, through their hard work and excellent examination results, will chalk out a path to self-reliance. It is a child who will instinctively give voice to nationalist feelings. Prescod will waver

52 See page 45, Chapter Two, 'A Spirit-Child Nation': The Child in the English Novel in Africa
like all the blacks of the time:

That created my biggest problem, I was not sure if I wanted to leave Barbados.... I wanted to be part of both worlds but I didn't want to give up anything.

(NH, 240)

But he will suddenly feel rebellious, and use his pen to make an affirmative decision - "Come home to join us", he writes to his parents in his award-winning essay. The idea equating Barbados with 'home' is the first enunciation of the nationalist feeling that had been sorely lacking in the black population. Through the child the dawn of a new independent nation is heralded. It is significant that the earlier incipient and the later vocalised stirrings of independence are accompanied by pleas and communications to the 'father to assert himself as one. Through the child the dawn of a new independent nation is ushered in.

Hence, recognising the strategies developed by the whites to exclude the blacks and to maintain their homogeneity; to consolidate their control based on ethnocentrism and racism, the blacks feel the need to embark on an ideological restructuring and reconditioning. They need to recognise and establish that it is not they who are 'outside', bastards, but the whites. For, without religious or moral sanction, the whole embarkation on the colonialist project was an illegitimate one. Thereafter, the colonialist strategy had one single aim that of trying to legitimise their act by making the colonised believe that it was 'right.' With time the
colonised had come to believe in his inferiority as the only truth which invited, validated and legalised colonisation. Now the coloured people feel the need to develop a strategy to counter this strategy with which reversal, they can now go about legitimising themselves, and thus entering the mainstream.\textsuperscript{53} Through the deployment of the illegitimate child, the Caribbean novelist is able to achieve this objective quite adequately.

With the discovery of a new independent identity, history is re-examined and re-interpreted through the use of the child. A notable illustration is the new light thrown on the 'discoverer' of the West Indies, Christopher Columbus in \textit{Annie John}. The history text establishes this fact of discovery by giving it the fixed truth of a historical date: 'On the third of November 1493, a Sunday morning, Christopher Columbus discovered Dominica.' (\textit{AJ}, 75) The eponymous girl-heroine Annie John responds with a new postcolonial awareness of identity when she reacts to a picture of the 'hero' fettered in chains thus: 'What just deserts, I thought, for I did not like Columbus. How I loved this picture--to see the usually triumphant Columbus, brought so low...' (\textit{AJ}, 77-78) She consciously thinks of turning the tables against the white oppressors. She can discount her England-returned teacher who once again, represents the enemy from within, as a 'prune left out of its jar for a long time.' (\textit{AJ}, 36) She correctly recognises this as the taint of Anglophilia.

Thus, by representing the experience of childhood, the novelist can actually follow the growth of a particular Caribbean

\textsuperscript{53} Negritude was a move in this direction of blacks trying to enter the mainstream.

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consciousness, and show how it is shaped into a characteristic pattern by the social, political and geographical realities it faces. In this context particularly, the novelist whose name comes to the mind is Trinidadian Michael Anthony whose published novels and collection of short stories all deal with childhood experience. More than any other West Indian writer, Anthony succeeds in skilfully recreating the untempered experience of the child, allowing the reader to partake in the actual responses as they occur. Thus the real experience of growing up in the West Indies finds its way into fictional representation.

Almost half a century after the achievement of political freedom, the postcolonial critique of life in the Caribbean is ceasing to make colonisation its main focus. Though this original focus has never been forgotten, and indeed does enter all the novels in some form or the other, winds of change are making themselves apparent. A positive feature noticeable is the widening of the purview to finally start taking stock of life in the Caribbean as it is. Also, more perspectives enter the field.

In this context, it must be noticed that the perspective of the child is not limited to coloured writers from the Caribbean. This stresses the importance of this novelistic strategy and is one indication of the opening out of the critique. The writing of white Creole writers reveal other important aspects of West Indian writing. Novels like *Christopher* by Geoffrey Drayton too deploy the central figure of the child to throw light on the peculiar West Indian situation with regards to the relationship between the whites and the blacks. But the novel goes beyond this first stage critiquing of the colonial effect. Both colonial and postcolonial visitations are
voiced. In fact, the novel touches upon all the major aspects of children in the West Indies namely race, colour, religion, bastardisation, the master-slave relationship, the erasure of identifying history and territory but transcends this by making connections with the African past and forge fresh links among the different races.

The central relationship between Christopher the seven year old white boy and Gip, his old black nurse highlights many aspects from a sympathetic white perspective. The innocent child’s mind is unable to understand social gradations imposed by the unequal laws and history

"What does it mean," he asked, "when somebody’s better than somebody else?"

"That depends," she stalled. "White people is better than black people-mostly. That’s because we work for them..."

(Christopher, 47)

Without doubt, the situation is undergoing a change. No longer is the black as much in awe of the white man as earlier. He may not have come out into the open in flagrant rebellion but he has nonetheless started harbouring a resentful dissatisfaction against the white masters. The disrespectful black beggar who accosts Christopher in the town, hints at a shrinking distance between the two races. He is closely, though more positively and more gently seconded by Gip in her assertion that ‘all is one in heaven, black and white together.’(Christopher, 47) The close relationship of the
Stevens family with Gip itself shows a marked change from erstwhile master-slave ties.

The ancient roots of the blacks in Africa are noted in conjunction with the changes which have been inflicted by the white rulers especially in the realm of religion. Converted to Christianity they have begun to sing Christian hymns 'but the rhythms to which they sang them were African, simple and repetitive, gaining speed and volume as they gained in length.' (Christopher, 28) They beat time with African instruments like the drum and the tambourine. A horrifying awful sense of sin, guilt and punishment is instilled in the blacks thanks to the indoctrination by the white rulers who excuse themselves from these rigours. Satan, his kingdom, hell-fire are terribly real for Gip thanks to 'the Sunday-night sessions at her own chapel' while she has noted that they are hardly mentioned at the parish church the Stevens frequent. Obeah constantly hovers over the mental landscape of the blacks though it sometimes touches the whites as seen in the effect on Christopher and his mother.

It is indeed ironic that the erasure of African roots should be blatantly laid bare by the childish comments of Christopher, a white boy. Though this amnesia is apparently total in Cinder's responses to his expressed desire to become an explorer in Africa, it is significant that the white boy has made a connection. When he talks of huge leaves used as boats on the African rivers, or huge snakes which do not bite but which squeeze their victims to death, she expresses disbelief and shudderingly wonders why he should even want to go to such a place. She is further from Africa than the little boy who has gained access to the continent vicariously through his
education and through his grandfather’s experience. Once again, the discussion between the young white boy and the black cook becomes an indicator of the shrinking distances between the different races. Also evident through the comments of the child is an early effort at the restoration of that which had been lost, an effort to establish links with roots.

Though the initial function of the child might have been to give an objective and sometimes, satiric viewpoint to the postcolonial situation, a function never abrogated, the simple, uncomplicated sensibility of the child finally becomes the means to penetrate to the root of the specifically Caribbean experience. It is the use of this motif which assists in following the process of the construction of a distinctive Caribbean identity. Significant also, in this connection is the narrative structure of *The Year in San Fernando*. The closeness of the child’s responses to the natural cycle of life and death, to the cycle of the seasons, is again an insight into the wholesomeness for which the trope of the child stands. Michael Anthony’s fictional childhood forays become a final comment on postcolonial life where a new identity *apart* from the colonial is being represented. No judgement is passed on either the child or the events, the bewildered confusion of the child continues beyond the end of the novel. In the mere depiction of Caribbean life, without any overt questioning of the ‘colonial’, the final postcolonial response can be discerned. Ultimately, the children represent the hope and the reality of the new country. Once again, the child, as will be seen in the novel from the Indian subcontinent, continues to be located at the centre of yet another kind of ‘postcoloniality’ where a constant battle does not need to be constantly or openly verbalised or undertaken.