

ENTERTEXT

Special Issue on Andrea Levy

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Guest Editor: Wendy Knepper

In memory of Cosmo (1993-2010)

A cat who lived happily in Toronto, Berlin, and London

'I've never seen him so upset. He really loves that cat. He's going to miss her. He said he'd never have another one because you just get attached to them and they die. I think she's dead, Ange—went somewhere to die. But I didn't say that to yer dad. He's too upset. He loves that cat. I hope he finds her.'

—Andrea Levy, *Never Far from Nowhere*

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Andrea Levy's Dislocating Narratives¹

Wendy Knepper

This special issue on Andrea Levy (1956-), the first of its kind, considers the author's contribution to contemporary literature by exploring how her narratives represent the politics of place² as well as the dislocations associated with empire, migration, and social transformation. Since the 1990s, Levy has published five novels, namely *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), and *The Long Song* (2010). Slavery and its legacies, migration, and quests for belonging are recurring motifs in her work. This is not surprising, given that this black British writer's life and writing have been shaped by histories of migration that preceded her birth, notably through her parents' emigration from Jamaica to England during the Windrush era as well as through her genealogical connections to the Middle Passage, slavery, and wider circulations throughout the Black Atlantic. Levy came of age in a Britain marked by racial tensions and the rise of multiculturalism; directly and indirectly, her work reflects the hopes and anxieties associated with this period of transition. Internal exile is a recurring theme, especially in her early novels, which tend to highlight the ways in which migrants and their children have often been marginalised in British society. Many of her novels depict breakdowns in communication or show characters who experience difficulties relating to one another—often as a result of colonialism or its legacies—even when held together in relations of intimacy, whether through sexual partnerships, friendships, or family. Her work as a whole interrogates relations to place/space, notably through depictions of the council estate, London, metropolitan/colonial relations, the sugar plantation, and routes of migration. Throughout her oeuvre, Levy offers an unflinching critique of inequality, especially as evidenced through the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Even as Levy attends to the contested politics of place and identity in material, affective, and imaginative terms, her textual strategies of dislocation work to challenge prevailing ideologies and foster social transformation. For instance, *Small Island* remaps our understanding of the histories, places, and peoples, before and after Windrush migration, in Jamaica and England as well the wider world.³ Maria Helena Lima observes that “[a]fter reading *Small Island*, [...] readers will not be able to see ‘home’ and ‘empire’ as two separate spaces, leaving unchallenged the fiction of a pre-existing England, herself constituted outside and without imperialism.”⁴ The very structure of the narrative, composed of various first-person accounts expressing black and white and male and female perspectives, implies the need for equal representation and thus challenges colonial hierarchies. As this example from *Small Island* indicates, Levy's textual dislocations—such as shifts in time and space and juxtapositions of multiple first-person testimonial accounts—have the capacity to reorient the socio-cultural imaginary because they expose and disrupt the uneven dynamics that underpin hegemonic constructions of space, time, and subjectivity.

Meena Alexander's account of a poetics of dislocation can help to shed light on Levy's politicised aesthetic. Alexander suggests that the migrant's "painful reckoning" with the vanishing memories of the place from which he or she comes can lead to "the shining strands of a poetry constantly slipping in and out of place, a lyric movement that undoes the teleology of narrative and where 'the explosion of the instant obliterates duration.'"⁵ Dislocations through language, space, and time are central to Alexander's vision of migrant writing, but she also suggests that a poetics of dislocation has the power to embody new relations: to offer "a place where the world is born again."⁶ Citing Zygmunt Bauman, she notes that the "the very notion of identity is born out of 'a crisis of belonging.'"⁷ The experience of what Édouard Glissant describes as "the shock of elsewhere" is potentially transformative, marking an entry into *relation* with others as well as the wider world: to "what is shared and as such can enter into the intricate exchanges of self-identity and the making of poetry."⁸ Glissant's definition of a Poetics of Relation, whereby "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other," suggests a new sense of being in the world order and community as the hierarchies and binary oppositions of empire are displaced by processes of affiliation.⁹ A poetics of dislocation has the potential to enable new relational modes of self and communal narration.

For Levy, representations of the crisis of belonging and/or "the shock of elsewhere"—events frequently depicted in her work—foreground the barriers and challenges to *relation* in Britain, but also explore the possibilities for a shared cultural discourse and sense of community through the space of writing. Levy's poetics of dislocation reorients the socio-cultural imaginary. By interrogating empire and its afterlife as well as relaying perspectives that have been marginalised, silenced, lost, or repressed, Levy's work plays a disruptive role in contemporary culture. Through multi-vocal narratives, she creates imagined spaces where new forms of audibility and visibility are made possible. Her emphasis on testimonial accounts, lived histories, everyday relations to place, and spaces of the imaginary forms part of a narrative strategy for interrogating prevailing relations to community and identity. Levy's work considers the relationship between intimacies and empire, challenging dominant accounts of history, culture, and identity in the process. This special issue contributes to mapping the literary, cultural, and other relations that shape Levy's literary production. As will be seen, Levy's contribution to postcolonial women's writing extends in various directions, including Caribbean, migrant, diasporic, black British, African American, and Black Atlantic writing, and embraces multiple hybrid and creolised idioms and genres.

Andrea Levy's Life and Works

A closer look at the contexts for Levy's life and writing helps to situate her concerns with the politics of place and identity as well as narrative strategies of dislocation. While Levy is frequently classified as a black British writer, her family background is more complicated for she is also of Jamaican, Scottish, and Jewish descent. Levy's father sailed from Jamaica to England on MV *Empire Windrush* ship in 1948, followed six months thereafter by her mother. Her family history is thus intimately connected with one

of the defining events of British identity in the twentieth century: the arrival of 492 passengers (in fact, there were more migrants, also from other places, but 492 remains the number that dominates the popular imaginary) from the West Indies whose entry would mark the rise of what Louise Bennett refers to as “colonizin in reverse.”¹⁰ Levy explains that her parents, like so many migrants of the Windrush generation, were astonished to discover that the ‘Mother Country’ was less than welcoming despite the urgent need for additional labourers in the post-war period:

But they soon found that they were foreigners in England, and this shocked them. The things they thought of as quintessentially English—manners, politeness, rounded vowels from well-spoken people—were not in evidence. They suffered bad housing—by no means the plight of black people alone in those post-war days: the signs in windows read “no niggers, no dogs, no Irish.” My dad faced incredible hostility when looking for somewhere to live because of the colour of his skin. He had a job with the post office. My mum, a trained teacher in Jamaica, had to sew to make a living here. She worked in sweat-shops with other foreigners—Czechs, Poles, Greeks—all fall-out from the war. She had one advantage: she spoke English. And one disadvantage: She was black (or coloured, as we were termed then).¹¹

Levy’s account attests to the various challenges of migration, particularly in terms of xenophobia and the troubled quest for housing and employment.¹²

Born in 1956, growing up in North London, Levy experienced the transitional years when white Britain came to acknowledge its multiracial identity, coinciding with a period of racial unrest. About two years after her birth, in 1958, the Notting Hill riots broke out; she was on the cusp of adolescence when Enoch Powell gave his infamous “Rivers of Blood Speech” in 1968; in Levy’s twenties, the 1981 Brixton riots took place. Lisa Allardice notes that Levy only took up writing in 1988 in an effort to represent black British experience:

It was only a growing political awareness in her 20s that drew her to literature. While working in the wardrobe departments of the BBC and the Royal Opera House, she read voraciously; she was “hungry, hungry, hungry” for books. She looked to Africa-American writers such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, but searched in vain for any British equivalents, or a reflection of herself. She enrolled in a writing class [with Alison Fell] and set about writing her own story.¹³

Despite the presence of Caribbean writing in Britain at that time, including authors such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley, and performance poets, such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean “Binta” Breeze, and Benjamin Zephaniah, Levy turned to feminist writing. Levy herself has said that reading *The Women’s Room* by Marilyn French was a key moment, which led to a wider reading of feminist authors such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Zoë Fairbairns.¹⁴ If we consider the writers to whom she turned, it seems that she was looking for a tradition of women’s writing for inspiration. Certainly, her early novels, written in the genre of the female *Bildungsroman*, show the influence of black women’s writing with its emphasis on what

Barbara Smith refers to as a “woman-identified art.”¹⁵ Yet, like Toni Morrison, Levy is also interested in representing black masculinities. Indeed, she has said that her father’s death in 1987 was the inciting incident that led to the writing of her first novel, observing: “[...] I think that I just wanted to make him, record something of his life, and also the experience that we’d gone through with it.”¹⁶ Levy has stated that Selvon’s accounts of the migrant experience correspond to those of her father,¹⁷ suggesting a wider oral tradition of storytelling in Caribbean diasporic families that supplements the well known fictions by male Windrush writers, such as Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954) and Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956).

Levy’s early fictions from the 1990s overlap with the kinds of critiques of race and culture offered by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy as well as by creative writers, such as Hanif Kureishi, Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley, Beryl Gilroy, and Salman Rushdie, among others.¹⁸ Yet, Levy has said that she experienced difficulty when searching for an agent and publisher for her early work,¹⁹ and we might consider why this was the case. Levy suggests that “publishers didn’t quite know what to do with a North London working-class girl talking about an ordinary family.”²⁰ Her early works—*Every Light in the House Burnin’*, *Never Far from Nowhere*, and *Fruit of the Lemon*—offer bleak, yet humorous, accounts from a black British female perspective. In *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature*, Alison Donnell argues that “‘double colonisation’ [...] has arguably served to figure women’s writing before the 1970s and the 1980s as voiceless and invisible.”²¹ For Levy, it seems that the legacies of earlier marginalisation persisted still in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Literary styles and the marketing of literature might also be considered. In an era when magic realism and metafiction often figured in postcolonial writing, Levy’s work seemed perhaps less marketable. Levy’s works are often unremittingly bleak, offering the reader little hope of a better horizon. So even though her work would fit well in the kind of literary history John McLeod presents in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, a closer look at the narratives he discusses shows that Levy’s early work does not tend to celebrate the carnivalesque or lead to “the articulation of utopian visions of London,” but highlights instead the ways in which imperialism’s enduring influence complicates and frequently blocks communication.²² Finally, perhaps Levy lacked sufficiently developed literary connections: for both Phillips and Jamaica Kincaid write in ambivalent, realistic fictions, which are comparable to Levy in style and themes, but were able to find their way into publication with relative ease.

Nevertheless, by 1998, Levy was already gaining wider recognition for her work as evidenced by the Arts Council Writers' Award for *Fruit of the Lemon*. However, it was not until 2004, with the publication of *Small Island*, which won the “Whitbread Book of the Year Award” and the “Orange Prize for Fiction,” that her reputation soared. The subsequent adaptation of *Small Island* to the small screen by the BBC and a mass reading project across Britain brought her a wider readership throughout the region. Recently, literary scholars have been particularly attentive to Levy’s place in British writing. For instance, Chris Weedon locates Levy’s work alongside works by British Black and South Asian women authors, including Joan Riley, Vernella Fuller, Lucinda Roy,

Charlotte Williams, Leonora Brito, Jackie Kay, Ravinder Randhawa, and Farhana Sheikh.²³ Looking beyond Britain, Levy's work belongs to the domain of transnational and diasporic fictions, which are inscribed across borders through multiple literary affiliations.

Levy's first three novels, from the 1990s, deal primarily with the coming-of-age experience for children born of Windrush migrants, offering black British and Caribbean diasporic perspectives concerning society and identity formation. These works are sometimes read as a trilogy,²⁴ reflecting Levy's experience from the 1960s through to the 1980s, but they also belong to a wider tradition of fictions by the children of migrants who "are constantly reminded they are 'not of here' even though they believe and feel that they are."²⁵ Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), presents a semi-autobiographical, fictionalised account of a Jamaican family living in London in the 1960s. Told from the perspective of Angela Jacob, this story explores the family's experiences on council estates and encounters with the National Health Service (NHS), highlighting the ways in which institutionalised and everyday racism as well as class distinctions have shaped life in Britain. Set during the 1970s, *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) shows how racial hierarchies inflect the life horizons and aspirations of two sisters, Olive and Vivien, growing up in Britain. Like Vernella Fuller in *Going Back Home* (1992), Levy depicts racism on the council estate, offering a comparative depiction of the two sisters' efforts to negotiate their Jamaican-British heritage and sense of place and displacement in British society. In *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Faith Jackson, a young black British woman, travels to Jamaica after suffering a nervous breakdown, following an incident of racial violence in Britain. In Jamaica, Faith gains a new sense of self and experiences an awakening of transnational consciousness by listening to stories about her family's participation in the long history of the global Caribbean. While it is tempting to read the first three works as a kind of trilogy, *Fruit of the Lemon* stands as a novel of transition because of its emphasis on the relations between historiography and vernacular storytelling traditions, concerns that are central to the novels that follow.

In an essay entitled "This is my England," published in *The Guardian* in 2000, Levy reflected on the question of identity politics and writing, observing: "Identity! Sometimes it makes my head hurt—sometimes my heart. So what am I? Where do I fit into Britain, 2000 and beyond?"²⁶ Interestingly, her answer to this question demands a backward-looking response, examining the longer histories that impinge upon the present. Like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, this has meant coming to terms with empire and the Black Atlantic experience. *Small Island* and *The Long Song* retain the focus on personal life stories, but they disrupt and complicate a sense of history. James Procter notes that "Empire brought Britain and its black communities together long before the Nationality Act of 1948 prompted mass migration to Britain from its colonies and former colonies,"²⁷ and Levy's narratives are attentive to this earlier sense of community. While histories of black British identity often focus on the Windrush era, Levy calls attention to the longer historical processes of contact and formation. While *Small Island* examines the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and the role of colonial volunteers in World War II, *The Long Song* considers the role of slavery and trans-Atlantic migration.

Multiple dislocating narrative techniques come together in *Small Island*. The novel subverts the centre-periphery paradigm of empire by bringing the history of one small island, Britain, into dialogue with another, Jamaica. Furthermore, Levy complicates a sense of history by retelling it through the converging and often incommensurate vantage points of white English (Queenie and her husband Bernard Bligh) and Afro-Caribbean migrant characters (Hortense Roberts and Gilbert Joseph). Britain, especially London, emerges as an uneasy contact zone of exchange, segregation, and intermixture. Levy calls attention to World War II as an event that transformed race relations for a short time, but also initiated longer term changes. African American authors, such as Walter Mosley, have already shown the ways in which World War II led to altered race relations at home following demobilisation. Levy follows in this path, but she also explores interrelated histories of violence, enabled by various imperialisms, especially through Britain's post-WWII military interventions in India. Her novel draws on testimonial accounts, including her own family narratives and those of the wider community. The experiences of Michael Roberts and Gilbert take inspiration from her uncle's experiences in the RAF and her father's experiences as a Windrush migrant respectively. Moreover, she incorporates insights gained from important oral histories, such as those collated in Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips's *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998). Thus, the novel reconfigures an understanding of history from many different angles.

Levy's keen interests in women's language and hybrid voicing surface in *The Long Song*, a neo-slave novel, a genre which has played an especially important role in African American women's writing. We might also situate this text in the wider Caribbean and Black Atlantic tradition of neo-slave novels, which includes works by Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Dionne Brand, Nalo Hopkinson, Marlon James, and Bernardine Evaristo. The language and voicing of *The Long Song* are particularly noteworthy, marking a turn towards a more stylised use of dialect. This metafictional work is presented as a highly self-conscious act of orature: even as the novel brings the voice of July to the reader, it also highlights the editorial interventions and mediating efforts of her son, Thomas. Levy's attentiveness to various forms of literacy and language and metafictional techniques are in many ways comparable to the narrative strategies of Patrick Chamoiseau, an author who frequently combines techniques of metalepsis, vocal distancing, and testimonial narration when writing about the slave past. Furthermore, Levy's novel is written in a tragicomic mode: as Ulla Rahbek notes, Levy "has managed to tell the gruesome story of slavery and racism in an amusing way."²⁸ *The Long Song* contributes to the wider Black Atlantic effort to confront the traumatic past of slavery and its legacies through an intimate history, which offers a fragmented, partial, and subversive view of the oppressions of empire.

Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Levy's Dislocating Narratives

Despite the importance and growing influence of her oeuvre, Levy's work has only recently begun to receive the kind of critical attention it deserves. Current scholarship tends to reflect on Levy's efforts to represent identity politics and issues of belonging in British, postcolonial, and global contexts. Mark Stein's *Novels of Transformation*, situates

the black British novel in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, arguing that fictions about identity formation, such as Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, are also "about the transformation of British society and cultural institutions."²⁹ Stein shows that Faith's "location of belonging turns out to be location of 'unbelonging'" and rejection.³⁰ However, when Faith journeys from London to Jamaica, she collects stories that enable her to put into perspective her relationship to Britain and "conceive of alternate histories—and alternate futures as well."³¹ Weihsin Gui's comparative reading of Andrea Levy and V.S. Naipaul situates the authors' work as "*post-heritage* novels that combine thematic and formal characteristics identified by Rebecca Walkowitz in her analysis of the 'post-consensual novel,'³² namely the microgenres of "the novel of minority culture; the novel of multiculturalism, and the novel of transnational comparison."³³ Where Gui is primarily interested in migrancy and racism as represented in *Fruit of the Lemon*, it is easy to see how this account of microgenres might more generally be applied to Levy's oeuvre as a whole. Gui's analysis of contesting representations and imbricated histories places emphasis on the related inscriptions of Jamaica and Britain, and suggests a new emphasis on travelling narratives as a means of locating new ways of dwelling in the world. More widely, issues of belonging and unbelonging have been explored through Levy's inscriptions of Windrush history,³⁴ the culinary,³⁵ the motif of adoption,³⁶ contrapuntal voicing and tensions between creolised and standard English,³⁷ the hybrid relationship between homeland and motherland and the hybridisation of Britain,³⁸ vernacular cosmopolitanisms,³⁹ and multiple negotiations of multiculturalism and globalization.⁴⁰ Finally, the wider impact of fiction on reading publics has recently been considered by Anouk Lang in her discussion of the mass-reading project on *Small Island*, which saw the distribution of fifty thousand copies of the novel across the UK.⁴¹

This special issue on Andrea Levy extends the dialogue about un/belonging and citizenship, but it also considers her approach to a poetics of dislocation. Levy's fictions examine the life histories of Caribbean peoples and their descendants, showing that their sense of place and identity is often deeply contested as a result of the dislocating effects of empire and migration. While many of her stories focus on life in Britain and the transformation of society through the rise of multiculturalism, Levy also shows how routes to, through, and beyond the Caribbean have contributed to the transnational experience and expanded social imaginary. At a discursive level, her narratives move to-and-fro through time and space, shift among various voices, explore various and often differing points of view, mix genres and idioms, and incorporate other techniques of textual dislocation. Thus, stories of dislocation and dislocating narrative techniques are central to her work, enabling a strategic representation of the past from a postcolonial vantage point.

The issue begins with contributions concerning Levy's narrative strategies for representing dislocation through space and time. In "The Familiar Made Strange: The Relationship between the Home and Identity in Andrea Levy's Fiction," Jo Pready examines the interplay between place, space, and feelings of displacement. Building on the work of John Procter and John McLeod about dwelling places in black British writing, Pready demonstrates that a sense of interiority is negotiated through the contested space

of the home in *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Never Far from Nowhere*. Claudia Marquis's "Crossing Over: Postmemory and the Postcolonial Imaginary in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and *Fruit of the Lemon*" bridges space and time by considering how Black Atlantic crossings, imagined and actual, shape literary production. Drawing on trauma theory, she takes George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), a work that looks back to the colony from Britain, as a point-of-entry for reading Levy's narratives of crossings as acts of memory and imaginative encounter that complicate and enrich our understanding of history.

Levy's approach to temporality, particularly belatedness, and writing as a process of continuous negotiation plays an important role in her oeuvre. Ole Laursen's "Telling Her a Story': Remembering Trauma in Levy's Writing" addresses the dislocating effects of slavery and migration as traumatic events. He argues that Levy resituates British and Black Atlantic histories through writing itself as a performative act of postmemorialisation, which reclaims "the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth."⁴² Levy's narratives highlight the ruptures and transformations that occur through the repression and recovery of personal and cultural memories. An emphasis on the open, ongoing process of cultural transformation also informs Alicia E. Ellis's "Identity as Cultural Production in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*." Through a close reading of the "Prologue," she highlights the ways in which Levy complicates the representation of black British presence, Windrush migration, and interracial encounters in Britain. The back-and-forth movements of memory and the instabilities of language come together in a dislocating poetics.

Intertextual readings of Levy's work highlight the ways in which Levy's fiction intervenes in the cultural imaginary in order to highlight forms of marginalisation, particularly in terms of race and gender, as well as consider the ways in which writing may disrupt and challenge the prevailing cultural imaginary. Sandra Courtman's "Women Writers and the Windrush Generation: A Contextual Reading of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*" addresses the marginalisation of female authors in the black British literary canon. Re-reading the work of Gilroy in dialogue with Levy, she critiques the suppression of women's writing and offers a nuanced reclamation of feminist literary genealogies. In so doing, Courtman sheds light on the poetics of dislocation, reflecting on the ways in which the author's location in a particular time and place may have shaped her writing strategies. Charlotte Beyer's "Representations of Ageing and Black British Identity in Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight*" takes an intersectional approach, examining representations of ageing and the body, race, and gender. Beyer skilfully weaves together an analysis of identity politics and the poetics of dislocation, showing how Levy and Riley's uses of realist memory writing, representations of ageing, and narrative that resist closure serve to foreground and celebrate intergenerational histories.

The final articles bring Levy's work into dialogue with African American and Black Atlantic fictions. Ann Murphy's "Stranger in the Empire: Language and Identity in the 'Mother Country,'" offers a comparative analysis of interracial encounters in Levy's *Small Island* and James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" (1953). Murphy is particularly

attentive to the ways in which language often impedes rather than enables communication, bound up as it is with discourses of race. At the same time, she shows how Levy's acts of voicing and Baldwin's account of dislocation and loss serve to rework the crisis of belonging and contest conditions of estrangement. Maria Helena Lima's "A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative" examines the ways in which *The Long Song* responds to and reworks the conventions of the genre. She shows that Levy's use of metafictional techniques places emphasis on the narrative as an ongoing, incomplete process of gathering together and narrating various discourses and stories of slavery and empire. Once again, Levy's resistance to closure serves as a strategy of dislocation and relation, reworking relations to the wider world. Storytelling becomes part of an ongoing process for contesting power relations and reframing ideological horizons in the direction of equality and non-violence.

Finally, two creative writing submissions represent responses to Levy's fiction from other locations related to the history of empire. Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar's "Coloured" tells the story of a British Indian man who finds himself misidentified in the South during an era of Jim Crow laws. She says that her story was inspired by reading *Small Island* as part of a book club, attesting to the ways in which communities of readers are also potentially communities of writers, affiliated with Levy through literary and cultural relations. Racialised encounters also figure in Rhona Hammond's "Letter to Motherwell," a testimonial narrative based on her ten-month stay in South Africa. Hammond describes the text as "a personal memoir, a diary of impressions, and also an attempt to make sense of a wonderful but very challenging experience." Like Levy, she examines the way in which migration and relocation are linked to textual dislocations of identity and culture.

Reading Levy: Future Directions

As this issue aims to open the way for a wider investigation of Levy's dislocating narrative techniques and literary affiliations, I would like to close by considering possible lines of inquiry for the future, particularly in connection with Caribbean diasporic and Black Atlantic writing. The following is a list of possible directions, and is far from exhaustive:

- **Voicing and Language:** Levy's uses of colloquial, vernacular, standard, and creolised English suggest a rich and varied engagement with the language of empire and global English. How does her use of language relate to the mapping of identities, communities, and imaginaries in global contexts?
- **(Post)Colonial Encounters:** Levy's emphasis on gazing and moments of encounter could be said to rework the colonial narrative of transcultural contact, particularly the colonial gaze. What role do vision, gazing, and eye witnessing play in her work?
- **Affect & Intimacies:** Drawing on theories of affect, including trauma theory, critics often open up new ways of understanding how emotional and psychic states can provide alternative forms of knowledge and insight. How does Levy

rework discourses of identity and relation through representations of affect and affective narrative strategies?

- **Feminisms:** Levy's relation to African American women's writing, particularly through black feminism with its emphasis on intersectionalism, warrants close attention. More generally, how does Levy's work contribute to black British and Caribbean writing from a feminist literary perspective?
- **Remapping Genres:** Levy frequently tweaks and remaps genres, most notably the *Bildungsroman* and the neo-slave narrative. How might Levy's transnational reworking of genre serve to reframe an understanding of Caribbean, diasporic, Black Atlantic, and minority identities?
- **Dislocating Realisms:** The tension between realism and metafiction represents one of the most fascinating aspects of Levy's works. Where Zadie Smith opts for what she describes as "lyrical Realism,"⁴³ Levy's fictions seem closer to the ambivalent realisms of Jamaica Kincaid or Caryl Phillips. How might her approach to the quest for new forms of mimesis and uses of realism be described?
- **Plots:** Caryl Phillips often takes converging, diverging, or parallel lines of migration as the basis for plotting. Similarly, Levy's poetics rely heavily on multiple plot lines and overlapping narrative perspectives, which rarely cohere, but tend to offer an oscillating, unresolved representation of historical realities. How might such approaches to plot serve to reconstruct, and perhaps enrich, an understanding of history?
- **Spatio-Temporalities:** The contributors in this collection have paid close attention to the politics of place and spatio-temporal movements, especially through discussions of textual circulations and alternative ways of narrating history, such as through trauma narratives or acts of genealogical reclamation. In what other ways, does Levy reframe our understanding of local, national, or global imaginaries and experiences?
- **Humour:** Comic modes have been touched on in several of the papers. How might Levy's humour be related to the uses of comedy in contemporary postcolonial writing, notably in the work of Zadie Smith, Hari Kunzru, and Hanif Kureishi?

It is perhaps fitting that this introduction to a special issue on Andrea Levy should end with a series of questions and topics for further investigation, given that Levy is resistant to closure with the aim of perpetuating debate, dialogue, critique, and relational tendencies. This issue aims to open up new directions for research on this important contemporary author whose work persistently explores the meaning of empire and community, renews realist modes of writing, gives voice to (post)colonial subjects, and challenges prevailing relations to time and space through her expression of the transnational imaginary.

Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank Charlotte Beyer, Maria Helena Lima, Jago Morrison, and Anshuman Mondal for reading the introduction and providing feedback. I would also like to thank Gloria Maestriperi for her assistance with copy-editing. The flaws that remain are my own.
- 2 Here I am using the term a "politics of place" to refer to the ways in which hegemonic and other, often competing, constructions of place (including locales, regions, and nations) work to (re)define groups of people or imagined communities, construct boundaries, and negotiate who and what is inside/outside a given place.
- 3 For a discussion of spatial remapping and the reconstruction of identity, see Irene Pérez Fernández, "(Re)Mapping London: Gender and Racial Relations in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, *Interactions* "The Role of Female Voices in Constructing Fictional Maps of Contemporary Britain" 19.1-2 (2010): 25-40.
- 4 Maria Helena Lima, "Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*, Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 56-57.
- 5 Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009, 5.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 9 Édouard Glissant, "Errantry, Exile," *Poetics of Relation*. trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, 11.
- 10 Louise Bennett, "Colonisation in Reverse," *Writing Black Britain: 1948-1998*. James Procter, ed., Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, 17.
- 11 Andrea Levy, "This is my England," *The Guardian* 19 February 2000: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/feb/19/society1> [accessed 10 January 2012].
- 12 For more on this topic, see James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.
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The Familiar Made Strange: The Relationship between the Home and Identity in Andrea Levy's Fiction

Jo Pready

You will love again the stranger who was your self.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you [...]

—"Love After Love" by Derek Walcott¹

"All the familiarities made everything more strange."

—Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*²

Place is central to the structure and plot of any novel. David James observes that "every novel has to be set somewhere," adding that "[a]ll fictional worlds surely depend upon some indication of locality, named or anonymous."³ Furthermore, James argues that "characters' decisions and their pivotal consequences are often intensified by the demands and opportunities of where they take place."⁴ The "somewhere" that James describes is of prime importance to Levy's novels as the space of the home takes a particularly dominant role in informing the reader of the central concerns of the novel; identity, racial identity, the role of the family, work, education, and opportunity are all characterised through key events that are carefully placed or inscribed within the home, often through its everyday features. Levy's approach to space, as I will show, places emphasis on connections between the individual experiencing the space and the space itself, a phenomenon Julian Wolfreys has described as "the taking place of a process between the materiality of location and the immateriality of the perceiving mind."⁵ Specifically, I will focus on Andrea Levy's early novels, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994) and *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), which are united by style, content, formal characteristics, and an exploration of the spatial meaning of home.

My reading will focus on the negotiation of space, identity, and relationships in postcolonial Britain. Henri Lefebvre asserts that understanding a space means breaking down its "image of immobility," transforming it into a "nexus of in and out conduits."⁶ As will be seen, Levy's spaces are malleable and rely on subjective interpretations; a large part of this theory is influenced by Jonathan Raban's work on soft spaces,⁷ a philosophy which demonstrates how spaces become flexible when subjected to scrutiny or interpretation. Yet, in Levy's fiction there is never a continuous sense of fluidity because there are breakages and disruptions in thought and meaning throughout her texts. This rupture occurs in both the interiority of the characters, and within their perception of the space around them. Each of her novels are concerned with a journey, a process of self-discovery and a dialogue between different parts of the self. As Walcott's poem, "Love

after Love,” reflects there are moments when you can “greet yourself arriving,” “smile” and “peel your image from the mirror,” regaining ownership of a sense of self.⁸ Levy’s novels focus on moments of completion between self and space as well as within competing aspects of space: moments of ‘arrival’ are anticipated throughout her novels. Her fractured spatial networks might be read in dialogue with Edward Soja’s concept of “thirdspace”: “thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings.”⁹ Soja observes:

Thirthing introduces a critical ‘other-than’ choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness. That is to say, it does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different.¹⁰

This “three-way dialectic”¹¹ among space as lived, perceived, and conceived has become a prominent mode for trying to equate everyday experience with abstract theory, particularly in the advent of deconstructive techniques, such as Yi-fu Tuan’s “mediating third”¹² and Derrida’s “threshold.”¹³ As I will show, Levy models, deconstructs, and explores the meaning of space in her fiction. I begin my discussion by considering the differences between first-and second-generation migrant experiences and relations to space. Then, drawing on Jonathan Raban’s distinction between hard and soft spaces, I show how the second-generation migrant experience of home as a place of dislocation and belonging produces a fluid but nonetheless disjunctive sense of British spatiality.

Second-Generation Migrant Fiction: The Enigma of Belonging

Postcolonial narratives are often imbued with a need for homeliness that is challenged by a complex array of issues related to migration, roots, and belonging. Dislocation or estrangement from spaces frequently serves as a source of primordial anxiety:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.¹⁴

Within the home this “post-colonial crisis of identity” becomes condensed, and localised as the intimate space of the home becomes perhaps the prime locator for the ‘recovery’ of self in postcolonial literature.¹⁵ Home is a contested space in which multi-faceted discourses of race, gender, class, and nationhood converge and infiltrate the framework of the visible structure. The immediacy of a dialogic relationship between a character and surrounding space brings issues of identity to the fore as if the space itself is a mirror as well as an arbitrator of feelings and desires. Notably, James Procter and John McLeod explore the meaning of domestic space in post-Windrush fiction. In *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, McLeod focuses his discussion on sites and experiences of community as resistance to alienation and the changing milieu of city living. He offers a critical analysis of the ways in which first-generation migrants have represented their

experience of a “new place, which, by their very presence, has itself been made new.”¹⁶ Proctor confronts traditional locations of black post-war writing—basements, bedsits, streets, cafés, and suburbs—and analyses these material sites in relation to the imaginative geography both circumscribed within them and written across them. Like McLeod, Proctor examines the transient nature of spatial relationships and situates the literary location in relation to the reality of the shifting British landscape.

I aim to extend this kind of spatial analysis by examining the relationship in terms of the formation of self and a sense of interiority in the lives of second-generation, female migrants to Britain. Levy turns to the *Bildungsroman* and renegotiates a traditional coming-of-age novel, with its psychological and moral shaping of the individual, alongside a kind of spatial initiation, which entails explorations of relations among inside/outside spaces, relations to family, and (re)constructions of self. Levy’s two novels, *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Never far from Nowhere*, employ a teenage voice, either in the present moment or through a nostalgic return, to prioritise issues of ‘home’ and belonging through an innocent sense of awakening to the adult, political world. This private account of development is made parabolic as Levy links individual experiences to a wider depiction of the communality of racial identity.

Notions of nationhood, belonging, and family ideals—embodied by the ‘Mother Country’—are thematised in the war-time narrative of Levy’s *Small Island* (2004). At the same time, Levy’s novel calls attention to the realities of a place (Britain) that is much less accommodating or nurturing than has been imagined by a whole group of Caribbean migrants. These narrative preoccupations are perhaps somewhat diluted in her earlier novels, which focus on the lives of the children of Windrush migrants: young British citizens trying to making sense of their own country, their parents’ beliefs, constructions of race, and opportunities in a country where they belong even if they do not always feel a sense of belonging. For these children, who are born and come of age in Britain, the dislocations of empire are played out anew within contemporary Britain. The result is a more intimate scrutiny of home and a sense of belonging in *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Never Far from Nowhere*, compared to the grand-scale narrative of *Small Island*. John Clement Ball’s conclusion that “the city’s manifold appearances in postcolonial literature reflect the varied experiences of colonised peoples”¹⁷ is true of all of Levy’s novels. Just as the “imaginably distant”¹⁸ realm of the ‘Mother Country’ is idealised in *Small Island*, the “imaginably distant” better life in England is of importance to the protagonists of both *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Never Far from Nowhere*.

The intimacy of Derek Walcott’s poem, used as an epigraph to this paper, places the individual at a moment of ‘arriving’ in a space in which they have felt apprehension, but which now represents a complicitous relationship between different parts of the self. Therefore, the moment of arrival—either literally within a space or metaphorically as a moment of realisation—is crucial to the stability of identity. Levy’s concentrated analyses of the home space through moments of arrival or realisation, or conversely, ambiguity or disruption, are driven by an awareness of the importance of self, and an identification with the ‘other’ self as Walcott highlights: a recognition of the distance between who you are and what you want to be.

In many postcolonial British novels, the imagined distance between people and places becomes a tangible and concrete barrier to harmony. For instance, in his reading of the spaces of Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe, and M. G. Vassanji, John Clement Ball observes that generality becomes a discernible reality:

the London of such texts is largely unseen: known indirectly and by reputation. A distant, mythologized object of dream and desire, a signifier of Britain's claims to political authority, cultural quality and centrality *vis-à-vis* the colonial periphery, it is constructed from impressionistic, repetitiously circulated images.¹⁹

The locations in Levy's first two novels testify to this; the majority of events take place inside the home or on the stairwells and streets within close proximity. The other spaces described—schools, pubs, shops—are generalised and become merely names of spaces rather than three-dimensional conceived spaces. Therefore, these spaces become displaced and a true conception or relationship with those spaces becomes improbable. It is not London that is being encountered, but the idea of London. Levy focuses on the intimate details of spaces, down to the position of furniture, the clothes that are worn on a daily basis and the goods that are bought from particular shops, and yet this kind of detail is displaced by its simplicity and universality. The question of London remains out of reach because of this generalising tendency: the characters are at once entangled in the politics of the home and divorced from the wider space outside. In the space of the council house and its perimeters, questions of self develop, but they lack context in the outside world. Therefore, Levy's characters fail to understand why they fail to feel settled or reach the sense of completion suggested by Walcott's discourse of 'arrival.' Maria Helena Lima offers a useful perspective on this question of belonging and domestic spaces: "As in other Caribbean novels, the house stands for the nation, the migrant is only superficially, and seemingly temporarily, allowed to occupy thanks to the 'charity' of the mother country."²⁰ The temporary and superficial nature of council housing is clearly linked to postcolonial concerns on a wider scale. Yet, as I will show, Levy's layered narratives suggest something more ambiguous: a postcolonial reading that simply equates the house with the nation is not the only available reading.

Navigating a Place in Britain: The Space of Home

John Agnew's analysis of people-place relations calls attention to a power within space, a geographical consciousness that arises through subjectivity. His three-tiered approach considers the location or situation of a building—the street, district, or country is of importance here (and of course to the post-colonial novel, the consideration of nation, immigration, and roots)—the physical attributes of the space itself, and the imagined and affective relations to space. Agnew observes that a space must have a "sense of place": the physical connection or attachment that *people* have with a place or the "subjective orientation that can be engendered by living in a place."²¹ In Levy's novels, as I will demonstrate, the sense of 'living' in an ambivalent space, which entails both a sense of attachment as well as a sense of dislocation or detachment, becomes central to *how* the characters act.

Consistently Levy presents and deconstructs images of the home-space in her novels. There are two ways this disruption occurs: firstly, the role of the home is disrupted by philosophical questions, the nature of which often centre around a real/imaginary dichotomy, or, conversely, memory and nostalgia for other spaces that have been left behind. Secondly, a sense of home is disrupted by other spaces with which the characters come into contact, spaces such as streets, pubs, dole offices, hospitals, shops, hairdressers, youth clubs, schools, and other homes. Spaces outside the home are often scenes of extreme violence: Carl and the rest of the family are bullied in the yard outside their house in *Every Light in the House Burnin'*; Olive is sexually abused by a man she meets in a bar while Gary gets a glass smashed in his face in a pub in *Never far from Nowhere*; Faith witnesses racial violence towards a shop owner in *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). Yet, despite this focus on fear outside the space of the home, the interior of the homes never seem to offer the protection they superficially exude. Olive sums this up when her mother fears for her safety outside the home: "she worried about me she said, it wasn't safe outside. Well it wasn't safe inside either."²² The lack of safety provided by all familiar spaces, highlighted by this juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces, creates a porous network of spaces that equates to a constant feeling of escape and return making attachment almost impossible.

Never Far from Nowhere has a unique narrative framework, juxtaposing the viewpoints of Vivien and her sister, Olive. The references to home begin on the first page with the description of the "marks on the door-frame that led into the living room."²³ These marks are classified simply as "Olive's and mine," and this is in essence what the story is about: Olive and Vivien and the home in which they grew up. These marks on the door introduce a simple but effective method for establishing a sense of place, a sense of belonging, and nostalgia. The sisters' lives and development are visually coded by these marks that stay forever and attach them to the space.²⁴ The focus on development—initiated by the description of the marks on the wall—is continued by the almost rhythmic fluctuations between the two first-person narrators who offer a kind of split subjectivity. The stories are undeniably united, but show subtle and interesting differences. The sisters go to the same school, have the same parents, and live in the same space, but their very distinctive and often contrasting experiences create a dramatic feeling of separation between the girls.

Shared spaces are experienced differently in these twinned tales of the coming-of-age experience in Britain. Vivien is in awe of her older sister, but their relationship fails to generate a real sense of closeness because of their age difference: "three years meant Olive in the juniors with me one of the baby new girls in the infants. Her at secondary school in a smart new uniform, me in the juniors with scuffed knees and marbles."²⁵ In tracing their development at different stages, the novel has an almost lilting effect due to the constantly switching narrative point-of-view from one sister to the other. Significantly, Vivien's feelings towards her older, taller, darker sister are set against Olive's feelings of inadequacy due to Vivien's apparently easier assimilation into the (racist) school environment: "me and Vivien went to the same school. But I always thought of it as Vivien's school, not mine, even though I went there long before she did."²⁶ Olive offers a

sustained comparison of her experiences of suffering and her sister Vivien's opportunities in life. As a result, the sisters' relations to place and space are dramatically different in later life: while Vivien moves to a picturesque and fairly luxurious student house, Olive, who becomes pregnant as a teen, comes to live in a council house. A deep sense of fatalism, connected to racism and racial hierarchies in Britain, pervades these dramatically different lives that begin from the same space, the same parents, and the same roots. Levy highlights the interplay between race/class in Britain through the contrasting life stories and spatial experiences of lighter and darker skinned sisters.

The entanglements of race, class, and a sense of spatial belonging culminate at the end of *Never Far From Nowhere* as both sisters, who are becoming distanced from one another, partly on account of their diverging social positions and prospects, return to the house in which they grew up. During this meeting, it becomes apparent that significant issues concerning home and belonging remain problematic and largely unresolved. Olive is considering a move back to Jamaica, a place in which she feels she may belong even though she has never before visited it. Vivien's feelings about space are equally conflicted. She no longer feels at home in the space of the council flat where she grew up: "I remembered moving in [to the council flat], and how I thought it was like living at a holiday camp. But now the camp was filthy, with rubbish blowing along every balcony."²⁷ The university has also failed to provide her with a sense of home and belonging. When she returns 'home,' hoping for a little stability despite her sense of alienation from this space, she immediately feels "nervous. Jumpy. Like a lost tourist."²⁸ Thus, despite their very different experiences and prospects for life in Britain, the sisters share a sense of dislocation and unbelonging.

Levy shows us that the impossibility of restoring the idealised image of local or intimate spaces causes both sisters to question their current position. When the question of Jamaica arises in *Never Far from Nowhere*, their mother asks Vivien to tell Olive where it is that they all belong. Her response is dramatically timorous:

I looked at the old photograph of Olive and me on the wall. Two little girls with identical yellow bows in our hair and happy, smiling chubby cheeks. But now Olive's arms were folded on the world. She was angry with everything, with everyone. And I had grown too big for our council flat, but not sure where else I would fit. Where did we belong? I answered my mum the only way I could. I said, 'I don't know.'²⁹

This extract highlights many of the interrelated themes of the novel. The photograph elicits a sense of nostalgia for a more innocent sense of unity, which runs counter to the views of these two characters in the present moment. In the photo, the similarity between the girls as young children is visually apparent, suggesting a common identity, but this image is undermined by the readily apparent differences between the sisters in the present: the abrasive quality of Olive's opinions about the world as a young adult and Vivien's anxieties about her failure to assimilate. Ironically, Vivien's feelings of inadequacy serve to alleviate some of the tension between the sisters as Vivien observes: "Olive smiled at me for the first time."³⁰ However, her mother has a very different reaction: "my mum's face drained of expression as she said, 'Oh Vivien,' and the

disappointment in her sigh drifted round and round the room.”³¹ The room becomes magnified as a response to these feelings and the words “I don’t know” are left echoing in the vacuum of emptiness created by this admission. The fatalism of the repetitious phrase, circulating round and round the room, leaves the novel hanging in a moment of suspension. The representation of space—through the blank emptiness of the room—reflects Vivien’s and Olive’s misgivings about home and a sense of belonging. The apparently simple (some might say simplistic) style of Levy’s narrative gives ways to a richly layered array of responses to space and its meanings: to home and a sense of (un)belonging.

The Dislocations of Family and Home

On a more functional level, the home is a space where mundane tasks take place and where the quotidian activities of eating, sleeping, and watching television take on more significant proportions due to the implication of philosophical questions about identity, race, adulthood, family, and relationships. In terms of narrative structure, *Every Light in the House Burnin’* is divided into simple vignettes or discrete moments; every sub-heading is given a minimalist title that begins with a section on Angela’s family: “my dad,” “my mum,” “my brother,” “my sister,” and even “the cat.” She then moves onto certain aspects of the house, either physical or material aspects, or titles that relate to memorable events, such as “the telly,” “the dream,” “the meatballs,” “the yard,” and “the holiday,” to offer a few examples. Through this formal technique Levy manages to separate and categorise but also simultaneously draw together different aspects of Angela’s life, including her home, its material features, her family, and their relationships. Her memory flits between spatial features and personal relationships. The titles are stagnant, everyday features that offer a framework for or outline of Angela’s life. This outline is filled in and complicated through the novel’s interior stories, which weave together to create an impressionistic view of a child coming to terms with her identity.

Levy’s spatial descriptions are contingent on action and focal details. She pays more attention to the interior details of spaces, which she fills with surplus features. The interiors afford the opportunity for personalised, familial, and subjective accounts while the exterior is a common, institutionalised, state-owned space, which serves to repeat the dynamic of domestic order. We do gain insight into what the houses look like from the outside, but these descriptions are often repetitive and featureless as they detail the rows of tall, angular buildings, the “concrete”³² worlds that make up the landscape of the estate. In Levy’s novels, the attention to furniture, and specifically the over-accumulation of furniture, is managed in a simplistic fashion, but her repeated attention to these details, reveals an underlying motif. For Sara Upstone, this motif consigns importance to colonial rule: she argues that attention to orderliness within the home represents an artificial attempt at gaining independence that merely re-aligns power with colonial ideologies as “domestic order was, in the colonies themselves, rigorously enforced” due to a “desire to present a vision of natural order,”³³ and instalment of moral virtue. Lives in these homes are not repetitious narratives of past histories. Instead, as Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti have pointed out in another context, I view the repetition of mundane tasks

associated with domestication in Levy's early novels as more than a mere ritual. For Levy, the systematic ordering of home becomes a way of self discovery, a means of evaluating or controlling psychological disturbances.³⁴

Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guittari, Upstone refers to this process of spatial negotiation as one of "deterritorialisation" or "post-space" as it signifies "the removal of fixed boundaries and the renewal of the abstract."³⁵ In *Every Light in the House Burnin'* an overpowering sense of claustrophobia occludes the attention to how the space is filled:

Our front room was packed with furniture. Every bit of wall space had something pressed against it. There was a green three-piece suite with a long settee that could double up as a bed should we have any guests—which we never did [...] There was also a dining-table with a flap that could be put up, if we ever felt like eating at it—but we never did.³⁶

Their inability to use the furniture for the correct purpose creates an overwhelming impression of dissatisfaction and the overabundance visualises this form of deterritorialisation. This is evident in Angela's discussion of the repeated possibilities of moving that she remembers through her life:

Moving had been something that we were always going to do. When I was little, we were moving to America [...] But we didn't go. When I was in my teens we were moving to Harlow, to start a new life in a new town. But we didn't go. We stayed in the flat in Highbury, settled but waiting to move.³⁷

The repetition here is inherent to this sense of futility. In the first example, the repeated statement, "but we never did," is replaced here by "but we didn't go." Both instances represent this entrenched fatalistic tone that saturates the novel. The statement "settled but waiting to move" could be an epigram for all of Levy's characters, particularly Faith's parents and their obsession with collecting empty boxes in *Fruit of the Lemon*.

Concepts and issues concerning both space and identity are not neatly drawn or adequately fused together. Instead they present a complex assortment of competing tensions which allows deconstruction to occur. When Angela introduces her father in *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, the descriptions are limited by the child's lack of knowledge, which creates a sense of spatial distancing. The father's physical persona, work life and upbringing are all distant from Angela's view of herself. We are told, simply, "my dad was a man;"³⁸ his work life remains secretive: "I couldn't tell you what he did or who he did it with."³⁹ She describes his move to London from Jamaica, but can offer no other information about his early life as "he seemed only to exist in one plane of time—the present."⁴⁰ Despite this one-sided approach to his character, framed by the shared post-migration life of the father and child, Angela goes on to describe different aspects of his personality: his work, the hours he spends in front of the mirror, the time he spends lying on the couch and the bloated, terminally ill man she comes to know at the end. All of these aspects are drawn together to create a composite human being, one that she can never know entirely: "my dad was all these men and many more."⁴¹ For bell hooks, and the postcolonial novel in general, this attention to a singularity of life is a way of dealing

with “the multiple voices within;” it is “not just who I am in the present, but where I am coming from.”⁴² Maria Helena Lima makes a similar point when she states: “it seems as if a return to the past is required for her protagonists to be able to move on.”⁴³ Angela requires an understanding of her father’s past to be able to understand her own identity. Therefore, Angela’s father’s dismissal of his past is a blockage to her own identity. Fundamentally, the narrative dramatises the need to look beyond the present time, and move outside of the present space, to reclaim a more expansive story concerning the wider family legacy. The child lives in symbolic exile as issues concerning race, migration and assimilation become imbued into readings of second-generation identity, despite their lack of first-hand experience and the disjunction that is created by not fully experiencing parents’ changing relations to place.

Lima observes that it is unusual for a female Caribbean novelist to focus on father/daughter relationships as the “central presence” is usually the mother or “mother substitute” as part of the Jamaica/mother country allegory previously mentioned.⁴⁴ In distancing herself from the trope of mother-daughter relations, Levy raises new questions about the relationship between space and postcolonial identity. Angela’s need to understand her father takes the form of a quest throughout this postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, which shifts from the maternal space of empire to the masculine space of arrival and hope so often associated with Windrush migration and the prospects of settling into Britain. Initially, she represents her father as an enigmatic and secretive adult, but the later descriptions focus on his childlike status as a result of his illness. At the end her father just becomes a “pathetic man in a red dressing-gown sitting in a chair in the corner.”⁴⁵ He is reduced to a fixed position in the home. While Angela’s father exists in one plane, her sisters “lived in a world of their own, which was their bedroom.”⁴⁶ The small, enclosed space of the council flat is metaphorically widened by their lack of emotional understanding. The sisters’ bedroom is impossible to penetrate as is their father’s past. The brother’s reaction to life in this space is to disappear or escape. He exists in a space outside the home, a space that Angela describes as “unspecified.”⁴⁷ When asked where he is going his reply is often simply “anywhere.”⁴⁸ Again, postcolonial concerns are filtered down through the generations, and those primarily male migrants of the Windrush generation are now facing a loss of vitality through the disappointments experienced in the new life, whilst those related to the first-generation migrants experience a more diluted version of the same dispiritedness. The father and his children encounter feelings of loss, separation and a genuine lack of purpose resulting in either fixed or unchangeable uses of space or vague ‘unspecified’ and ultimately forlorn spatial arrangements.

Journeys and trips replay the spatial dynamic of the Windrush journey and the fated hopes of the disappointed traveller to the new country. Fundamentally the home is a place of safety and permanency, whilst the holiday is a moment of extravagance and excitement; here, in Levy’s novels the divide between home and holiday is not so easily configured and disappointment occasionally occurs whilst away. During Angela’s first trip to Pontin’s at the age of eleven, each member of the family asks for a different item of food, from “fish and chips” to “cake and cola.” However, they receive bread rolls, a

mundane staple food, and feel let down: “it was us and him.”⁴⁹ The bread rolls come to signify misplaced feelings through a kind of ritual that centres on food; in a similar method to the over-abundance of furniture these everyday articles represent misguided desires and needs that cannot be met. The father, as the care-giver and also the significant figure who controls the experience of the holiday, disappoints the children and fails to meet their expectations, distancing them from him in the same way as he was distanced from the ‘Mother Country.’

When they reach the chalet the tone changes to one of excitement due to the luxury of the “palace”⁵⁰ in which they are staying. Levy sets up the space as one of grandiose proportions, and yet there is a real melancholia attached to this excitement, again due to the simplicity of the materials described. This is elucidated by the image of the whole family clustered in the doorway of her brother’s room while they “wondered at the sight”⁵¹ of the wash-basin in his room. This bathroom “was just a room dedicated to your cleanliness.”⁵² The pure functionality of the room and the lack of unnecessary detail is what elicits pleasure: there were “no old TVs waiting for repair” and no “crumbs in the cutlery tray.”⁵³ Levy brings this narrative focus to a climax with the revelation that “our excitement at our new temporary home was hard to contain.”⁵⁴ The fact that the holiday home is the epitome of temporary living aligns it with life in a council house, both of which exudes transience and highlights a certain lack within their real life environment and their unsettled existence at ‘home’ in Britain.

The Dream Home and the Space of Dreams

The most pertinent excursion the family goes on is their routine ‘dream’ trips to the Ideal Home Exhibition. This section of the narrative is highly poetic, more sensory, and less staccato than any other section of the novel. The detail Angela gives to the journey—the tube, the connections, the bustling crowds, and shuffling queue—gives this section of the narrative a faster pace than the rest of the novel. The emphasis on the journey to a new place heightens the sense that the visit to the Home Exhibition represents an idealised, dream-like experience that is somehow separate from the real world of lived spatial relations. Each family member has their own specific sections of interest: “six individuals all wanted to see different things, have different experiences.”⁵⁵ Angela likes the bendy toys; her brother likes models and kits; her mum likes the pressure cookers; her dad likes the gadgets. Each interest responds finitely to their age, sex, personality, and domestication rituals. Their experiences and interests are united, however, when it comes to the ‘village’ of ideal houses. Because “there were actual houses built there”⁵⁶ the physical structure causes the dream to become more like reality. As Rob Shields elucidates, “place myths are always subject to being amended by the uneven experience of reality.”⁵⁷ The same might be said for the construction of identity, which undergoes a transformation through shifting and uneven relations to place and space. This shifting sensibility is especially evident as the dream tone abruptly changes reverts to a realistic mode, characterised by anxieties and tensions about spatial relations, when the family returns home:

[...] then we went into our flats. Red brick with long open balconies built round a grey, concreted yard [...] we went inside our little council home, choked full of furniture [...] in need of decoration, in need of being ten times the size, in need of a staircase. And the row started again.⁵⁸

The focus on temporality—the reversion to family rows—foregrounds the shift from the promise of life in a better home to the realities of life in the council home. Through shifting spatial relations—the depiction of hopes, desires, and disappointments—Levy offers a rich depiction of how family life and character are shaped through the disconnections between people, place, time, and reality.

Moreover, this trip is linked to a discussion of a real space that approximates a domestic ideal when Angela visits her teacher's house. She offers the following account of the journey:

I watched the road where I live go by. I watched the boarded-up shops and old houses with peeling paint and rubbish piled high in the front garden go by. Finsbury Park. Then the landscape began to change.⁵⁹

The total separation between the houses of her estate and the leafy middle-class area she is entering is represented by the tone change and the fact that “Finsbury Park” is set apart from the rest of the description. Finsbury Park, and therefore the space that she knows, is totally disengaged from the space she is encountering and becomes categorised as ‘other’ to the space she is visiting. When she goes into the house, “I stepped into another world. A world from the Ideal Home Exhibition, only someone's real world, not make-believe.”⁶⁰ The space widens once again and Angela moves through the house describing “another room” and then “another room.”⁶¹ Despite the obvious luxury of the space there is also a return to normality as she describes plants, cushions and magazines. Angela has had no access to this world before, for her it only exists in dreams. When visiting her teacher's house she realises how normal this existence is for *other* people and this realization securely places her within her own category as she becomes even more firmly inscribed in her marginalised position within “Finsbury Park.”

Olive's dream section in *Never Far from Nowhere* also explores the relationship between lived (realistic), conceived (ideal), and dreamed (perceived) spaces. Olive dreams of a painting, an unfinished work which becomes a metaphor for her own development. She cannot remember what it is she is painting, but it is something just out of reach, “just out of the window.”⁶² The moment of completion is not available to her and as she lifts the brush to the canvas her development reverts and the paint lifts off “until it was beginning to look unfinished again.”⁶³ She describes her dreams as moments not of fear but frustration, repetitive dreams of “trying to get somewhere but I can't get my clothes on – everything's too tight or falling to bits. Or the bus breaks down. Or I end up in the wrong country.”⁶⁴ Here we gain a highly intimate insight into Olive's personality, which is often opaquely rendered or difficult to decipher despite her first-person narration. Her fears or frustrations reflect anxieties about her self-image, a sense of belonging, feelings about nationhood, and the possibilities for fulfillment and achievement. Just as Angela's dream-like account of the ideal home tells us something about her aspirations, which are far removed from the concrete details and realities of the council house existence, Olive's

dream of a space that she cannot fully render suggests the disconnect between ideal and real spaces of belonging. Both dreams about a lack of fulfillment in domestic space attest to anxieties about the a sense of belonging, ranging from the local neighbourhood space of Finsbury Park to the country itself, namely Britain.

Alongside the repetitive and comparative descriptions of the spaces encountered, there are abrupt alterations in thoughts and feelings which create ruptures in developmental progress. In *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, Angela's father changes throughout his life and descends into a childlike state of dependency due to his illness. Paradoxically, in *Never Far from Nowhere*, Olive's ascent into womanhood—her motherhood and marriage—is linked to a reversion to childhood. Both of these situations highlight the quest for a nurturing space. Olive watches her daughter, Amy, sleeping peacefully in her cot and observes "I wished it was me in there."⁶⁵ Olive's consideration of marriage at a young age, on account of her pregnancy, causes Vivien to feel disengaged from her sister; it was "as if she was going to be born again in a different form."⁶⁶ The difference between the sisters and their life choices is apparent and it is Olive who seems to be making the most powerful step. However, it is Olive who in fact becomes disconnected: "I used to watch them. I'd sit on the settee feeding Amy and see them running in front of me, speeded up, like they were in one of those silent films."⁶⁷ These dramatic life choices, inscribed upon the spaces which contain them, serve to reinforce ideological issues concerning acceptance, separation, loneliness, and fear inherent to this second-generation community. Another dream sequence appears soon after; instead of frustration, the dream now represents complete desolation:

I dreamt I was a jelly baby. A little black sugar-coated jelly baby that had been thrown away. I wasn't in a packet, I was on my own on the floor—on the pavement. And I couldn't move my arms and legs because jelly babies can't, they're solid. People started walking down the pavement, and because I was only the size of a jelly baby, their feet were enormous.⁶⁸

There is none of the excitement or hope of the first dream. The displacement of herself into a child's sweet corroborates this idea of her reversion into a child-like state, as does the enormous feet of the people who constantly pass her by. In relation to spatial theory, the balance between the hard and soft spaces and the connection between stability and fluidity is represented here by her uneasiness due to her inability to move. Lefebvre's claim that fluidity is necessary to assimilation is responded to by Olive's increasing feeling of immobility and peril. Olive has always required stability: a husband, nice home, and enough money are all that she requires, but this stability has always evaded her. Now she is totally "solid" and the futility of her situation reaches us in the potency of this one word as well as her total disconnection of what she has from what she always hoped for: a nurturing space.

Dwelling Places Beyond the Home

Thwarted hopes and desires are highlighted further by the question of education. The focus on education and opportunity ranges from Vivien's decision to go to art college to

Angela's mum's need to read and write for her degree whilst sitting on her bed because "the room was too small to hold a desk and a chair."⁶⁹ The spaces and activities of education are placed in direct opposition to the central image of the home. When Vivien leaves for college she becomes totally disengaged from her present life in her mother's home: "I kept looking round my bedroom waiting to feel nostalgic, waiting to remember all the fun times. But none came. I was sure I must have smiled and laughed and sang in there, but I couldn't remember."⁷⁰ Her transition to university fails to equate with what she has already experienced in her home; the two parts of her life become compartmentalised, producing a blockage in her identity, which is both represented by and experienced through spatial dislocation. Ultimately, this is the reason for her failure to find support in her family home when she returns at the end. Vivien's new flatmate, Victoria, is negative about the "dump" they will be living in while Vivien is astounded by the beauty of the place.⁷¹ Again the description of the interior focuses on small, functional details, which attest to a very new and different kind of life for Vivien: the lamp on the table "that you could push up and down to the right height,"⁷² the writing desk with "lots of little drawers"⁷³ and the "window-seat with a pink cushion."⁷⁴ Her appreciation of this space causes her to reject her old way of life and relationships including her boyfriend, Eddie, who fails to fit into the context of her new environment. This problem faces her immediately as there is a letter waiting for her the first time she arrives at her new home. Her reaction is clear and instantaneous: "it was nice of him to write, I wanted to think. I love him, I wanted to think. I'm looking forward to seeing him, I wanted to think."⁷⁵ Her immediate recognition that this response is merely what she *wanted* to think rather than what she *actually* thinks clarifies this rejection of her old life. The changes in her spatial dynamics here clearly reflect and parallel the changes in circumstances and identity and serve to make the break more complete.

Other characters face similar concerns when they move onto new stages of their lives, which are typically embodied by changing relations to place and space. When Faith's brother visits her in *Fruit of the Lemon* she sees him through the eyes of her new housemates: "I saw him as a stranger" as he was "out of context."⁷⁶ Specific times in these characters lives are compartmentalised and when traces of previous spaces infiltrate the present moment a process of disengagement occurs. For Levy, identity is fractured and spaces become a way of allocating desires, wishes and feelings through a process of development throughout space. Engaging questions about life, family, education and illness are assigned to specific spaces: the hospital, the school, the workplace and spaces of leisure draw together these fundamental questions which Levy manages to highlight through a consistent return to everyday features. The details highlight the rudimentary nature of existing in a space and how interpretations of spaces and identities are constantly evolving, fluid or elastic and in a continual process of breaking down boundaries, considering 'other-than' opportunities until nothing is "settled but waiting to move."

In summary, there is a dialectical relationship between the space and the individual in Levy's early novels. According to Relph, "[a]ll places and landscapes are individually experienced, for we alone see them through the lens of our attitudes, experiences and

intentions, and from our unique circumstances.”⁷⁷ Levy’s narratives depict the unique circumstances of each individual, creating a highly personal account of what *living* in a space actually entails. Idealization of space versus the reality of existing is constantly in conflict. As Atkinson et al. have argued, “it is important to move beyond the idealisation of an objective analysis of space to strive for a more human-centred and empathetic understanding of the lived experience of place.”⁷⁸ Levy’s characters constantly strive for human-centred relations to space, but the tensions between real and ideal spaces ultimately lead individuals to experience a sense of spatial disruption as well as to disengage from both the spaces and the people around them. *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Never Far from Nowhere* develop through layered narrative techniques, which constantly switch between time and place, memory and future hopes, until each character is unsure of who they are and where they belong. Simple but highly effective formal methods, such as divided first-person narration and unconnected chapters, join together different characters in space and time. However, these unifying textual strategies are disconnected from the content of the stories, which represent characters who experience fragmented, disconnected relations and responses to common spaces.

As Sara Upstone observes, “to consider postcolonial spatiality is not to reject postcolonial history.”⁷⁹ Levy’s work highlights the disruption of identity, whether that is through the displacement of young, second-generation immigrants or through the representation of their divided relations to space, which often leave them disconnected from their habitats. Identity is a process and is constantly *in process*. At the end of *Never Far from Nowhere*, we leave Vivien on a bus returning to university, an image of circularity that sees her constantly in a state of transition. She is left with feelings of loss, but she has gained a new understanding that a completely stable identity is not possible: “true permanence is never static, it is an eternal process of becoming, susceptible to dialogue with otherness.”⁸⁰ This ‘dialogue’ between each character and potential sources of conflict is enriched by the manipulations between space and identity in Levy’s novels.

Endnotes

- 1 Derek Walcott, "Love after Love," *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992, 328.
- 2 Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*. London: Review, 2000, 101.
- 3 David James, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space: Style, Landscape, Perception*. London: Continuum, 2008, 1.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London: Inventions of the City*, vol. III. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 43.
- 6 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 1974, 93.
- 7 Jonathan Raban, *Soft City*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2008.
- 8 Walcott, *Collected Poems*, 328.
- 9 Edward Soja, *Thirdspace*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 1996, 2.
- 10 Ibid., 61.
- 11 David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley and Neil Washbourne, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, 42.
- 12 Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974, 18.
- 13 John Knechtel, *Alphabet City 6: Open City*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998, 12.
- 14 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 2002, 8.
- 15 The discussion of space in postcolonial literature diverges into discrete and tangential enquiries. For example, feminist appraisals of postcolonial spaces have been studied by: Hena Zafar Ahmed, *Postnational Feminism in Third World Women's Literature*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998; Himani Bannerji, ed., *Returning the Gaze*. Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993; and Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds., *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: Guilford Press, 1994. Spaces are discussed as an allegory to nation in Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 and Gerhard Stilz, ed., *Territorial Terrors: Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing*. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2007. Other writers consider interior spaces in relation to internal psychologies, diversifying the work of Gaston Bachelard. This is particularly resonant in Homi K. Bhabha, "The World and the Home," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ellen Shohat, eds., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 and G. B. Nalbantoglu and C. T. Wong, eds., *Postcolonial Space(s)*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997. There is a large body of work which circumscribes nationhood and race within a politics of both the home and the body as well as considers the body as a site of resistance: Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006 and Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.
- 16 John McLeod, *Postcolonial London, Rewriting the Metropolis*. Oxford: Routledge, 2004, 3.
- 17 John Clement Ball, *Imagining London—Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 5.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 6.

- 20 Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black, Write British. From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*. Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib Publications Limited, 2005, 60.
- 21 John Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987, 6.
- 22 Andrea Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004, 39. Sara Upstone equates this lack of safety to a colonial bypass where the "home forms a microcosm of colonial tabulation of space. Acquisition of territory, and its association with violence, is replaced with the establishment of home, and—rather than violence—as association with the natural and timeless processes of settlement" (Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009, 117).
- 23 Ibid., 1.
- 24 Elsewhere, Levy presents a dichotomous representation of space in Britain for migrants and their children who are torn between feelings of belonging and an entrenched feeling of transience. For example, in *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, a novel which continuously returns to the council home in which the family lives for twenty-one years, we witness a repetitive thread concerning the desire to move. Sadly, this does not occur until the late stages of the novel when, after the children have grown up and moved on, the parents are facing old age and terminal illness. Ironically, the attainment of a desired space, a family home, is no longer necessary because the children have already moved out of the home.
- 25 Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere*, 1.
- 26 Ibid., 24.
- 27 Ibid., 226.
- 28 Ibid., 274.
- 29 Ibid., 281.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid., 3.
- 33 Upstone, *Spatial Politics*, 117.
- 34 Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, "Reading the House: A Literary Perspective," *Signs* 27:3 (Spring 2002): 837-846.
- 35 Upstone, *Spatial Politics*, 131.
- 36 Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 1995, 30.
- 37 Ibid., 217.
- 38 Ibid., 2.
- 39 Ibid., 3.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., 4.
- 42 bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as Space of Radical Openness," *Framework* 36 (1989): 16.
- 43 Lima, "Pivoting the centre," 57.
- 44 Ibid., 60.
- 45 Levy, *Every Light*, 199.
- 46 Ibid., 20.
- 47 Ibid., 30.
- 48 Ibid.

- 49 Ibid., 1.
- 50 Ibid., 70.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., 39.
- 56 Ibid., 41.
- 57 Rob Shields, *Place of the Margin: Alternate Geographies of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1991, 32.
- 58 Levy, *Every Light*, 42.
- 59 Ibid., 184.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid., 185.
- 62 Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere*, 6.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid., 112.
- 66 Ibid., 77.
- 67 Ibid., 101.
- 68 Ibid., 220.
- 69 Levy, *Every Light*, 8.
- 70 Levy, *Never Far from Nowhere*, 237.
- 71 Ibid., 252
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid., 253.
- 76 Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*, 53.
- 77 Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Ltd., 1976, 36.
- 78 Atkinson et al., eds., *Cultural Geography*, 42.
- 79 Ibid., 3.
- 80 Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford, "Fossil and Psyche," *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., London and New York: Routledge, 1995, 188.

Crossing Over: Postmemory and the Postcolonial Imaginary in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and *Fruit of the Lemon*

Claudia Marquis

We live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.

—Ben Okri¹

Drawing on the work of Andrea Levy and George Lamming, this essay explores what colonial inheritance means for an Anglophone, postcolonial generation of subjects whose history and identity are complicated by the colonised subject's passage 'home' to 'Mother England.' The "crossing over" of my title refers to the migratory subjectivity formed in crossing and recrossing the Atlantic through real and imagined travels. In particular, I situate Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) and *Small Island* (2004) as responses to writing by the Windrush generation of migrants, which includes such notable authors as Sam Selvon and Lamming whose texts depict the experience of arrival and settling into Britain. I argue that we need to consider the importance of imagined returns performed by these Windrush authors, particularly Lamming, in order to grasp the wider re-envisioning of black British and Caribbean identity formation. As a means to interrogate the notion of Caribbean (diasporic) textual returns and crossings, I refer specifically to Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), which purposefully revisits pre-independence Barbados, in particular the riots of 1937 and their consequences, to reclaim a history from below. Like Lamming, whose narrative brings together various subjective perspectives, Andrea Levy, a generation later, brings several modes of narrative into play and offers a number of takes on history. Levy's writing, as I will demonstrate, suggests a radical un-making of history or subversive representation of the past that, according to Linda Hutcheon, is characteristic of postmodern historiographic metafiction.²

While I do not want to ignore the influence of modernism on Lamming or postmodern fiction on Levy, I suggest that we might perhaps more fruitfully consider the shared aesthetics of Windrush writing with its criss-crossing manoeuvres through Black Atlantic space and time. In particular, turning to works by both authors, I analyse the ways in which they make use of memory-work, "living" history (as Pierre Nora puts it),³ in order to reclaim history as an embodied experience rather than as a disciplinary body of knowledge. While Lamming tends to focus on the role of communal memory and cultural formation in a transatlantic context, Levy—like many Caribbean women authors—places

emphasis on the family chronicle in a late twentieth-century context of migration and exile. Both authors bring together multiple perspectives, foregrounding the problematic role of memory and colonial discourses as they come to shape the narrative of self and community. In her novels, Levy presents an intimate criss-crossing of desires and hostilities, needs, and provisions, in the daily life of the household, where, after fifty years of assimilation, the landlord is still the Empire.⁴ I shall demonstrate that Andrea Levy offers a counter-imperial inscription of black British history and identity formation, grounded firmly in the domestic, familial sphere as a vehicle for acts of memory and a wider reclamation of the past, reaching back to the Caribbean's traumatic foundation.

Memory-work and Reclamation

An important line of modern historiography acknowledges a close, if problematic, relationship between novel and history: both, in fact, properly call on the imagination in engaging with the past. R.G. Collingwood's view of the grounding force of the historical imagination remains cogent: "Historical thinking is that activity of the imagination by which we endeavour to provide this innate idea [the past] with detailed content."⁵ An emphasis on detailed content may entail bringing new historical actors into view, imagining an historical space beyond that of the established record, or turning to different narrative forms in order to express history as a lived, culturally specific experience. In my view, Lamming and Levy recognised the writer's duty to both fiction and the archive as complementary sources of information and inspiration. In doing so, both writers bring the past into memory. In this context, it is helpful to consider Pierre Nora's "fundamental" distinction between the work of memory and history:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.⁶

The challenge faced by history largely issues from the expansion of the field of legitimate historiographic practice and production to include informal histories and, indeed, informal historians. More to my point, however, the contest between history and memory seems especially to be a mark of the intensity of modern—and postmodern—interest in the function and status of memory itself.

Lamming and Levy, in fact, are not so much concerned with memory as with remembrance. Homi Bhabha refers to time-lag, a gap that joins, as central to the postcolonial commitment to social and cultural reclamation:

Where these temporalities touch contingently, their spatial boundaries metonymically overlapping, at that moment their margins are lagged, sutured, by the indeterminate articulation of the 'disjunctive' present. *Time-lag keeps alive the making of the past.*⁷

There is an undoubted cross-over between postcolonial fictive works of remembrance and historiographic metafiction, allowing for a shared interest in alternative, even dissenting histories.⁸ However, the postcolonial text of remembrance also seeks to reclaim the past and thus returns to the question of history. The historically-oriented fiction produced by Lamming and Levy seems more properly regarded as memory-work, performed for a British and Caribbean society. Further, I argue that this fiction, as memory-work, is very close to what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, connected to cultural trauma: “Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated.”⁹ Such stories seem to me to demonstrate vividly the force of Ben Okri’s insight into the power and function of narrative or “stories planted in us early or along the way.”

For Hirsch, postmemory elicits a sense of “living connection” with the past, particularly through responses to photographs.¹⁰ For Levy, in *Fruit of the Lemon*, an album of photographs also plays a central role in giving new life to past-present relations. When Faith Jackson discovers photographs in her aunt’s house in Jamaica, she observes:

Underneath this photo were two fat photograph albums. I looked around me. To pull them out I had to take all the photographs off the shelf and carefully lift out the books. I felt like a burglar.

[...]

My family took up nearly half the album. The rest of the pages were full of people I didn’t recognise. Young, old, middle-aged and everything in between. Black and white photographs, brown photographs, coloured snaps with thumbs in the corner. People standing stiff and formal or on a beach or larking around somewhere lush.

[...]

I slowly turned all the pages of the albums and stared into their faces.
(201-3)

When Faith examines the album, she feels as if she is doing something illicit by ‘stealing’ a look at the past. She fumbles with the photographs, struggling to get them back into order, when she is discovered looking through them. This episode speaks of a disturbing, almost ungovernable interest in this past that will not be denied.¹¹ As the narrative unfolds, Faith discovers the histories concerning several of the family members, whose faces she sees, many for the first time, in these photos. Ultimately, these images, and the stories to which they allude, do indeed connect her to her traumatic inheritance.

Hirsch’s discussion of trauma texts as examples of postmemory focuses largely on the Holocaust, but she also considers other contexts, such as colonialism, particularly the fate of indigenous peoples who have all too often been displaced, decimated, and, for generations, denied collective identity.¹² Likewise, Sam Durrant observes that “the impact of both events [Holocaust and colonialism] exceeds the moment of their historical

occurrence, acquiring the disturbed, belated chronology of trauma.”¹³ To offer an example, Maori activist, Tariana Turia claims that Maori culture still suffers from “post-traumatic stress disorder” because, for the Maori, colonialism took the form of a holocaust.¹⁴ We need also consider the erasures of memory brought about through the Middle Passage and the violence of slavery itself.¹⁵ Drawing on the work of Orlando Patterson, Françoise Vergès refers to slavery as a secret “social death,” which has resulted in a fragmented knowledge of the past: “Memory is a wounded memory, and the wound seems impossible to heal, to be integrated into history.”¹⁶ She also quotes Toni Morrison who describes the need to confront the trauma of slavery as follows: “until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves into other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again.”¹⁷ Trauma may entail forms of repression, silencing, and other symptoms of distress, but it also returns, often in disturbing forms until it is confronted and worked through.

Hirsch’s work sketches out the possibility of a less disabling relation to the past. Postmemory may relay trauma to later generations. For Hirsch, the action of postmemory produces an “intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked specifically to cultural or collective trauma.”¹⁸ Furthermore, stories and images contribute to the articulation of this “space of remembrance,” amplifying the act of “imaginative investment, projection and creation.”¹⁹ She describes this “retrospective witnessing by adoption” as follows:

It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one’s own life story. It is a question, more specifically, of an ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted other for which postmemory can serve as a model: as I can “remember” my parents’ memories, I can also “remember” the suffering of others.²⁰

The particular history we encounter in Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* works in the very way Hirsch describes, beginning in anxieties, apprehensions, and hostilities, related to a prior history, one troubled by European colonisation and slavery. Lamming, in his typically oblique style, describes the incredulity of the school boys who laugh at the suggestion that anyone could possibly own a Barbadian:

Slave. The little boy had heard the word for the first time and when the teacher explained the meaning, he had a strange feeling. The feeling you get when someone relates a murder. Thank God, he wasn’t ever a slave. He or his father or his father’s father. Thank God nobody in Barbados was ever a slave. It didn’t sound cruel. It was simply unreal. The idea of ownership. One man owned another. They laughed quietly. Imagine any man in any part of the world owning a man or woman from Barbados. (57-8)

In that laughter, we register a certain kind of generational distance and, at the same time—in the act of denial—something of the force of an original, traumatic event, in line with Hirsch’s analysis of memory as familial inheritance. Nevertheless, the boys’ quiet laughter is also part of a textual event, and, like the Holocaust photograph, it works upon us with

the sharply affective force of what Hirsch (following Barthes) terms a *punctum*, prompting an ethical relation. Through flashes of narration and perception, postmemory posits a vital relation to the slave experience in the Americas, as recalled and remade in later cultures. Such texts call attention to new ways of reading the Black Atlantic experience, illuminating connections among places and events and introducing new lines of sight. Lamming, in Barbados, preparing for migration to Trinidad, is in that line; Levy, in London, taking stock of late twentieth-century Caribbean migrant subjectivity, stands there too.²¹

Traumatic Histories: Colonialism in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*

Lamming's work revives a traumatic past that seems to undo personal and cultural identity, not just in its own moment, but through successive generations, marked most incisively by the trauma of slavery for Black Atlantic subjects. In this context, trauma defies aestheticisation, even as it inevitably turns towards particular moments and casts the experience of the individual in terms of a larger, common narrative. Édouard Glissant's remarkable essay, "The Open Boat," highlights the potency of this persistent narrativising of an event as the telling sign of a collective traumatic condition. If trauma is experienced in a belated manner, at some later moment when events force an ancient suffering into communicable form, it potentially lays claim to a new kind of historicity through the delayed emergence of the narrative.²²

Imaginative recovery of the past, in the case of slavery, surfaces in peculiarly interesting fashion in the historical fiction of Andrea Levy, not only in *The Long Song* (2010), a neo-slave narrative that deals explicitly with the topic of remembrance, but also in the more oblique, diasporic recollections of her earlier novels, which deal with West Indian migration from the Caribbean to England. These novels draw aspects of their structure and something of their power to disturb not only from a mass of oral histories but also from earlier migration novels, especially Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) and Sam Selvon's ferocious narrative of arrival, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). Both these novels, however, are formed in the suffering moment. Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, written in exile, might be read as an expression of belated memory because it deals with events in the West Indies a decade prior to his arrival in the United Kingdom. In a recent interview with David Scott, Lamming has discussed the origins of this novel, particularly the political events of 1937 and 1938, touching on the "silent subconscious accumulated experience" of growing up in what he describes as a 'bad' village: "all of these things are in some way secreted and at some moment comes out."²³ This description sounds very much like the return of repressed memory. For this reason, I suggest *In the Castle of My Skin* may properly serve as an exemplary text for an understanding of postcolonial trauma narratives, including Levy's postmemorial stories.

In the Castle of My Skin projects the sense of undone identity allusively, as a more or less comic quest to take possession of this place, Barbados. Central to this quest is the person of its first narrator, G, whose life overlaps with the life of the author to some extent, which in turn suggests we might profitably approach the novel as strictly autobiographical fiction: the route taken by G can be understood as the route taken by

Lamming himself. The coming of age of G, marked by his double passage from village language to well educated Caribbean English and from Barbados to the larger world of Trinidad, shadows Lamming's own history, extending as that did to migration first to Trinidad, 1946, then, in 1950, to England.²⁴ Aimé Césaire argues that writing the self is an attempt to recapture a place from which one originates, a return home. It enables an imaginative grasp on a world; you have to go out in order to look back. The "backward glance" to use Lamming's own expression,²⁵ then, is not retrogressive, but, paradoxically, a self-determining effort to press forwards—perhaps an exemplary, modernist project.

Lamming's novel does not submit to the first generic rule of autobiography, however, by which the truth of the narrative of events is effectively underwritten by the constant presence of the author as first-person narrator. Rather, the autobiographical voice is multiple: the novel's history of a singular subject is complicated by the seductions of other acts of narration and perspectives. We see this partly in its active measuring of story-kind against story-kind: the oral and the literary, the regional and the metropolitan, novel and fable. Arguably, this narrative multiplicity, with its consequential fragmentariness, does not suggest modernism so much as it anticipates the postmodern development of historiographic metafiction. Events turn into textual facts as they are caught up by the novel's range of narrators in a polyvocalised set of narratives, which denies the authority of any single, or official history. Perhaps, in the struggle against a single history, Lamming achieves what Édouard Glissant calls "the cross-fertilisation of histories [...] repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity."²⁶ *In the Castle of My Skin* places emphasis on a local world that official society barely notices—the village—and transfers narratorial authority to a crowd of speakers. Through its scrupulous concern with an insular moment, the novel generates an affective understanding of this particular Caribbean society's historical condition.

In the polyvocalised world of Lamming's novel, the traumatic legacy of slavery is evident almost everywhere, in everything. G recalls moments in his childhood in which this inheritance surfaces in village life, especially in historically patterned socio-economic and political relations. Ma and Pa give a vivid account of the days of slavery, providing an alternative to official, colonial histories. Moreover, their immediate experience, as subjects who fear losing possession of their own home, says as much (perhaps more) about the persistent ramifications of slavery as an event that impinges on the present moment of the novel. Not until decades after Barbadian independence, in fact, was any serious effort made to reform the patterns of tenure and possession of land introduced with emancipation: ownership restricted, for most, to portable 'chattel' houses, with land leased from plantation owners, often from generation to generation. The consequence of this kind of tenure was a somewhat paradoxical attachment to the land itself. Lamming's Miss Foster says: "This land ain't the sort of land that can be for buy or sell [...] 'Twas always an' 'twill always be land for we people to live on" (239). Lamming calls attention to the symbolic, affective, and socio-political consequences of the loss of land claims for the individual and the community. When Pa loses his family holding, his social standing is diminished. This homeless man is consigned to the Alms House; this turn of events erodes his sense of agency and heralds his death (247-57). For Pa, Ma, and the wider

community, the loss of home can be seen as a repetition of colonial dispossession and exile. Elsewhere, in “Journey to an Expectation” (1960), Lamming reflects on the characteristic conditions of loss and exile that underpin the colonial condition:

Papa was a colonial; so am I; so is our once absolute Prospero. For it is that mutual experience of separation from their original ground which makes both master and slave colonial. To be colonial is to be in a state of exile.²⁷

In both of these texts, we see the Caribbean diasporic writer’s imagination at work, reflecting on repeated histories of exile and dispossession, linking slave culture from the distant past to the more immediate history of colonial rule. Lamming, a migrant living in England as he writes of plantation society, attests to a traumatic chain of exilic moments.

With no memory of family, G tries to come to terms with the problematic nature of his historical situation. He pursues his mother’s memories of the past and attempts to reclaim a story of origins, but cannot find a cohesive, complete narrative. G observes: “for memory I had substituted inquiry” and “[m]emory was again pursuing the line of discovery which inquiry had left off.”²⁸ The novel repeatedly teases out what memory means and how it functions, especially in G’s relationship with Ma and Pa. As I have noted, Pierre Nora speaks of memory as being “borne by living societies.” History, on the other hand, is “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.”²⁹ This is where analysis that stays with the postmodern and metafictional elements in Lamming’s novel must fail for all its instructive illumination of the novel’s textual play. The desire for historical reclamation is met, in my view, by an approach such as Marianne Hirsch’s, which focuses on sympathetic post-generations as witnesses to the past. Her emphasis on the important work of postmemory, through inquiry, reflection, and imaginative engagement, seems closer to the central practices of a post-slavery, post-Windrush novel like Lamming’s with its persistent interest in picking up the gossip, anecdotes, arguments, and tales of Barbadian culture, recalled by a writer living in exile.

Migration Stories and Rememoration in Levy’s *Small Island*

A similar jostle between competing perspectives occurs in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*, and again this characteristic structure seems to focus attention on the novel’s insistent problematisation of history. Levy’s and Lamming’s stories are linked by a shared focus on the transition to decolonisation, albeit in different eras and places. Like Lamming, Levy mediates between storytelling traditions. She does so by deviating from the linear narrative of the domestic novel: she parcels out the novel’s action as well as its narration. In Lamming’s novel, the voices we hear are all Caribbean, indeed all Barbadian, and, in a sense, represent the historically determined problems of his small village through sharply opposed perspectives. This clash sees G in conflict with his schoolmaster, just as the village is ferociously at odds with the island’s landlords and government officials. It also sees G separated from his mother as well as Pa and Ma by his desire to leave the island, turning exile into something other than economic need. Later in the novel, we see another clash of perspective as G listens with sympathy to lessons about blackness from

Trumper, his older friend, who talks about his experiences in America. In these instances, different perspectives are expressed through distinctive voices. At the same time, particularly through G's shifting uses of language, we see changes occurring at the linguistic level, reflecting different points of connection and relation to places and communities.

In *Small Island*, recollecting the major period of West Indian migration to Great Britain, Levy clearly writes out of an immediate experience of a West Indian British extension of the postcolonial, but, even more than with Lamming, we encounter here different modes of expression, different cultural registers that mark the impact of ideology on the personal. By mixing together the voices of the newly arrived West Indian immigrants and British peoples living in England, Levy highlights the contest between socio-cultural orders, which both bind and separate the lives and minds of the four characters central to the novel. Each of Levy's four major characters takes responsibility for a part of the story as it develops, so that the reader comes to know them all, intimately. A sense of the past is pieced together from their separate testimonies, rather than articulated by an all-seeing narrator with a single, unifying voice and viewpoint. Different visions, various subjectivities, come together in *Small Island*. Multiple narrators are by no means exceptional in the English history of the novel, but they do seem highly characteristic of border-crossing postcolonial fictions, where timelines become maps, directing us into different lives, and spatial relations lead us in and out of history. Through the introduction of various voices and shifts through time and space, Levy calls attention to points of connection among peoples as well as moments of collision and difference in the making and unmaking of history.

Such moments of contact and collision are also evident in Levy's intertextual references, which tend to subvert the ideological priorities of empire through parodic moments. For example, Hortense's grandmother takes a textual symbol of imperial conquest—Wordsworth's poem on daffodils—and recites it in Jamaican dialect or nation language. For Hortense, the poem represents cultural legitimation of an Englishness that (for most of the novel) she aspires to possess. As such, she has committed it to memory:

I wander'd lonely as a cloud,
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils.³⁰

Miss Jewell has it otherwise: "Ah walk under a cloud and den me float over de ill. And me see Miss Hortense a look pon de daffodil dem."³¹ Levy often gifts us brilliant, funny moments like this, but it is worth noting that the larger movement of the narrative is equally parodic, crafted by means of reworking genres. What we have, in effect, is a novel that reverses the direction of imperial romance: the adventure of colonialism's new hero now brings the Caribbean black subject back across the Atlantic to the very centre of Empire, London itself. The stabilising attribution of position, ethos, values, language, and literary decorum to those who possessed power within the imperial establishment is replaced by a transnational flow of culture, language, and tradition, calling into question the legitimacy of orthodox history.

Small Island in fact tells the story of the beginning of the diasporic shift that saw thousands of black West Indians migrate from the Caribbean to Britain. Levy's novel, that is to say, published in 2004, recaptures a singular historical moment—1948—and the arrival of 492 West Indians (including Jamaicans) on the S.S. *Empire Windrush*. Windrush has often been read as an event symbolic of the rise of multicultural, multiracial Britain, but it also belongs to a longer and complicated history of Black Atlantic migrations, which carry the force of cultural rupture and irrupt into culture, such as the traumatic migration of the Middle Passage, which carried African peoples into slavery. As Victor Ramraj has pointed out, the diaspora created by colonialism came eventually to include the counter-posed passage of Empire's peripheral, subject peoples to the metropolis itself.³² In the case of the immigrant from the West Indies, Jamaica especially, diaspora cannot be identified exactly with the large movement Ramraj discusses, let alone the kind of globalised movement from one territory to another that characterises modern/postmodern society, producing an exilic or diaspora subject and its consequent, migratory subjectivity. The Caribbean diaspora is haunted by prior passages. Furthermore, if migration to the metropolis changed the world scene for the Caribbean, as it clearly did, it has also come to function as a metonym for modern, multi-racial Britain. As Levy observes, Windrush inaugurates British multiculturalisms,³³ including especially an emerging sense of black Britishness.

Levy's novels, then, bear witness to the post-Windrush formation of multicultural, multiracial Britain, although it is also true that the record of this process includes an unnerving sense of history's wheels grinding, rather than turning. Late in *Small Island*, Gilbert, Hortense's husband, defends himself against her disdain when he is too quick to acknowledge some men "from home," but he adds for the reader's benefit, sotto voce, "I did not tell her that some days I was so pleased to see a black face I felt to run and hug the familiar stranger" (463). England, whose welcome was assumed by the West Indian immigrant, not least because of its willingness to spend West Indian lives in its own defence during World War II, quickly discovered all over again the threat of invasion when Caribbean peoples began to sail home to mother. By 1962, indeed, legislation had cancelled the general right of entry enjoyed by passport holders who were imperial subjects—as in the British Caribbean—limiting this right to those who met qualifications requiring a direct family connection. Nonetheless, even without continuing immigration, black migrants from Caribbean islands did settle in modern Britain, becoming generic West Indians (even to themselves), and giving a new turn to Daniel Defoe's description of the English as a "Mongrel Half-bred Race," as Ashley Dawson has reminded us.³⁴ If the history of this development leads towards Levy and her novels, it is also a history of persistent hostilities, all too often erupting in violence, but mostly stitched quietly into everyday social practices and attitudes. Decades after the action of *Small World*, in the 'England' half of *Fruit of the Lemon*, Faith Jackson wins a job in television, in the costuming department, apparently on the strength of her performance in the show for her fashion degree, where her tutor had appreciated her work, but with sentiments that irritate her, and us:

‘Your work has an ethnicity which shines through [...] A sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you. Don’t you find that exciting, Faith?’ As I was born and bred in Haringey I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through from my slave ancestry. Or perhaps it was that I was just better than everybody else.³⁵

This account offers a double-voiced perspective. On the one hand, Levy presents the prevailing white English perspective of the black British subject as an exotic other. On the other hand, through the representation of internal discourse, Levy offers a view that both challenges and resists this act of othering, albeit in an ambivalent way.

Although *Small Island* is not the biography of a family, in speaking of the culture to which Levy’s parents belong, it presents something like a biographical representation of a generation. In this sense, it is a work of remembrance, actively bringing the past back to mind. While Levy herself is not one of the colonised, by virtue of her own family’s history, she is intimately acquainted with the experience of marginalisation in postcolonial Britain. Writing in 2004, as she explores the trauma of her Caribbean parents’ migrant experience in post-war England, she takes stock of the imperial metropolis from a point-of-view sharpened by their passage from the periphery to the centre. Paul Gilroy has spoken of the gathering experience of the British Black as “ambiguous assimilation,” “partial belonging.”³⁶ Levy and her generation surely display the signs of cultural division, even hybridity, as if the modern diasporic condition of moving between social identities, as well as between places, still demands a sense of self that is built around difference and transformation, speaking and acting in part as Caribbean, in part as Black, in part as British.³⁷ Stuart Hall offers a cogent account of this condition:

Caribbean culture is essentially driven by a diasporic aesthetic [...] Cultures of course have their ‘locations’. But it is no longer easy to say where they originate. What we can chart is more akin to a process of repetition-with-difference, or reciprocity-without-beginning. In this perspective, black British identities are not just a pale reflection of a ‘true’ Caribbeanness of origin, which is destined to be progressively weakened. They are the outcome of their own relatively autonomous formation. However, the logic that governs them involves the same processes of transplantation, syncretisation and diaspora-ization that once produced Caribbean identities, only operating in a different space and time frame, a different chronotope—in the name of difference.³⁸

Levy’s writing conforms to a “diasporic aesthetic” through its emphasis on difference, especially as evidenced through her use of embedded narratives. At the same time, her articulation of the diasporic experience, particularly in terms of temporal and spatial dislocation, calls attention to claims of the past on the present. Belated arrivals, detours through history, and journeys of return become part of a process for navigating a course through the world.

By moving to England, the two central West Indian characters in *Small Island*, Gilbert and Hortense, hope to shed one history and enter another. Hortense, in England, hopes to gain the unattainable power and privilege that could never be hers, even as a

light-skinned woman, in Jamaica. The mastery she wishes for herself is the mastery she had seen in her British teachers: “those white women whose superiority encircled them like an aureole” (69). Gilbert is less ambitious, more pragmatic. After the war he moves to England, expecting that, as an ex-serviceman, he would find a good job and a decent place to live, but the treatment he receives is very different:

“So how many gates I swing open? How many houses I knock on? Let me count the doors that opened slow and shut quick without even me breath managing to get inside [...] Man, there was a list of people who would not like it if I came to live—husband, wife, women in the house, neighbours, and hear this, they tell me even little children would be outraged if a coloured man came among them. Maybe I should start an expedition—let me trace it back and find the source of this colour bar [...] Eventually the originator of this colour prejudice would have to stand there before me. And I could say to their face, ‘So, it is you that hates all niggers, I presume.’” (215)

In Gilbert’s account of his personal experience of late colonial diaspora, raging despair illuminates the extremity of British hostility: colonial superiority, in the ‘Mother Country,’ proves to be racism.³⁹ Levy’s novel highlights the effacement of subjectivity in Britain as a continuation of the dehumanising dynamics of the colonial era. The West Indian remains outside English community: to be outside is to be made to feel outside humanity itself. Levy’s construction of this moment, binding it to another recent history—Caribbean wartime service—requires that we know the sense of alienation this entailed. For instance, when a child hears Gilbert, a Jamaican, speak, he says to his mother, “It speaks, Mummy, it speaks” (165). Children speak frankly, reflecting their elders’ often unspoken views as is evident in another case when Gilbert’s fellow immigrant and friend, James, becomes a target of racial abuse: “the white urchin [...] yelled up at James, “Oi, darkie, show us yer tail” (140). Colonial discourses, in this regard, persist into the postcolonial era of increasing contact in England itself.

For the Windrush generation, incorporation into British society was challenging. Stuart Hall has described this social development as “differential” because it fell short of migrant expectations: the migrant was forced to accept inadequate accommodation and employment, which matched neither talent nor training. Historically, many Afro-Caribbean subjects exchanged the diminishing opportunities available to them in their island societies for the tribulations of English working-class life and “informal segregation”⁴⁰ in Britain. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the experience of the Caribbean immigrant was not all of a piece as Levy shows us by bringing together the voices and various perspectives of Jamaicans, represented by Gilbert and Hortense, and white, English society, in Queenie and her husband Bernard Bligh. The relationships between these four characters are posited in dyadic terms: male and female, black and white, British and West Indian. The novel poses a question that it cannot fully answer: how do Gilbert and Hortense get to be at home in England? Their experience replays at a generational remove the patterns of differentiation and exploitation that were familiar under colonialism. Just as recollection of plantation society has a certain traumatic force when it makes its belated appearance in Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, so the

“colony society” of the Windrush generation, represented in Levy’s novel, marks a late entry for writer living in contemporary, multicultural Britain. Here the birth of the mixed-race child, whom Hortense agrees to mother, comes to embody the past that speaks to the present. In this context, Levy’s novel performs a remarkable piece of remembrance, presenting a “haunting memorial of [who and] what has been excluded”⁴¹ Insofar as the modern novel recalls a hidden history of events that themselves catch up earlier histories, the text of remembrance has the depth and the immediacy of a postcolonial palimpsest.

The Familial Gaze, Postmemory and Traumatic Inheritance in *Fruit of the Lemon*

Testimonies to the traumatic moment, for Hirsch, whether stories or photographs, are regularly orientated towards the family and, in consequence, repeatedly fix on loss of emotional plenitude. *Small Island* is obsessed with the (im)possibility of finding for the Caribbean family an English place, a new home. In Levy’s earlier novel, *Fruit of the Lemon*, Faith, the British-born, black narrator, knows the Caribbean only through family stories told by parents who, like Gilbert and Hortense, migrated to England as part of the Windrush generation. For Faith, like Levy, England is home. At the level of familial experience, then, this opens up a complex that is comparable to the generational structure that sustains the play of memories for holocaust survivor families, where memory passes on belatedly to the next generation in the form of photos and stories. For Levy’s generation, growing up in Britain, the Caribbean figures as a postmemorial space.

Faith inherits her parents’ memories, but her own images of home are very different from the warmth and brilliance of their Caribbean island: “The village green with perfect lush grass sitting in dappled light, little thatched houses with windows and doors that looked too small, the pub, the post office, and the steeped church surrounded by yew trees and teetering grey gravestone” (116).⁴² This description may suggest that her generation is more fully socialised as British, but greater exposure to contemporary multicultural practice and freer incorporation into the institutions and customs of British society are not without tensions and contradictions. On the one hand, inter-generational tensions emerge. When Faith’s father visits the flat she shares with university friends, he asks, “Faith—your friends, any of them your own kind?” (28). On the other hand, the working class family of Faith’s closest university friend, Marion, treats her as one of their own: “Don’t be a stranger, Faith—it’s always lovely to see you.” (86). Yet, at the same time, racism exists alongside seemingly post-racial perspectives. For example, when Fred (the father of Marion, one of Faith’s friends) rants against the school that had disciplined his daughter, Trina, for rough behaviour:

‘She went and clocked some darkie. And this coon’s mum and dad come up to the school wanting to see Trina. They said she’d been bullying their daughter. Now their daughter is a great big, six-foot gorilla and Trina, as you know, is only small.’ (84)

Like a generation before her, such as seen in *Small Island*, Faith confronts race thinking and forms of exclusion in British society, even when that racism is not necessarily directed at her.

Stuart Hall has described British Black society of the late 1990s, as marked by a “new ethnicity, a new Black British identity,” formed not just in opposition to society at large, but also out of complicated internal differences: confident in black communal identity despite relative socio-economic disadvantages and enduring political hostilities. As an adult, Faith belongs to that “minority of Black people [who] have been able to occupy the interstices of the enterprise culture,” especially women, relative to young black men.⁴³ Yet, she still confronts xenophobia. When Faith is invited by Simon, her white flat-mate, to his country home, she is made to answer a series of questions about her identity:

‘And whereabouts are you from Faith?’

‘London,’ I said.

The man laughed a little. I meant more what country are you from? I didn’t bother to say I was born in England, that I was English, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear.

‘My parents are Jamaican.’

‘Well, you see, I thought that,’ he began. ‘As soon as you walked in I thought I bet she’s from Jamaica.’

‘Just my parents are.’ I added, but he went on. (130)

This exchange catches contemporary English racism into the novel quite as clearly as the ranting diatribe from Marion’s father. The fact that she was born and raised in Britain makes little difference. Symbolically, she is positioned as an outsider and migrant.

Andreas Huyssen has noted the powerful impetus social and intellectual modernity has given to cultural memory:

The form in which we think of the past is increasingly memory without borders rather than history within borders. Modernity has brought with it a very real compression of time and space. But in the register of imaginaries, it has also expanded our horizons of time and space beyond the local, the national, and even the international.⁴⁴

This memory without borders translates into acts of “sympathetic memory,” when Levy forges associations between the present, the recent past, and remote times. Indeed, she stages the psychic effects of postmemory—memory crossing and re-crossing borders—most cannily when she tells the story of Faith’s psychic collapse (Part I) and her journey towards recovery (Part II). At the outset, ‘Part II: Jamaica’ proposes a rudimentary reconstruction of subjectivity: “Child, everyone should know where they come from” (86). At one level, however, this judgement seems to be supported by the work of the novel’s second half, which clearly retreats from the witty social romance of ‘Part I: England’, with its sharp critique of British multicultural, but racist society. In its place, Levy delivers a narrative of personal, familial, even domestic experience that has a very different depth of history to it, calling for a very different order of understanding.

Faith’s point of view and characteristic wit remain intact in the second part of the novel, but the narratorial perspective shifts from the focalising first-person narration of

Part I (almost entirely Faith's perspective) to the mixed narration of Part II. Faith herself becomes a listener and 'reader' as she gives her attention to testimonies or testamentary fictions. The accretion of these memories results in a remarkable portrait of the family across borders. The fragmentary family portrait challenges a sense of formal coherence; since each testimony switches from Faith's perspective to one or more Caribbean family sources. Each family member brings into 'public' memory distinct but genealogically linked histories from past generations. The second part of the narrative consists almost entirely on family voices, family 'snapshots', and memories. Levy's multi-vocal approach to history is comparable to Lamming's practice in *The Emigrants* and *In the Castle of My Skin*. Both authors are governed by a migratory logic (despite the differences in their diasporic conditions) because they choose to locate their writing in different places and times. Even if Lamming's novels seem more aggressively experimental, more formally demanding, Levy seems equally driven to find a form that catches the diasporic character of the colonial and postcolonial West Indian experience, investing much in the individuating power of acts of memory.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall describes the arrival of an "emergent new subject," arguing forcefully for a newly complicated sense of identity:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact [...] which the cultural practices then represent, we should think instead of identity as 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.⁴⁵

Faith recovers what Hall refers to as "hidden histories" through her dialogues with her family in the Caribbean, particularly with her aunt who serves in effect as a family archivist. We might even argue that Faith's recovery from nervous collapse presents the shift away from what Stuart Hall describes as "the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity"—with a return of "imaginary fullness or plenitude"—achieved when "these forgotten connections are once more set in place." In Faith's case, this move occurs with the startling sequence of historiographic fragments: the family stories.

For Faith, identity proves to be a striated production that depends on the process of representation: the continued narration and reclamation of fragmentary testimonies. The result, for her, but also for us as readers, is a kind of family album, where the place of the photograph is taken by snapshot family narrative.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Levy creates one extraordinary moment in which the recovered past, which emerges in-and-between the fragments, is grasped with something close to ecstasy, imaginary fullness, a passion that almost collapses the sense of archive in upon itself.

Coral stopped by a small mound of earth; a tiny hillock on the flat of the garden. I put my foot on the mound ready to climb but Coral held me back.

'Have some respect, Faith,' she said. 'This is where your grandmother and grandfather are buried.'

I thought we were at the house of Violet Chance.

'No this is where your mummy and me grew up. This used to be our land.'

I had been to Blenheim Palace and stared transfixed at the romper suit Winston Churchill wore when he was planning his strategies for war. I had been to Hampton Court and listened for the screams in the long gallery. I had sat where Shakespeare courted Anne Hathaway. And drunk in the pub where Dick Turpin was captured. But...

'Here?!' I shouted at Coral. 'This is where you grew up? This is where Mum grew up...?'

'Hush Faith—don't shout.'

[...]

'Can we see the grave again?' I asked. I had not looked properly. All I had seen was the disturbed rounded earth. I had not knelt and pressed my ear to the ground. I had not laid flowers. I had not told them that I was their granddaughter from England. I had not left my respect. (255-56)

The passion with which Faith seizes the Caribbean past, represented in her family's history, suggests her need for an identity that might well be defined as cultural; in truth, however, the individuality of her voice and the specificity of her family relations give this moment of apparent plenitude a singular aspect. Faith links British public memory to her own private history; she registers the past in her black diasporic present, but she does not assimilate this recognition into a coherent diasporic cultural unity.

Consequently, moments of recognition emerge in Levy's narrative account, particularly through discontinuities, which enable the formation of identity as a matter of "becoming" rather than "being," much after the fashion outlined by Hall:

Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure a sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.⁴⁷

Levy's narrative calls our attention to points of positioning and repositioning. Faith quilts together recollections in such a way that her engagement with the past serves to authenticate the present moment and herald the birth of the latest arrival. Through her encounter with and recognition of shared family memories across borders, Faith herself is now symbolically born into a larger Caribbean family: "They wrapped me in a family history and swaddled me in its stories" (326).⁴⁸ She finds an alternative sense of historical belonging that rivals the national history of Britain. Nevertheless, as familial memory gets assembled, from generation to generation, so memory lays down lines of identity that depend on a history that variously incorporates rupture, crossing lines. This typical, eccentric, West Indian postmemory brings about a belated recovery of a past for this most recent generation returning to the Caribbean, where cultural memory has its roots. On the other hand, however obliquely, this memory is carried in narratives that, by the force of West Indian, diasporic settlement in Britain itself, must now include late twentieth-century layers of Black Atlantic experience.

In *Fruit of the Lemon*, black British postmemory teeters on the edge of what Eva Hoffman terms “spectral autobiography.”⁴⁹ This kind of text arises in and out of migrant experience where the writer’s memorial work takes the form of imagining a past life in the homeland with such intensity that it is as if that world actually exists in the here and now. Faith’s parents believe her nervous collapse can only be healed by going ‘home,’ a reality that takes the shape of the world they left in the period of the Windrush migrations; this imagining of the distant/present moment looks decidedly spectral, decidedly backwards-looking. Marianne Hirsch, for all her sympathy with Hoffman’s passionate yearning for the past, maintains that there is an important distinction between postmemory and spectral autobiography. She sees the latter as indeed a form of nostalgia, reconstructing the past as paradise; it is symptomatic of Hoffman’s “desperate desire to displace the relativity, the fracturing, the double-consciousness of immigrant experience.”⁵⁰ Double-consciousness, however, runs very deep in Levy, even if it is presented not so much in the moment, or in a single person, but serially across the text, in the embedding of those ancient family narratives within the larger narrative. Even as Faith listens to tales of her family’s ‘home’ in Jamaica and various Caribbean diasporic locations, she continues to identify with England as her home.

Faith’s feelings for Jamaica may be akin to the nostalgia that characterises the spectral autobiography, representing this past as a kind of “paradise.” However, ‘home’ remains a site of ambivalence. The very last section of the novel reclaims the imperial space with which Faith’s history began: “I was coming home. I was coming home to tell everyone. My mum and dad came to England in a banana boat” (339). As a child, Faith experienced shame when mocked by children who ridiculed her family’s history of Atlantic crossings through Windrush and slavery: “Your mum and dad came on a slave ship [...] They are slaves” (4). Through her visit with her Jamaican family, which helps her to understand Caribbean and Black Atlantic crossings from a postcolonial perspective, Faith learns to value her family’s past. Thus, mockery gives way to memory in Levy’s discourse. Before her return journey to England, Faith accompanies her cousin, Vincent, to house high on the mountain, overlooking Kingston, “pretty pink and white,” with a roof that sloped like a country church and tall windows that were “elegantly glazed with squares of glass like fine Georgian houses in England” (324). The true object of this visit, however, is not the grand house, but a shed out back, with “an opening for the door and two windows that had no glass”—“an unprotected place” (325): slave quarters. Inside this shed, Faith finds “wooden bunks like three large shelves up a wall,” catching back into memory the opening frames of her story, when to be teased about those banana boats was to think of illustrations of a slave ship: “There was the shape of a boat with the black pattern of tiny people laid in rows as convenient and space saving as possible [...] slaves in a slave ship” (4).⁵¹ That shed, calling narrative into image, sparks the flash of memorial *punctum*, establishing a relation to the oppressed or persecuted other. This connection can be seen as ethical because it brings together new ways of understanding and ‘remembering’ the suffering of self and others. When she reclaims the jibes and insults about her migrant history, she acknowledges the ways in which slavery, exile, diasporic formation, and migration have shaped both the Caribbean and black British experience.

She links together the disparate, fragmented histories that have pre-scribed her own, coming to terms with her transnational formation. Memory then, so long after the traumatic event of slave migration, is worked out firstly through the generations, but then proves to take the form of a “retrospective witnessing by adoption.”⁵²

Memory’s Ethical Relations

In *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Small Island*, Levy calls attention to the ways in which the legacies of colonialism, particularly of slavery and racism, continue to resonate in the present, in both Britain and the Caribbean. Her stories track shifts of consciousness, positioning and repositioning our sense of time and place. By the end of *Fruit of the Lemon*, Faith knows she will keep her deep, family history alive, including the stories that frame her sense of what it means to inhabit a British ‘home’ that, for most, has been confined to enclaves or “partial belonging.” She knows the Blackness of Britain, that is to say. Jamaica Kincaid speaks of her Antigua relations as possessed of very different attitudes from those of American blacks: her relatives, like Levy’s representation of the Caribbean family, engage in back-chat.⁵³ However, in so far as back-chat is the response of those who would otherwise be put down, Levy’s response to post-imperial arrogance is to allow Faith to answer back. Where the “bully boys” of her childhood tease her—“You’re a darkie. Faith’s a darkie”—now she has family chronicles to back her refusal to be defined by the playground insult and to support her emphatic counter-attack: “I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day” (327).

According to Ben Okri, the stories we live by and tell ourselves have the power to change our lives. Levy’s black British novels open up the possibilities of narrating life anew in several distinct ways. There is, for a start, their sheer inventiveness, the sly, sharp stories they tell, stories of making do and getting by—not least those that bring these novels to their beguiling conclusions. Her acts of narration are often tactical, offering a mode of resistance or negotiation, something of the “surreptitious and guileful movement” that Michel de Certeau identifies as “the very activity of “making do” as a tactic for survival in consumer society⁵⁴—like multiracial, multicultural Britain—or, in a different form, in the colonial Caribbean. More importantly, however, is the way that both of Levy’s novels, by the belatedness that they incorporate into their structures, bind narration to the action of memory. The play of memory always works in her fiction, as in Caribbean culture more largely, to set traumatic history circulating across generations. In this case, however, history pulls a larger, *reading* public into a sympathetic relation to the Caribbean past. These novels trace out black Caribbean, diasporic memory as a palimpsest of repeated unsettlement. In opening up *memory*, fiction gives to this *history* an affective or, in Dominick LaCapra’s term, an “empathic” force.⁵⁵ Levy’s work prompts a complex identification with those for whom slavery and exile form the ground of history. Whereas the memory of survivors operates more or less directly through the recollection of personal experience, postmemory as transgenerational memory works indirectly through representation and creation, extending the survivor’s memory to later and other generations, establishing an ethical relation to a past across borders. For all their detailed pleasures of observation and phrasing, Levy’s representations of Caribbean peoples

crossing and re-crossing the Atlantic bear witness to collective trauma. In performing this kind of witnessing work, Levy's novels get under our skin, catching us into the community of those who remember.

Endnotes

- 1 Ben Okri, "The Joys of Storytelling," *A Way of Being Free*. London: Phoenix, 1998, 46.
- 2 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988, 105-23: "Historiographic metafiction [...] privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity—multiple points of view and an overtly controlling narrator" (117-18).
- 3 See Pierre Nora's introduction to *Rethinking the French Past: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; also "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations*, "Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory," 26 (1989): 7-25. See also Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*. London: Verso, 1994; Samuel charts the formation of "perceptions of the past which find expression in the discriminations of everyday life" (17).
- 4 Mike and Trevor Phillips, *The Irresistible Rise of Multiracial Britain*. London: HarperCollins, 1999, 11.
- 5 R. G. Collingwood, "The Historical Imagination," *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946, 247.
- 6 Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.
- 7 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 364. For use of the concept to cover "diasporic recollections," see Vijay Mishra's "Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie," *Ariel* 26 (1995), 24.
- 8 I take the term "dissenting history" from Simon Featherstone, *Postcolonial Cultures*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
- 9 Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997, 22. See also Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29 (2008): 104-28.
- 10 Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 104.
- 11 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, "Past Lives," 241-68.
- 12 In "Generation of Postmemory," Hirsch considers the "collective catastrophes" of recent decades and comments on the scope of "intergenerational acts of transfer": "The bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall, or reactivate, the effects of another, exceed the bounds of traditional historical archives and methodologies" (104).
- 13 Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004, 3-4.
- 14 See *The New Zealand Herald* 31 August 2000: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=149643 [accessed August 19, 2011].
- 15 Hirsch's instances include American slavery, which presumably extends to slavery in the Caribbean ("Generation of Postmemory," 104, n. 1). See also Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, 4.
- 16 Francoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutions: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, 14. See also the interview with Nicholas Ganes, "Postcolonial Challenges," *The Future of Social Theory*. London: Continuum, 2004, 197. See also Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.

- 17 Ibid. Note also Sam Durrant's comments on Morrison's memorialisation of slave culture, and "the impossibility of ever coming to terms with the generation of the Middle Passage" (*Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, 85).
- 18 Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*. Barbie Zelizer, ed., London: Athlone, 2001, 215-46. See also Hirsch, "Generation of Memory," 106.
- 19 Hirsch, "Generation of Memory," 106-7.
- 20 Hirsch, "Surviving Images," 10-11. See also Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Mieke Bal, ed., Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1999, 9.
- 21 Mike Phillips, reviewing his experience as novelist in the late twentieth century, cautions against ignoring the significance of historical conditions in a culture formed out of migrancy: "Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, the poets of Negritude, all wrote within a specific historical context and they are part of our history, but partly as a result of this history, the spokesmen and women of migration now tend to trace migrant identity to a pre-colonial and autonomous ethnicity, an autonomous nationhood, an ancient paradise, from which the migrants have been somehow exiled." See his introduction to *A Black British Canon?* Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds. London: Palgrave, 2006, 18.
- 22 See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996 and Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- 23 David Scott, "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming," *Small Axe* 12 (2002): 107.
- 24 For a discussion of Lamming's language differentiations, see Claudia Marquis, "'Bombarded with words': Language and Region in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*," *What Country's This? And Whither Are We Gone?*, J Derrick McClure, Karoline Szatek-Tudor and Rasa E. Penna, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010, 267-92.
- 25 Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Michael Joseph, 1960, 32.
- 26 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. trans. J. Michael Dash, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, 93. For more on the role of the Caribbean writer, see Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 275.
- 27 For this recollection in full, see *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Michael Joseph, 1960, 226-29. Lamming puts things a little differently in the interview with David Scott, where he describes Barbados in 1938/39 as "semi-feudal": "It is a Barbados where there is no doubt at all about the location of power. It is a total plantation society and a garrison as well. One of the ironies of geography here is that this poor village is only five minutes walk from where the governor lives" (*Sovereignty of the Imagination*, 76). See also Mike and Trevor Phillips, cited above, fn.4.
- 28 George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, c.1991, 12. References henceforth to this novel are to this edition.
- 29 See Nora, "Between Memory and History," 3.
- 30 Andrea Levy, *Small Island*. London: Hodder Headline, 2004, 43. References henceforth are to this edition. For the original poem, see *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. E. De Selincourt, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, 216.
- 31 Levy, 43-44. Jamaica Kincaid also responds critically to Wordsworth's daffodils in *Lucy*. London: Macmillan, 1994, 29. Helen Tiffin observes: "The gap between the lived colonial or post-colonial experience and the imported/imposed world of the Anglo-written has often been

- referred to by Commonwealth post-colonial writers and critics as ‘the daffodil gap.’” See “Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues: Recitation and the Reclamation of the Female Body in the Works of Erna Brodber and Jamaica Kincaid,” *Callaloo* “On ‘Post-Colonial Discourse’: A Special Issue” 16.4 (1993), n.7 and Renu Juneja, *Caribbean Transactions, West Indian Culture in Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1996, 158.
- 32 See Victor Ramraj, “Diasporas and Multiculturalism,” *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction* Bruce King, ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 214–29. See also Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007 and Itala Vivan, “The Iconic Ship,” *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 228.
- 33 Carol Burns with Andrea Levy, “Off the Page: Andrea Levy,” *Washington Post*. 24 June 24 2004: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A52272-2004Jun18.html> [accessed August 19, 2011]. See Stuart Hall on the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*: “This event signified the start of postwar Caribbean migration to Britain and stands symbolically as the birth date of the Afro-Caribbean partner black diaspora”; he adds that it has likewise been understood as symbolizing the emergence of multi-racial Britain. See Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad,” *Small Axe* 6 (1999): 1.
- 34 See Dawson, *Mongrel Nation*, 6.
- 35 Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*. London: Headline, 1999, 31.
- 36 Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 155; see also Gilroy’s comment on the effects of the 1971 Immigration Bill on black settlement (31).
- 37 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford, ed., London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 223-237. Hall observes: “The diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235). Hall goes on to characterise these differences for the Caribbean in terms of mixes, blends, “the aesthetics of the ‘cross-overs’” (236). Hall argues that “third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three identities” (Hall, “Old and New Identities; Old and New Ethnicities,” *Culture, Globalization and the World System*. A. D. King, ed., [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991], 59.) See also Mike Phillips on this factor in migrant experience more broadly: “the authentic identity of many migrant communities begins with the tension of operating several different selves at the same time” (*Black Canon?*, 28).
- 38 Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home Thoughts from Abroad,” 8 and 10.
- 39 For a compelling account and analysis of modern racism, see Paul Gilroy’s *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 43-ff. Both Lamming in *The Emigrants* and Selvon (especially) in *The Lonely Londoners* put this kind of experience on the fictional record, at the very moment of migration. See also Mary Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005.
- 40 For a more detailed discussion of the Black community in the 1960s, see Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan, 1978, 350-53.
- 41 Bhabha, *Location of Cultures*, 198.
- 42 Mike and Trevor Phillips observe: “If you were born in the Caribbean and shared that moment of arrival [through Windrush migration], and lived through the dreams and the changes, it gives you a peculiar little shiver to think that when your children look past you they don’t see the colours of the Caribbean, bright green and vibrant red and the endless blue of sea and

- sky. What they see is England.” Nevertheless, they would say, if they are themselves from the Caribbean, “Our children’s origins are in us” (*Irresistible Rise*, 397).
- 43 Stuart Hall, “Frontline and Backyards: The Terms of Change,” *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*. Kwesi Owusu, ed., London: Routledge, 2006, 129. In this regard, when “hustling culture” turns into “enterprise culture,” it is also worth paying attention to Levy’s Carl, Faith’s large brother, and his “plans” (“Big ones, small ones, I never knew”), but also to the “higglers” who cost her some anxiety when she arrives back in Jamaica (*Fruit of the Lemon*, 172-73).
- 44 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 4.
- 45 Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 222.
- 46 In addition to Hirsch, see also Mike and Trevor Phillips’s practice in *The Irresistible Rise of Multiracial Britain*.
- 47 Hall, “Cultural Ideology and Diaspora,” 225.
- 48 Black Atlantic crossings continue in various forms. If many migrants, like Faith’s own parents, never stop asking themselves whether they should return to their Caribbean island ‘home,’ West Indians also enjoy visits to the Caribbean that make them tourists under a different name. This emphasis on continued family relations and on consequential patterns of travel turns up in the narratives reported by Mary Chamberlain: “I like it when I go on holiday, get sort of like a bonding with Gran. We’d talk. She’d tell me about Mum and the other kids, and what it was like bringing them up” (*Narrative of Exile and Return*, 164).
- 49 Eva Hoffman, *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe*. (London: Vintage, 1999) 36.
- 50 Hirsch, “Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood,” *Family Frames*, 217, 240.
- 51 I am struck by the graphic representation of traumatic dehumanisation and impressed by the structural resonance between these representations of slave ship economies and those of the Holocaust, behind the wire. See especially the image from Spiegelman’s ‘The First Maus’ that Hirsch uses in illustration of her account of the family structures at work in postmemory (“Generation of Postmemory,” 113).
- 52 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 53 *Lucy*, 86.
- 54 Michel de Certeau, “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics,” *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, 29-42.
- 55 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 78.

“Telling Her a Story”: Remembering Trauma in Andrea Levy’s Writing

Ole Birk Laursen

In her recent fiction, particularly *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), and *The Long Song* (2010), Levy has been concerned with exploring the traumatic collective histories and legacies of slavery, colonialism, and post-war migration to Britain.¹ In this article, I argue that this interest is brought about by the historical rupture of post-war West Indian migration to Britain—symbolised by the arrival of the MV *Empire Windrush* in 1948—which caused a loss of commemorative and narrative tradition. The dominant regimes of representation that positioned and subjected black people as Others within the categories of the West continue to haunt the postcolonial era in the form of modern racism, leaving certain traumatic histories such as slavery, colonialism, and post-war migration outside mainstream British history. At the same time, on the part of the migrant, the attempt to start a new life in Britain was frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the histories of slavery and colonial subordination. Confronting such historical silences and thinking about how traumatic histories can be mediated, I will argue that Levy’s work addresses this rupture through the form and content of her writing. In this sense, Levy’s works should not merely be examined as socio-historical texts but as an aesthetic oeuvre that memorialises the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and migration.

These observations relate to Levy’s motivations for writing *The Long Song*, which revolves around the daily lives of slaves and slave-owners in Jamaica around the time of the Baptist Wars (1831-1832) and Emancipation (1834). Responding to a young girl’s question about how she [the young girl] could be proud of her Jamaican roots when her ancestors had been slaves, Levy asked herself: “Could a novelist persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story?”² Addressing the question of how memories of traumatic collective experiences are memorialised, trauma theorist Marianne Hirsch theorises the concept of “postmemory,” which “characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by events that can neither be understood nor recreated.”³ Her argument relates to Paul Gilroy’s claim that the telling and retelling of stories of loss, exile, and migration serve as nodal points in the social memory of black people. The continual narration of traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism, and migration, he says, serve to “invent, maintain and renew identity,” thus creating a collective, shared cultural identity.⁴ Although developed in relation to the commemoration of the Holocaust, Hirsch argues that the concept “may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences.”⁵ However, while examining Levy’s writing—and specifically the memorialisation of traumatic events—through the concept of “postmemory,” this article will complicate and extend the term to suggest that, in Levy’s writing, memories of slavery, colonialism, and migration are *not* necessarily passed on

from one generation to the next. Rather, I will argue that Levy's writing *itself* constitutes a form of postmemory.

In order to engage intellectually with the notion of trauma, the absence of collective memory and the memorialisation of slavery, colonialism, and migration in Levy's writing, in the first part of this article, I will briefly define and explore the term trauma and its historical context. Considering issues of repression, the processes of working through trauma, and the belated nature of traumatic experiences, I will examine how these ideas have served to advance certain traumatic experiences as paradigmatic at the expense of others. In the last twenty years, drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, a literary-critical fascination with the unspeakable nature of trauma and its belated effects has developed through an emphasis on the Holocaust. Thinking about traumatic experiences outside the Euro-American context, I will briefly map the critical engagement with trauma in postcolonial studies. Building on critical inquiries, especially the work of cultural critics Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha, I will highlight the complex issue of narrating collective traumas in contemporary black British literature. In particular, I will examine how the historical rift of Windrush has caused a belated sense of trauma, which demands a remembering of the past in order to make sense of the present.

Theorising Trauma: The Politics of Remembering

Since the late nineteenth century, the concept of trauma has taken on a psychological meaning, which places primary emphasis on a wound to the mind rather than the body. In this article, the term trauma is used in this sense, meaning an experience, or a series of experiences, that alters the state of mind of the victim. For J. M. Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, trauma is understood as an experience that shatters the victim's capacity to cognitively comprehend what happened; indeed, the traumatic event is repressed, and the victim is unable to represent it. Consequently, this leads to an "identity crisis" on the part of the victim. Attempting to treat the disorder, Charcot applied hypnosis, while Breuer developed his "talking cure," and Freud drew on Charcot's and Breuer's procedures to develop his own form of psychoanalysis where the patient would reconstruct the traumatic event through interpretation and free association. This is referred to as *mimesis*, where the patient through words mimics the traumatic event with the help of the psychoanalyst. Another characteristic of traumatic experience, Freud says, is the reliving of the experience in flashbacks. In this sense, trauma is both the initial blow to the mind and the conscious reliving of the experience later.⁶ These understandings of trauma—and the treatments of it—are relevant for exploring trauma in literature. However, while influential, the early clinical work of Freud and others left some areas unexamined: first, non-European experiences of trauma and, second, collective traumatic events.

In the 1990s, a new literary-critical fascination with the unspeakable nature of trauma occurred—particularly within United States-based academia—which developed into the critical field known as Trauma Studies. While Freud focused primarily on personal mental disorders, trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth have given considerable attention to the long-term impact of collectively experienced traumas such as the Holocaust.⁷ Within

Trauma Studies, the Holocaust has occupied a prominent place, prompting Andreas Huyssen to call it a "master signifier" of the "culture of memory" and critics Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman to argue that it represents "the watershed of our times," the unspeakability of which has led to a "*radical historical crisis in witnessing*."⁸ Yet, despite this supposed crisis of witnessing, Laub and Felman stress the importance of language for experiencing, recognising, and understanding trauma. This is echoed by Cathy Caruth, who argues that the processes of speaking and listening are essential for understanding the "inherent belatedness" of trauma.⁹ Drawing on Freud, Caruth claims that it is only through this belatedness that trauma is experienced in the first place. In relation to the Jewish history of displacement and the Holocaust, Caruth argues that, since the sheer scale and terror of the Holocaust leads to a crisis in witnessing, "it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time."¹⁰ This insight is illuminating for understanding contemporary black British trauma narratives, especially for Levy who explores the connections between her present location in Britain and the histories of the Caribbean under empire.

Caruth's notion of belatedness is developed further by Marianne Hirsch, whose concept of "postmemory" is instructive. Conceived with particular reference to the Holocaust and using photographs as a medium, she says that

postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their own birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated.¹¹

Postmemory is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection."¹² Hirsch's concept presumes both a linear progression and a generational difference between those who experienced the Holocaust and the children of those who survived. In the face of the possibility of historical extinction, the retelling of stories of the traumatic nature of the Holocaust establishes a modern, post-Holocaust collective identity for Jewish people. These stories are, according to Hirsch, passed on from one generation to the next in mediated form. Moreover, as Hirsch goes on to claim, "I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences."¹³ Gilroy's argument that the telling and retelling of stories of collective traumatic experiences are essential for cultural identity is particularly useful when considering the role of narrative as a means of working through the trauma of empire.

The centrality of trauma to the understanding and overcoming of slavery and colonialism has long been noted by influential thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.¹⁴ More recently, Leela Gandhi has argued that "postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past."¹⁵ In a similar vein, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy acknowledges the work of

Fanon but still asks why critics have been reluctant to consider a correspondence between the histories of blacks and Jews. Taking up the challenge, Gilroy argues that within black cultural production—and here Gilroy refers particularly to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) but also to the work of C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois—the desire to return to the traumatic history of slavery and explore it imaginatively offers “a means to restage confrontations between rational, scientific and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless and bestial African slaves.”¹⁶

Some critics have considered how we might analyse various collective traumatic experiences without resorting to a hierarchical and competitive ideology. Michael Rothberg proposes that “we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.”¹⁷ In this sense, memory is conceived as a discursive space where cultural identities are formed in dialogical interactions with others—not silencing histories, but displacing them. Looking beyond the age of decolonisation, this article brings Rothberg's insights into the realm of contemporary black British literature. A similar interest in postcolonial trauma is found in Sam Durrant's *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2004).¹⁸ While his study does not engage with trauma in the black British context, it provides a useful model for thinking about the memorialisation of collective traumatic experiences such as slavery and colonialism. Building on Gilroy's work in *The Black Atlantic*, Durrant says that postcolonial narratives are caught between two commitments: on the one hand, the recovery of the individual subject, where mourning is a process of attaining closure, and, on the other hand, the remembering of collective traumatic experiences that foster a sense of cultural identity. He argues that “postcolonial narrative enables us to work through our *relation* to history; it is not a communal act so much as an act of creating community.”¹⁹ As such, black British trauma narratives might also be said to foster a sense of community, especially in the context of diasporic identity formation.

Diasporic Trauma: Collective Memory and Cultural Identity

The narration of personal and collective traumas in black British literature is complicated by and through the history of diasporic formation. In Gilroy's view, unspeakable terrors such as slavery and colonialism are inherent to the black Atlantic diasporic experience. He argues that cultural identity hinges on “remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the tearful process of dispersal.”²⁰ Echoing Hirsch's notion of “postmemory,” Gilroy suggests in *The Black Atlantic* that the retelling and commemoration of slavery and serve a mnemonic function that organises the social memory of the group. However, a close reading of Levy's writing suggests that the transmission and sharing of memories is a more complicated process than Gilroy suggests.

If the historical rupture of the Holocaust led to a crisis in witnessing for the Jewish diaspora, the Second World War also prompted other kinds of historical ruptures that may be considered in dialogue with the Holocaust. We might consider the trauma of Partition

in South Asia and the painful processes of decolonisation throughout Africa and the Caribbean alongside the promise of migration to Britain—as symbolised by *Windrush*—and the voluntary separation from a common, shared collective identity elsewhere.²¹ According to Stuart Hall, post-war migration has led to two ways of thinking about cultural identity: first, as “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”²² His understanding relates to the shared experiences of slavery and colonialism that have been brought to light in order to establish an essential “black” identity in the name of anti-colonial and anti-racist movements, for instance. This view offers an “imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas.”²³ Second, however, Hall also offers another position that recognises that, “as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather—since history has intervened—‘what we have become.’”²⁴ By contrast to Durrant’s point that individuals seek closure, in psychoanalytical terms, Hall posits that the differences between people are crucial for understanding the traumatic character of the colonial experience. He observes:

far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which , when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.²⁵

Hall’s comments highlight the intricate connections between various histories that place the individual in the collective history: the personal life story becomes a part of the collective, shared memory.

Contemporary black British writers of Caribbean descent have increasingly engaged with the traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration in their writing. Briefly put, this has tended to take two forms: first, in various ways, Levy’s *The Long Song*, David Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1999), Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), S. I. Martin’s *Incomparable World* (1996), and Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* (1991) revisit the history of black people in Britain before the Windrush generation.²⁶ Establishing a long history of black people in Britain, these texts return to and re-imagine the traumatic history of slavery in order to maintain, invent, and renew black British identity, to echo Gilroy. Second, in *Fruit of the Lemon*—as well as in work such as Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* (1997), Lucinda Roy’s *Lady Moses* (1998), and Jenny McLeod’s *Stuck Up a Tree* (1998)—a return to the shared, collective history of the Caribbean is presented as problematic or not viable.²⁷ This, in turn, causes a crisis of identity, in the Freudian sense, which can only be resolved by re-imagining the initial event. In this context, it is useful to consider how Levy’s aesthetic oeuvre has travelled from struggling to engage with a collective black history to commemorating and retelling traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism, and migration.

Empire's Child: Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*

In the concluding pages of *Fruit of the Lemon*, the narrator, Faith, proclaims, "I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day," after returning from Jamaica where she has discovered her ancestry.²⁸ Faith's declaration, which points as much to the past as it does to the future, is crucial for understanding Levy's interest in the traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism, and migration. In the context of the black British experience, I propose that Jamaican migration to Britain in the post-war years produced a historical rift between the collective, shared memory of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, and the experience of racism in contemporary Britain. In other words, I argue that the generation of West Indians who grew up in societies shaped by the historical experiences of slavery and colonialism did not pass on those histories to their children. As a consequence, I suggest, the children who grew up in Britain at that time may have little understanding of how modern racism is rooted in the traumatic histories of slavery and colonialism.

Throughout the novel, the main character, Faith, is subject to a number of racist experiences that deny her subjectivity and agency, and place her in a collective history—to which she has no immediate access—outside of British history. In response to the fracturing of memory and history, Levy explores the links between Jamaica and Britain, especially through the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and migration, throughout her work. In what follows, I attend to the question of how the protagonist negotiates her individual experience of growing up in Britain with the collective history of slavery and colonialism in Jamaica. Moreover, I address how, through writing, Levy is able to work through trauma. Attending to these questions, this section will first introduce Levy and work. The analysis will then focus on *Fruit of the Lemon* in order to examine how a series of racist experiences eventually lead to Faith's breakdown, which initiates a process of working through trauma.

Born in London in 1956 to Jamaican parents, Levy grew up on council estates in North London. Her father served in the RAF during the Second World War and returned to Britain on the SS *Empire Windrush* in June of 1948 with her mother following shortly after. Levy worked in the Royal Opera House and the BBC costume departments before turning to writing in her mid-thirties. Inspired by African American writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and books published by feminist presses, such as Virago and The Women's Press, Levy wanted to write the novels that she, as a young black woman, had always wanted to read: "I was desperate to go into a bookshop, pick up a book and read about being Black in Britain and not having come from somewhere else, of actually being born here and having to create your own identity."²⁹

Levy's fictions about the children of Windrush and the black British experience draw on many aspects of her own coming-of-age experiences and family background. For instance, after attending a creative writing class, Levy drew on her own experience of council flats as well as the death of her father as inspiration for her first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994).³⁰ Set in the North London of the 1960s, Levy's debut novel revolves around the young Angela, who relives her childhood years as her ailing father

goes through the National Health Service. Her second novel, *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996), also set on a council estate in North London, details the adolescence of two very different sisters, Vivien and Olive, in the 1970s.³¹ In those two novels, Levy narrates her subjectivity into the national story of Britain in relation to her parents. In *Fruit of the Lemon*, however, Levy extends her aesthetic gaze beyond the present when she explores her past:

The first three [novels] I see as a baton race, passing the baton on to the next person. I suppose it was about exploring aspects of my life, although in fiction. I didn't research it, obviously; it was there in my head for those three books. [...] with *Fruit of the Lemon*, I started that backward look, when Faith goes into her family, once I had actually asked my mum about our family and gone to history books and had a look. Before I wasn't so interested in the link between Jamaica, the Caribbean and Britain. I was much more, "we're black British, we're here, and how are we going to move on?" And that's absolutely part of what I do, too, but I didn't think that looking backwards was so important, whereas now I think it is absolutely important and so fascinating.³²

From the outset, Levy challenges racism in contemporary Britain through claims of citizenship: "we're black British, we're here."³³ This assertion sheds light on Levy's exploration of her collective history and cultural identity: "how are we going to move on?"³⁴

These complex issues of postcolonial identity formation are dramatically presented through the story of Faith who experiences an identity crisis on account of experiences of racism in Britain. At school, two kinds of racism are shown to be at play, Faith, is bullied by boys who tauntingly say, "Your mum and dad came on a banana boat" (3). Faith is unable to respond to their remarks because her parents have not shared with her their stories of migration to Britain. Moreover, at an institutional level, her history lessons at school have taught her nothing about the West Indian migration to Britain in the post-war years. Subsequently, Faith is surprised when her mother remarks, "We came on a banana boat to England, your dad and me. The Jamaica Producers' banana boat" (3). Remembering the illustrations of slave ships from her history lessons, Faith pictures them "curled up on the floor of a ship, wrapped in a blanket perhaps, trying to find a comfortable spot amongst the spiky prongs of unripe bananas" (4). On one level, this wilful repression—or "postcolonial amnesia" as Gandhi calls it—happens because of the parents' desire for self-invention in Britain. On another level, her parents have repressed their history in Jamaica because it is too traumatic to be told:

My mum and dad never talked about their lives before my brother Carl and I were born, they didn't sit us in front of the fire and tell long tales of life in Jamaica—of palm trees and yams and playing by rivers. There was no 'oral tradition' in our family. Most of my childhood questions to them were answered with, 'That was a long time ago,' or 'What you want to know about that for?' And if mum ever let something slip—'You know your dad lived in a big house,'—then I was told with a wagging finger not to go blabbing it to my friends, not to repeat it to anyone. (4)

This separation from family history renders Faith unaware of her own collective cultural identity.

In less obvious ways, however, the tension between her individual cultural identity and the collective experience of the black diaspora is evident in her workplace experiences. Her employer, Olivia, remarks as follows: "Your work has an ethnicity which shines through A sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you" (31). In what is both a form of intimacy and distancing, Faith's cultural identity is described as different from that of Olivia. Unaware of this African or South American feel, Faith responds: "As I was born and bred in Haringey I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through from my slave ancestry" (31). In this case, Faith is made to bear a cultural history that bears no relation to her own experience as a British citizen or her parents' own cultural background.

In a later episode, when working for the BBC Television costume department, the complexities of her cultural identity are again exposed. Although now working for the BBC, an institution that might be seen as a guardian of British social and cultural identity, she is hampered when she wants to apply for a job as a dresser: "But they don't have black dressers" (70), says her new boss, Lorraine, and continues, "Oh sorry, ... I don't mean to be horrible but it's just what happens here" (71). This institutionalised racism is not directly aimed at Faith. In fact, Lorraine encourages Faith to apply anyway: "you'll probably be all right because everyone likes you" (71). Nonetheless, Faith is invariably interpellated as black, but not like other black people, while Lorraine identifies herself as white, but not like other white racist people. Relating to Hall's second notion of diasporic cultural identity, in these instances, Faith does not position herself in the narratives of the past. On the contrary, in the words of Hall, Faith is "positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation", which simultaneously disavow and affirm a sense of racism in Britain.³⁵

Eventually, Faith realises that her sense of a collective black diasporic cultural identity is as important to her as the intersections of gender and class. She accompanies her roommate Marion and Marion's father to a poetry reading, which includes a presentation by a black poet at the end of the evening. When Faith sees him, she becomes aware of her own black cultural identity:

Suddenly, as I looked up at this black poet I became aware that the poet and me were the only black people in the room. I looked around again—it was now a room of white people.

I became nervous waiting for the poet to start. I was thinking, 'Please be good, please.' The poet became my dad, my brother, he was the unknown black faces in our photo album, he was the old man on the bus who called by sister, the man in the bank with the strong Trinidadian accent who could not make him understood. He was every black man—ever. (92)

Faith internalises this nervous condition of black people, so when Marion's father comments happily on the poet leaving the stage, Faith realises that his racist remarks are just as much aimed at her as they are at the black poet. Suppressing the issue of race,

Marion excuses her father's remarks, suggesting that it is "a cultural thing" (93). Marion invokes her working-class background, goes into a Marxist and feminist rant. She assures Faith: "all racism would be swept away after the revolution. As a feminist we were all sisters" (94). Marion continues:

These things can be so easily internalised and I wouldn't want you to. I mean as a woman in this society I think I know how you must feel. I can understand that you might be angry by what you heard in my house today, for example. It's going to take time but the working classes are already forming allegiances with a lot of black organisations... (94)

Realising that racism cuts across gender and class, Faith finally shouts: "Oh shut up Marion!" (94).

Awakening to the sense of a collective black diasporic cultural identity, based on the shared, common experiences of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, Faith confronts those intricate connections between Britain and Jamaica. When she visits the countryside with her friend Simon, they go to a pub where they meet a man, Andrew Bunyan, who asks Faith:

'And whereabouts are you from, Faith?'

'London,' I said.

The man laughed a little. 'I meant more what country are you from?' I didn't bother to say I was born in England, that I was English, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear.

'My parents are from Jamaica.'

'Well, you see, I thought that,' he began. 'As soon as you walked in I thought I bet she is from Jamaica.'

'Just my parents are,' I added but he went on. (130)

When Bunyan tells her about going to Jamaica and meeting a man who shared his last name, Faith retorts: "Well, the thing is, that would have been his slave name, you see Your family probably owned his family once" (131). In this instance, Levy demonstrates that the history of slavery should not be "allocated exclusively to the victims"—in Gilroy's words—but acknowledged and confronted by the white British as well.

Levy engages with racism in 1970s Britain. Faith and her friend Simon witness a racist attack on a black woman who works in a bookshop that carries gay and lesbian and black and "Third World" fiction. Adding to the shock of the experience and telling of the period, the police brush off the attack: "They say they're National Front but they're not, they're just a bunch of thugs" (154). When Simon protests, the police officers blame the bookshop for bringing this onto themselves: "We've told them not to have people in their shop on their own. I mean, they're just asking for trouble" (154). In the wake of the assault, two different stories emerge: indicating that the event shatters her capacity to comprehend fully what has happened on a cognitive level, Faith is unable to remember significant parts of the assault. By contrast, Simon appropriates the event and relates the story to their roommates:

The story sounded different when Simon retold it. It gained more menace with hindsight. It was now a fact that three men walked into a bookshop in daylight and hit someone over the head with a blunt instrument because they didn't like them. It was real. Not something skipped over in the local paper or tutted about at the dinner table (155).

Racial difference and racism emerge as fundamental themes as Faith and her friends work through the traumatic event. Crucially, Faith interrupts Simon's story twice to remind her friends that "the woman that was struck on the head was black like me. And both times Simon and Mick had looked at me and nodded" (156). Consequently, unable to share the experience in the company of her white friends, she resolves, "What it all comes down to in the end is black against white. It was simple. It was so simple" (159). Hoping to relate the story to her parents, Faith returns to her parents: they would understand how she felt - black on the outside and cowardly custard-yellow on the inside" (158). However, she is not met by an understanding family at her home. Instead, she is surprised to meet another family: her brother's 'black' girlfriend, Ruth, has come with her 'white family' members to pay a visit. This episode demonstrates how the histories of Britain and its colonies are intertwined, and the impossibility of constructing essential white or black family histories. Realising that family narratives constructed along racial lines are inadequate, Faith's perception of the world crumbles: "I couldn't look into [Ruth's] eyes. It was simple. I felt dizzy. It was so simple. I ran" (160). The episode suggests that, as she was hoping to return to the comfort of a collective black history through her parents, such perception of an essential "black" collective cultural identity is also untenable. Indeed, it is only through an understanding of the hybrid nature of Jamaica that Faith can come to terms with her own place in that history.

Throughout the first part of the novel, Faith undergoes a transformation that eventually leads to her breakdown. Growing up in 1960s and 1970s Britain, she has no desire for a homeland elsewhere and her experience of diaspora is different from that of her parents. Faith does not have a sense of a black diasporic cultural identity that hinges on the memory of the shared, collective experience of slavery and colonialism. Instead, she is positioned within the dominant regimes of representation that makes her see herself as other. Subject to these racist experiences, she gradually awakens to a sense of essential "black" collective identity, but Levy shows that this position is untenable too. In other words, these racist experiences cause a wound to the mind that she—at the time—is unable to register or, indeed, represent. This leads to a "crisis of identity" which she attempts to resolve by denying her black cultural identity altogether:

I got into bed. But as my eyes adjusted to the dark I could see my reflection in the wardrobe mirror. A black girl lying in a bed. I covered the mirror with a bath towel. I didn't want to be black any more. I just wanted to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. *Voila!* I was no longer black (160).

Following her breakdown, Faith's mother encourages her to go to Jamaica because, as she says, "Child, everyone should know where they come from" (162). In the second part of the novel, Levy challenges those dominant regimes of representation that position her outside British history and shows the intricate connections between British and Jamaica.

Through the interweaving of histories, Levy's novel can be seen as enabling the processing of working through trauma.

Considering the narratological part—the way Levy memorialises the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and migration—the structure of the novel is significant. In the absence of memories passed on from her parents, Faith's experience of diaspora is not dominated by narratives that preceded her birth. Those narratives, however, are related to her in Jamaica by family members. As she has little knowledge of her family history, upon arrival in Jamaica, Faith's family tree is limited to herself, her brother and her parents. Her experience of growing up in Britain contrasts with her experience of arriving in Jamaica: "everything was a little familiar but not quite. Like a dream. Culture shock is how the feeling is described" (169). If, in Britain, Faith's sense of belonging hinged on her being black, then, in Jamaica, Levy shows that being black does not necessarily mean that she is at home there. Indeed, the notion of belonging hinges also on the process of narrating subjectivity into the past. Moreover, for Faith, a sense of belonging is linked to the need to be accepted by indigenous Jamaicans, especially family members. Hence, Faith's sense of belonging in Jamaica occurs through the narration of her family history by family members. In Jamaica, Faith gains a sense of her family history through the "oral tradition," a tradition which has been silenced or forgotten by her family in England. Her family in Jamaica tells stories by family members *of* family members: "Coral's Story told to me by Coral," "Wade's Story told to me by Violet," and "Cecelia's Story told to me by Vincent" are among the many examples. These narratives trace trajectories to the black diasporic community of Harlem, New York City, through the history of skilled Jamaican labourers who worked on the construction of the Panama Canal, and to ancestors and family members in Cuba and Scotland. She learns of her slave ancestry while also discovering a story of a plantation owner from England and learning about relations to others of Scottish, Arawak, and Indian descent. This rich family history attests to the hybrid and transnational nature of Jamaican identity. The telling and retelling of these family stories serve as nodal points in the collective socio-cultural identity of Jamaica. Importantly, these personal stories highlight differences within a seemingly coherent black experience in Jamaica. As memories of her past are revealed, Faith forges a connection with her shared, collective Jamaican cultural identity. Yet, she remains aware of her English cultural identity as a black British subject, which forms one branch of a wider narrative web.

Before she went to Jamaica, Faith believed that her history began when her parents arrived in Britain on a banana boat: "I thought that my history started when the ship carrying my parents sailed from Jamaica and docked in England on Guy Fawkes' night" (325). In Jamaica, however, she is introduced to a shared history of slavery, colonialism, and diasporic identity, which includes black Jamaican relatives in the United States as well as Jewish and white English ancestors. In short, she gains a sense of a wider history, which was kept from her because the memory of it was too traumatic to pass on. Faith observes:

The country where I live, among people so unaware of our shared past that all they would see if they were staring at my aunt would be a black woman acting silly.

Let those bully boys walk behind me in the playground. Let them tell me, 'You're a darkie. Faith's a darkie.' I am the granddaughter of Grace and William Campbell. I am the great-grandchild of Cecelia Hilton. I am descended from Katherine whose mother was a slave. I am the cousin of Afria. I am the niece of Coral Thompson and the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson. Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day (326-7).

This testimonial, taken from the final pages of the novel, bears witness to Faith's transformation in Jamaica. She asserts a collective, shared history of slavery, colonialism, and migration among all Britons, black and white alike. Having discovered a collective history, Faith reclaims a wider history, acknowledging the hybrid nature of Jamaica. In doing so, she is able to confront and overcome the trauma of modern racism in Britain.

Passing On Memories: *Small Island* and *The Long Song*

The aesthetics of remembering and narrating traumatic collective experiences, which also surface in *Small Island* and *The Long Song*, might be analysed in the light of Hirsch's notion of postmemory. Where Hirsch places emphasis on the role of the photograph, arguing that the ghostly traces of family members provide a mode of passing on memories of collective traumatic experiences, I want to focus on the role of oral storytelling, which has been essential to the creation of cultural identity and the passing on of memories in West Indian societies. Without setting up a hierarchical relationship between photography and literature or orality and literacy, I want to think further about but how Levy memorialises collective traumatic events in her writing and, indeed, how literature functions as a mode of passing on memories. This is particularly pertinent when considering the inherent belatedness and impossibility of representing trauma.

Following on from *Fruit of the Lemon*, where family members tell stories of other family members to Faith, Levy employs a non-linear narrative structure and four narrators in *Small Island* to tell the story. In doing this, she addresses the historical rupture of the Windrush—symbolised in the novel by its division into two sections entitled "Before" and "1948"—and complicates the notion that the history of migration belongs only to those who migrated. Bringing together the histories of two Jamaicans (Gilbert Joseph and Hortense Roberts) and two white Britons (Queenie and Bernard Bligh), Levy confronts the silences that often accompanied West Indian migration to Britain. Moreover, however, this narratological strategy equally prompts Britain's white English population to reassess the history of post-war national identity. Each of these characters has a distinct voice and a personal story to tell: the individual tales are both intricately connected and interdependent. Specifically, I will focus on how each narrator experiences and represents three specific issues: colonialism, the Second World War, and migration.

Colonialism impacts each of the characters in different ways. For Hortense Roberts, the colonial education and her light skin—"the colour of warm honey" (38)—has instilled

in her a particular sense of class identity. She sees herself as superior to other West Indians: "My recitation of 'Ode to a Nightingale' had earned me a merit star and the honour of ringing the school bell for a week" (16-17). Trained as a school teacher, she yearns to migrate to England, partly because she believes that her refined and well-behaved manners are typically English. She has internalised colonial values, viewing herself as superior to other, darker-skinned West Indians. For Gilbert, colonialism entails an immense sense of feeling British. His colonial education has taught him to revere the Mother Country: "this relation is so dear a kin that she is known as Mother" (139). This intimate bond inspires him to join the Royal Air Force when the War breaks out. Through their colonial education, both have attained sense of Britishness that does not correspond with reality.

Giving voice to Queenie and Bernard, both of whom are white English subjects, Levy depicts life in Britain before the War. The novel is prefaced by the young Queenie's visit to the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, where she encounters a black man for the first time. This meeting instils in her a curiosity and open-mindedness towards black people. In contrast to Hortense, Queenie is barred from education by her father who wants her to work on his farm. Seeking to escape life on a farm, she seizes the opportunity to work in her aunt Dorothy's sweet shop in London where she meets Bernard Bligh. Although she dislikes him from the outset, she is forced to marry him after her aunt dies. A product of an imperialist upbringing, he remains a deeply racist character throughout the novel. However, in giving voice to him, Levy implies that this racism stems from his colonial education.

Bernard's experience of violence in post-Partition India (1947) illuminates how the Second World War was linked to the Partition of India. In many ways, the Second World War and the Partition of India precipitated the dismantling of the British Empire and the instantiation of the British Nationality Act of 1948, which conferred British citizenship to its colonial subjects. Upon his return to Jamaica after the War, Gilbert finds that there are few opportunities for him there. Now a British citizen, he decides to return to Britain, but needs money. Entering a marriage of convenience—much like Queenie and Bernard—Hortense lends him money so he can travel to England on the *Windrush* and set up a home for them so she can join him six months later. Faced with racism, Gilbert struggles to find both a job and proper accommodation; he finally calls on Queenie, who takes him in as a lodger. As Hortense joins him later and Bernard returns unexpectedly from India, their stories become inextricably entangled. As an aesthetic exercise in narrating the collective experience of migration to Britain, Levy's strategy of employing four narrators complicates the notion that *Windrush*—as a collective experience and a historical rupture—belongs only to Britain's black community. Instead, in re-imagining and reliving the event through four distinct narrators, *Windrush* is imaginatively experienced anew as central to British history. In this sense, *Small Island*, a carefully crafted work of literature, functions as postmemory in itself.

Set entirely in the nineteenth century, Levy's most recent novel, *The Long Song*, adopts a different narratological strategy to tell the story of slavery in Jamaica in the years around Emancipation. The impetus behind Levy's motivation for writing the novel—

"telling her story"—speaks about the silence surrounding Britain's history of slavery in Jamaica. Drawing on a wealth of archival material, personal testimonies by plantation owners, and slave narratives, Levy gives voice to the people who endured slavery. "Writing fiction", she says, "is a way of putting back the voices that were left out."³⁶ In exploring histories that she had only hinted at in *Fruit of the Lemon*, Levy delves deeper into the beginnings of the intricately connected histories of Britain and Jamaica. Yet, considering the silences and gaps in history, how can the story of slavery, as experienced by a slave, be passed on?

Employing the strategy of the unreliable, reluctant narrator, the novel is told by July to her son Thomas in the late nineteenth century. Resembling the scene of Freudian psychoanalysis, where the patient reconstructs the traumatic event through interpretation and free association. Playing with the boundaries of narrator and protagonist, the story of July is told in the third person, and it is not until later it is revealed that the narrator and the protagonist are one and the same. In several instances, the son points out the inaccuracies in his mother's story. Psychoanalytic critics and trauma theorists often note that the original traumatic event cannot be entirely reconstituted, thus posing issues with respect to representation, Levy's responds to the crisis of representation by offering a creatively re-imagined history, which constantly calls attention to issues of representation in highly self-conscious ways. From the outset, Levy establishes a complicated relationship between the main character, July, the narrator, her son Thomas, and the reader that bears on the difficulty of narrating trauma. The tale takes the form of a framed narrative: set within *The Long Song*, there is another book, told by Thomas. On the inside cover of the novel, Thomas addresses the reader of the book (his book, the story he is told by his mother) and explains that she is passing on those stories to her son so that he can put them into writing: "Her intention was that, once knowing the tale, I would then, at some other date, convey its narrative to my own daughters" (1). The metafictional transcription of an oral narrative also provides a forum for passing on memories. This duplex narrative strategy enables Levy to give voice to those who have not been heard in dominant narratives of that era. Moreover, Levy reclaims the story of everyday life in Jamaica during the colonial era, offering a history that supplements and complicates our understanding of the horrors of slavery.

While the notion of postmemory is at play in the novel, the aesthetics of *The Long Song* also serve to confront historical silences and challenge dominant histories. The telling and re-telling of the story of slavery, as Gilroy says, serve to reclaim a wider and more complicated sense of the history of colonialism. However, initiating the difficult process of re-telling this complex history in *Fruit of the Lemon*, and continuing in both *Small Island* and *The Long Song*, Levy extends these insights and shows that the collective experiences of slavery, colonialism, and migration should be conceived as part of a more expansive history of Britain. As Levy has become increasingly interested in exploring and narrating the complexities of Britain's colonial past, her work continues to confront the silences of the past. As such, by working through the traumatic narratives of the past, her aesthetic oeuvre serves as a communal act of recovery for fostering a wider sense of community in modern-day Britain.

Endnotes

- 1 Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*. London: Headline Review, 1999; Andrea Levy, *Small Island*. London: Headline Review, 2004; Andrea Levy, *The Long Song*. London: Headline Review, 2010.
- 2 Andrea Levy, "The Writing of *The Long Song*": www.andrealevy.co.uk [accessed 5 February 2011].
- 3 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997, 22.
- 4 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993, 198.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 22
- 6 For more on Charcot and traumatic hysteria, see Mark S. Micale, "Charcot and le névroses traumatiques: Scientific and Historical Reflections," *Revue Neurologique* 150 (1994): 498-505. For Breuer's and Freud's psychoanalytical models, see Sigmund Freud, Josef Breuer, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, James Strachey, and Alan Walker Tyson, *Studies on Hysteria*. By Josef Breuer and S. Freud; Translated under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud, Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. [with a Portrait.], *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 2. London: Hogarth Press, 1955. See also Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, James Strachey, and Alan Walker Tyson, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology, and Other Works*. Translated under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud, Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 18. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 12-23.
- 7 See the special issues of *American Imago*, 48.1-2 (1991); *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, eds. New York; London: Routledge, 1992; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- 8 Andreas Huyssen, "Trauma and Memory: A New Imaginary of Temporality," *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*. Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy, eds. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 16; Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, xiv, 201, italics in original.
- 9 Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," *American Imago* 48.1-2 (1991): 10.
- 10 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 17.
- 11 Hirsch, 22.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2007 (1952); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003 (1978). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon engages in a critical dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Anti-Semite and Jew" (New York: Schocken Books, 1948 [1946]), making valuable comparisons between the history of the Jews and the history of black people. His anti-colonial manifesto, however, is invested in the specific historical context of liberation struggles in the Caribbean and Africa. It evokes the traumatic experiences of slavery and colonialism in order to unite black people in their struggles for independence. As such, there is a specific strategic purpose to Fanon's inquiry.

- In *Orientalism*, widely considered the founding text of Postcolonial Studies, Edward Said discusses the discourses shaping imperialism and observes that "anti-Semitism and [...] Orientalism resemble each other very closely" (27-28).
- 15 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, 4.
 - 16 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 220.
 - 17 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 3.
 - 18 Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. See also Mairi Neeves, "The Negotiation of Trauma in Postcolonial Culture" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2009); Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy's edited collection, *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 and the recent special issue of *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008), edited by Stef Craps and Gert Buelens. These studies and collections seek to promote closer connections between the critical fields of Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Studies.
 - 19 Durrant, 11.
 - 20 Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures, and the Allure of Race*. London: Allen Lane, 2000, 124.
 - 21 For more on the trauma of Partition, see for example, Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
 - 22 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford, ed., London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, 223.
 - 23 Ibid., 224.
 - 24 Ibid., 225.
 - 25 Ibid., 225.
 - 26 David Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1999; Fred D'Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1997; S. I. Martin, *Incomparable World*. London: Quartet, 1996; Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge*. London: Bloomsbury, 1991.
 - 27 Bernardine Evaristo, *Lara*. Speldhurst: Angela Royal, 1997; Lucinda Roy, *Lady Moses: A Novel*. London: Virago, 1998; Jenny McLeod, *Stuck Up a Tree*. London: Virago, 1998.
 - 28 Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*, 327.
 - 29 Kesewa Hennessy, "A Girl from Nowhere," *Voice* 6 August 1996, 24.
 - 30 Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. London: Headline Review, 1994.
 - 31 Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere*. London: Headline Review, 1996.
 - 32 Susan Alice Fischer, "Andrea Levy in Conversation with Susan Alice Fischer," *Changing English* 12 (2005): 362.
 - 33 Ibid.
 - 34 Ibid.
 - 35 Hall, 225.
 - 36 Levy, "The Writing of *The Long Song*."

Identity as Cultural Production in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

Alicia E. Ellis

Windrush migration sparked new encounters among peoples as well as debates about citizenship, access to public spaces, housing, and employment, transforming British society and culture in the process.¹ Andrea Levy's work responds to the literary and historical genealogies of exile and Windrush migration, but she frequently challenges accepted accounts of the socio-historical processes of identity (re)formation in Britain and thus also contests prevailing accounts of Britishness. As I will demonstrate, Levy represents Windrush migrants and their descendants, including herself, as *epigones*, a term referring to followers or "those who are born after." *Epigones* also refers to "that which comes after." I take this meaning of the term to Windrush as an historical event that not only marks the rise of multicultural Britain (at least, in the popular imaginary) but also follows a long history of migrations to Britain, especially on the part of Afro-Caribbean and other colonial subjects, and encounters on the island among peoples from different places. *Small Island* brings together four intersecting stories, including those of Queenie, a white British woman; Bernard, Queenie's husband, Gilbert, a black Jamaican migrant; and Hortense, the wife of Gilbert, an Afro-Caribbean woman who follows her husband to Britain. Through the space of writing, multiple identities converge. Levy's work serves as an act of reconstruction, a belated intervention, which is both sequel (*epigones*) and prologue to the story of the Windrush Generation. As I will show, *Small Island* presents multiple, often contesting, representations of a fraught historical moment of racial/ethnic and gender conflicts, but at the same time the discourse functions as a space of potential reconciliation among various competing views.

Andrea Levy's *Small Island*² moves back and forth between 1924 and 1948 and across national borders and cultural moments, including the Empire Exhibition of 1924 at Wembley³; London immediately before the outbreak of World War II; Jamaica during the war years; the England and America of the Jamaican airmen during the war; and Calcutta after VJ Day (Victory over Japan). In this article, I argue that Levy's "Prologue" in *Small Island* foregrounds many of the novel's central concerns about space, race, libidinal impulses, and language. At the Empire Exhibition, as I will show, Queenie's cultural, ethnic, and political imagination are inscribed through an imagined encounter with Africa and a real encounter with a man that Queenie perceives as African. These moments of contact make a lasting impression on Queenie as a child and have a profound impact on how she interprets difference as an adult. This defining event in the life of Queenie frames both her subjectivity and identity as an adult in the aftermath of World War II. The brief but significant interaction in the "Prologue" not only structures Queenie's personal narrative but also tells part of a greater story of historical encounters in Britain and throughout empire. Levy's novel is "essentially an essay about the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas."⁴ Significantly, Levy begins her novelistic representation of the

processes of hybridisation in Britain with an act of misreading on the part of the young Queenie. I argue that a close reading of this scene can help to elucidate the ways in which the novel renders problematic the mythologised history of Windrush, a moment seen as symbolic of the rise of multicultural, multiracial Britain. I will begin by offering an account of Levy's approach to Windrush history and then turn to a closer reading of the "Prologue" in *Small Island*, showing that it is part of a wider strategic representation of the British colonial/postcolonial imaginary.

Pre-/Post-Windrush Contexts

Levy's *Small Island* focuses on the period before and after World War II (1939-1945) when men and women from the Caribbean volunteered for all branches of the British armed services with the majority of those Caribbeans serving in the Royal Air Force.⁵ In 1948, an advertisement in a Jamaican newspaper offering inexpensive transport on the ship to anyone who wanted to come and work in the UK, lured many to the 'Mother Country.' At that time, there were no immigration restrictions for citizens from one part of the British Empire moving to another part since Britain's 1948 Nationality Act⁶ gave UK citizenship to people living in her colonies, including the West Indies. The arrival of MV *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Dock in London on 22 June 1948, with its 492 West Indian passengers, is regarded as a landmark event in British post-war history, marking the beginning of immigration to Britain from Commonwealth countries and colonies.⁷ Many of those on board had been posted to Britain during the war and were promised that jobs would be waiting for them, and some looked forward to joining (or rejoining) the Royal Armed Forces (RAF). Others were just curious to see the 'Mother Country.'

As a second-generation migrant, born in Britain, Levy is firmly entrenched in the 'we' of British identity. Yet, her sense of identity has also been shaped by her family's migrant history from Jamaica to Britain during the Windrush years. Irene Pérez Fernández, observes that Levy's "dual cultural heritage becomes the mediating lens by which she understands and negotiates her writing."⁸ We can see evidence of this in Levy's article in *The Guardian* (2000), which offers an account of her feelings about Windrush migration and British identity:

Identity! Sometimes it makes my head hurt - sometimes my heart. So what am I? Where do I fit into Britain, 2000 and beyond?

My dad came to this country in 1948, on the Empire Windrush ship. He was one of the pioneers. One of the 492 people who looked around the old British Empire colony of Jamaica, saw that there were no jobs, no prospects, and decided to chance his arm in the Mother Country. [...]

I don't know what my dad's aspirations were when he arrived in Britain - he certainly didn't realise that he was making history at the time. But I do know that, when he boarded the ship, he knew himself to be a British citizen. He travelled on a British passport. Britain was the country that all Jamaican children learned about at school. They sang God Save The King and Rule Britannia. They believed Britain was a green and pleasant land - if not the centre of the world, then certainly the centre of a great

and important Empire that spanned the globe, linking all sorts of countries into a family of nations. Far from the idea that he was travelling to a foreign place, he was travelling to the centre of his country, and as such he would slip-in and fit-in immediately. Jamaica, he thought, was just Britain in the sun. [...]

When you look at family trees—anybody's family tree, people's individual histories, not the winner-takes-all history of nations—the question of identity becomes very complicated. It would be nice and simple if we were all pure...Any history book will show that England has never been an exclusive club, but rather a hybrid nation. The effects of the British Empire were personal as well as political. And as the sun has finally set on the Empire, we are now having to face up to all of these realities.⁹

Levy's testimony about her father's arrival places emphasis on hybridity, filiation, and the notion of empire as a "family of nations." Through this account of her father's experience, Levy asserts a generational connection that aligns her own biography with that of her parents who were 'formed' as subjects under the direct influence of immigration, exile, and disillusion. Her father and mother emerge as pioneering figures, among the first post-war immigrants whose presence prompted the introduction of hyphenated language to describe identity and express a sense of plurality (examples include words such as multi-cultural, multi-racial or multi-cultural-ism). This essay helps to set the stage for my reading of *Small Island* as a novel that addresses issues of cultural transformation, shaped by migration histories and dialogues between past and present.

Small Island is structured around four competing personal narratives—each laying claim to historical truth—and temporal shifts through space and time. Levy's novel takes place during two time periods: "Before," a nebulous period of time before World War II, and "1948," a year that marked the advent of multiple ethnic immigrations to Great Britain from her current and former colonies. The novelistic discourse traverses multiple geographic locations, including Jamaica, the racially segregated United States, India, and London. This accumulative and overlapping approach to time and space defies a singular articulation of the experience of migration and empire while suggesting instead a plurality of moments, locations, and perspectives. The form of the novel, with its shifting perspectives, does not privilege a particular subject position over another. The novel tells the story of interracial encounters and brings together disparate perspectives—voiced by black and white characters—but it resists the tendency to suggest a seamless collective. Instead, this structuring device calls attention to the gaps, fissures, and differences that underpin race thinking. Identity is seen as a provisional and negotiated construct, shaped by the pressure of political necessity, an ever-changing product of cultural encounters. Reflective of the instabilities of identity formation, Levy's novel moves through space, occupies contested locations, and stands in the intervals.¹⁰

At the same time, we can also see a certain unifying tendency. The structure of here-and-there and past-and-present links the experiences of black people in London and Jamaica, calling attention to the wider Black Atlantic experience. In the words of Paul Gilroy, Levy's *Small Island* explores "[...] the special relationships between 'race,' culture, nationality, and ethnicity which have a bearing on the histories and political cultures of

Britain's black citizens.” (3). Levy complicates our understanding of the Windrush era as a turning point in British cultural history by calling attention to the pre-history of Windrush. Thus, like David Dabydeen's *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (1994/2002), to offer an example, her work foregrounds a long history of black presence in Britain, which is also attested to in histories of Britain¹¹ and its artistic production.¹² We might read Levy's work alongside these other histories of black British identity. The structure of the narrative, with its shifting voices and time periods (before and after), indicates that her narrative seeks deliberately to complicate the prevailing approach to Windrush history as a moment of rupture. Instead, Levy reclaims a pre-history of discourses and events that inform and even shape Windrush and post-Windrush encounters.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* presents a framework through which to examine the formation of political and philosophical paradigms based on the Atlantic as a place of transit and exchange. In the opening chapter, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,” Gilroy attempts to find new ways to talk about culture and identity, which are relational rather than hierarchical. Gilroy's opening epigraphs in *The Black Atlantic*¹³ call attention to the plural and hybrid processes of intercultural and transnational meaning-making that are embryonic testimonies of movement, loss, travel and relocation. In this context, Gilroy's citation of Friedrich Nietzsche is especially noteworthy:

We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us...Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom—and there is no longer any ‘land.’¹⁴

This excerpt from *The Gay Science* (1882) is profoundly emblematic of the modern experience of mobility: ‘home’ no longer exists as a place to which one might readily return.

The Black Atlantic shows that cultural and national identities are shaped through the interplay among language, knowledge, and homelessness. Gilroy writes of his own study:

This book addresses one small area in the grand consequence of this historical conjunction—the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world. This chapter is therefore rooted in and routed through the special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once.¹⁵

Gilroy calls attention to the notion of an “unfinished identity,” one which is forced into poly-vocal and poly-visual postures, leading to a form of double consciousness that is both black and European.¹⁶ He highlights the role of writing as a means to intervene, negotiate, and contest culture, especially when language itself is bound up with nationality and national belonging.¹⁷ Likewise, Levy's *Small Island* depicts the struggles of four protagonists whose discourses share a similar mark of anxiety in the form of a distressed language that faces two ways at once, reaching back into the past to write the

way forward. Through highly self-conscious uses of language, Levy calls attention to the unfinished and ongoing process of identity formation in Britain.

Reading the “Prologue”

In *Small Island*, the narrative perspective moves back and forth—across time and geographical locations—and presents intersecting historical trajectories and cultural knowledge. Following the “Prologue,” the cyclical repetition of section headers (the names of the main characters), marked by temporal signifiers (“Before” and “1948”), creates a sense of rhythm or cadence, suggesting unity through repetition and return. While the term “1948” calls attention to the moment of Windrush, the term “Before” elicits a threshold of temporal elusiveness, a pre-history. The section titles of the work are chronological and symmetrical: the “Before” / “1948” structure is repeated four times. Within each section, the chapter title reflects the shifts in narrative voicing as the point-of-view switches from one character to another:

Prologue: Queenie
 1948: Hortense; Gilbert
 Before: Hortense; Hortense; Hortense; Hortense; Hortense; Hortense
 1948: Queenie; Hortense
 Before: Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert; Gilbert;
 Gilbert
 1948: Hortense; Gilbert; Hortense
 Before: Queenie; Queenie; Queenie; Queenie; Queenie; Queenie;
 Queenie
 1948: Gilbert; Hortense; Gilbert; Hortense; Queenie
 Before: Bernard; Bernard; Bernard; Bernard; Bernard; Bernard; Bernard;
 Bernard; Bernard; Bernard; Bernard
 1948: Bernard; Queenie; Bernard; Bernard; Hortense; Gilbert; Bernard;
 Hortense; Gilbert; Queenie; Gilbert; Bernard; Queenie; Hortense

As we can see from this structural outline of the novel, Levy documents the reconstruction of the “enigma of arrival,” to borrow a term from V. S. Naipaul, in relational terms: Hortense, Queenie, Gilbert, and Bernard function as agents in social and historical roles that compete with and supplement the authorial voice. Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write and to represent the past in fiction and in history is to open it up to the present.¹⁸ In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* Linda Hutcheon uses the term “historiographic metafiction” to refer to texts that are highly self-reflexive, which offer a pluralistic interpretation of the past.¹⁹ Hutcheon posits that the interaction between history and literature is at the very core of questions of subjectivity and identity. Her postmodernist theory of historiography and literature sheds light on our reading of Levy’s work, which questions the relationship between storytelling and history. *Small Island* presents a multi-perspectival network of interrelated and fictionalised testimonial accounts, brought together through the discourse as a space of encounters, which calls attention to various, sometimes conflicting, views about Britain’s multicultural formation.

While Levy's narrative style is indebted to the late nineteenth-century realist novel, its postcolonial and postmodern techniques of shifting narration undermine an omniscient rendering of history.²⁰ Notably, the multi-vocal composition of the novel reflects Levy's careful response to and reformulation of literary influences from the Windrush era, such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954). Even if we acknowledge that Levy's novel follows the conventions of social-literary realism, which tend to represent chronology and location as fundamental for an understanding of origins, the text persistently defies linearity.²¹ In the "Prologue" and elsewhere, the historical novel's reliance on chronology and the documentation of 'known' facts are undermined by Levy's clever undercutting of narrative expectations. The prologue as a literary device derives from the Greek *prologos*—*pro* (before) and *logos* (speech)—and functions as an explanatory first 'act.'²² I want to argue that Queenie's prologue serves as a double introduction because it reflects Queenie's perspective as a child, but the account is also saturated by the adult's retrospective perspective. Through this slippery sense of temporality, looking forward and backward at the same time, Levy's "Prologue" establishes a dualistic perspective concerning Queenie as well as the social and political milieu of the novel: "Before" and "1948."

The question of empire and spatial (dis)location comes to the foreground in the neo-realistic account of Queenie's trip to Africa, which suggests that Queenie, our first speaker, does not know where she is. Her disordered perspective is evident in this passage:

I thought I'd been to Africa. Told all my class I had. Early Bird, our teacher, stood me in front of the British flag—she would let no one call it the common Union Jack: 'It's the flag of Empire not a musical turn.' And I stood there as bold as brass and said, 'I went to Africa when it came to Wembley.' It was then that Early Bird informed me that Africa was a country. 'You're not usually a silly girl, Queenie Buxton,' she went on, 'but you did not go to Africa, you merely went to the British Empire Exhibition, as thousands of others did.'²³

This first paragraph's performative structure is remarkable. As readers, we enter the text at the moment of retrospection when Queenie reflects on her mistake in thinking that she had actually visited Africa when, in fact, she attended the British Empire Exhibition. Queenie's confession of her error is central to the articulation of a new understanding of the past, reinscribed through retrospection. This backward glance, which is framed by the word "prologue," is further framed by her account of the experience in the classroom. Her testimony and the correction by her teacher, Early Bird, call attention to Queenie's negotiation of time, space, and naming. The meaning of words and names is shown to be shifting and unstable. The failure to name things correctly or make distinctions is the primary feature of the novel's opening conceit. Queenie calls her teacher "Early Bird," but her name is actually Miss Earl.²⁴ Queenie does not acknowledge, in this moment, that "Early Bird" is a partial idiomatic construction: "The early bird catches the worm." The figurative nature of this passage with its idiomatic and metonymic features overwhelms and inhibits literal meanings, calling attention to the problematic construction of 'reality' through language.

Error or misunderstanding is built into the very structure of the opening episode. As we have seen, through idiomatic language, the teacher has been presented as a figure of speech: she is named Early Bird. This is somewhat ironic given the teacher's objection to the certain uses of rhetorical and colloquial language. For instance, Early Bird argues that the term "Union Jack" should not be used to refer to the British flag. Instead, she insists that the term "Union Jack" refers to a song. Ironically, her insistence on the meaning of the term entails another kind of rhetorical substitution: the British flag becomes a metonym for "the flag of empire." Through her allusions to the Union Jack, Levy's novel asks us to consider the interplay between rhetorical, literal, and colloquial uses of language to refer to nation and empire. Even as Levy highlights the contested, pluralistic understanding of meaning through the English language—the language of empire—she leads the reader through several (broken) chains of signification: linking the flag and the song, the country of Africa and Wembley Stadium, and the British Empire Exhibition with the wider territory of the British Empire. Thus, the opening to the novel denies the possibility of referential meaning through signs that are emblematic of the British Empire. The contiguity of associations, based on substitutions, figurative language, and rhetorical strategies, all serve to create a dualistic cultural discourse that affirms certain 'truths' even as it falters in the linguistic realm.

Elsewhere, the inability to understand the meaning of events is also seen as symptomatic of imperial ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. For example, Bernard does not seem to comprehend fully his collusion in the violent upholding of empire while serving in India near the end of the war and after the war had officially ended. He observes: "I'd not wanted a war. None of us had. And I never wanted to be out in India. But (I admit) it put a rod in the back and spring in the step of this middle-aged bank clerk who'd thought his life was spent...now I was part of a team."²⁵ Interestingly, while in Calcutta, Bernard uses the word "chocolate"²⁶ to describe the browning of his skin. "Would Queenie have recognised her husband now? Molten and brown as a warm bar of chocolate."²⁷ These direct references to chocolate are crucial points of visibility in *Small Island*. This moment, when Bernard perceives himself as dark-skinned and perhaps unrecognisable, reminds the reader of Queenie's encounter with this sweet ration as a child at the Empire Exhibition: "That's when we got lost in Africa. We wandered in, following the syrupy-brown smell of chocolate."²⁸ The deeper significance of chocolate for Queenie transforms Bernard's 'innocent' question into the refrain of the central problem of the text: knowledge formation, language, and identity. Similarly, Queenie, as will be seen, is unable to connect her early childhood experiences to her adult erotic interests. In this opening paragraph, which Levy writes with such virtuosity, an entire world, a host of experiences and understanding, is shown to be founded on a crumbling linguistic and cultural edifice. The role of the prologue is to offer background; the very first page of Levy's novel, a 'Prologue,' presents the reader with information that is both partial and erroneous. Thus, Hutcheon's problematisation of historical knowledge and narrative genres is embodied in the very opening to *Small Island*.

The Butchers' Association trip allows Queenie to take an imaginary journey to Africa, a defining moment in her early life, which becomes the only *real* space that exists for

Queenie: this misinterpreted and confused encounter is a formative event, which shapes her understanding of race, nation, empire, and the exotic. The trip and her encounter with the African man orders her reality, 'enabling' her to dismiss versions of reality that are not in her line-of-sight, an approach to space and vision that is symptomatic of imperialism. In this context, the name "Queenie" is especially significant. This affectionate diminutive or nickname links her to the Queen Victoria, also the Empress of India, a person who is associated with the greatest 'triumphs' of the United Kingdom. The name "Queen Victoria," referring to a figure who ruled over the British Empire at the height of its reach and power, has been replaced by a kind of anodyne nickname, Queenie. The full import of the name is disclosed when the teacher reveals Queenie's actual name, Victoria Buxton. Queenie's name is emblematic of her parents' monarchical leanings as well as the child's internalisation of imperial perspectives.

Levy's emphasis on naming, referentiality, and misnomers gestures towards the underdeveloped and infantile processes of colonial thinking. The metonymic function of the name "Queenie" reinforces the associations with sovereignty already implicit in the girl's legal name, Victoria. In the second paragraph, Queenie corrects her own narrative account: she is quite lucid about the premises of the outing as a holiday, an annual social event. Yet, her ability to correct herself by telling the truth—"I'd thought I'd been to Africa"—remains stylistically in the past as if she were still the young Queenie rather than an adult who is offering a corrective to a faulty story:

Every year there was an outing organized for the butchers, the butchers' wives and children and even the butchers' favourite workers. A day out. Mother liked to go. 'It's like a holiday,' she would say to father.²⁹

Thus, Levy presents Queenie's story from a double perspective: the tale is told from the perspective of an unknowing child and the knowledgeable perspective of an adult. Queenie tells us about her visit to the Empire Exhibition through her child's eyes. Her inability to recognise that her trip to Africa was a family outing, a constructed exhibit, a spectacle of empire, even after she returns home, demonstrates a paucity of hermeneutical agility, which also threatens the reader's understanding of what s/he is witnessing and experiencing in Levy's novel.

The "Prologue" sets the stage for the subversion of realism throughout the novel by showing that the so-called realities of history are underpinned by pre-existing colonial discourses, myths, misnomers, and fictions of identity. Queenie's narrative account of a trip to 'Africa' sets the stage for the novel's wider critique of Empire as a problematic form of 'pre-knowledge' about history, society, politics and identity. This defining moment in Queenie's life betrays a naïveté and bewilderment about space and place but also testifies to the power of the colonial gaze. Through the British Empire Exhibition, a staged spectacle, Levy calls attention to empire itself as a form of spatial production and identity formation. To offer a specific example, I would like to consider the description of the African man at the Exhibition:

An African man. A black man who looked to be carved from melting chocolate. [...] A monkey man sweating a smell of mothballs. Blacker than when you smudge your face with a sooty cork. The droplets of

sweat on his forehead glistened and shone like jewels. His lips were brown, not pink like they should be, and they bulged like bicycle tyres. His hair was woolly as a black shorn sheep. His nose, squashed flat had two nostrils big as train tunnels. And he was looking down at me.³⁰

Queenie's encounter with this African man, who spoke in "clear English" but whose "lips could have swallowed [her] up," is depicted through a series of sensual markers. In this initial encounter, she describes the black man as a confection: a spoil of empire that cuts across Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Her discourse represents the black man in superlative terms, but he is also viewed as a primate, a domesticated animal, and a locomotive. He smells like a garment stored out-of-season. For Queenie, the African man is depicted as a hieroglyph in need of interpretation: a subject both domestic and foreign, human and animal. In her world, this black man is overburdened with meanings that both maintain and disrupt the binaries of colonial discourse. Queenie only belatedly (and never wholly) understands that this man is part of an imperial exhibition, a spectacle, a show. As a child, she takes in the appearance of the man and re-orders his features, relating them to her own limited set of experiences in the world, filtered through a provincial perspective and the kind of ethnographic language associated with colonial discourses.³¹

When discussing the "Prologue," some scholars, notably Sarah Brophy and Irene Pérez Fernández, have argued persuasively that the Exhibition exists as an ambivalent but simultaneously highly charged space, which stages moments of "colonialism and the desiring machine," to borrow from Robert J.C. Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*.³² Brophy argues that this episode in *Small Island*, which explores the commodification of difference, implicates Queenie (and her family) as part of this colonial admixture:

Queenie's equation of the African man with the chocolate insinuates, moreover, that the crowds were being invited to consume not only the goods but also the Exhibition staff, as commodities that offer pleasure to the visitors, but which are granted no significant material histories of their own. Here, Queenie is fabricated by the Exhibition and by her family's interaction with it as a sexual subject, whose public significance is, confusingly, bound up with a visible and tangibly embodied arousal: the feeling of the "blood rising in [Queenie's] face, turning [her] crimson," combines fear, excitement, and shame [...].³³

As a result, there is something that is not at all child-like in Queenie's exchange with the African man, which hovers at the threshold of knowing and not knowing. The retrospective language of the "Prologue" is both innocent and highly charged by desire.

Levy's "Prologue" sets the stage for the next section of the text, leading us to the moment when the nation itself will become a site of ongoing interracial and cross-cultural encounters: "1948". Years later, in her relationship with Michael Roberts, a Jamaican member of the RAF, the encounter with the African man remains an important reference point, shaping Queenie's understanding of cultural, racial, and erotic identities. When Queenie opens the door of her home to Roberts, childhood memories come flooding to consciousness and inform her interpretation of events:

The RAF man's hand was raised almost in salute, ready to knock at the door once more. But that wasn't the first thing that I noticed. I was lost in Africa again at the Empire Exhibition, a little girl in a white organza frock with blood rising in my cheeks turning me red. He was coloured.³⁴

Here we can see that the encounter with the African Man at the Empire Exhibition in "Prologue" predetermines Queenie's interest in interracial relations with Michael Roberts. Significantly, their intimacy develops when Roberts offers Queenie a much-coveted orange and "a bar of American chocolate."³⁵ Thus, the importance of commodities, particularly ones associated with colonial production, underpins Queenie's desires. Furthermore, Levy's description of their erotic encounters shows the way in which colonial discourses and histories of interracial encounters under empire give narrative shape and form to their accounts of desire for one another:

It wasn't me. Mrs Queenie Bligh, she wasn't even there. This woman was a beauty—he couldn't get enough of her. He liked the downy softness of the blonde hairs on her legs. Her nipples were the pinkest he'd ever seen. Her throat—he just had to kiss her throat. This woman was as sexy as any starlet on a silver screen. The zebra of their legs twined and untwined together on the bed. Her hands, pale as a ghost's, caressed every part of his nut-brown skin.³⁶

Thus, Levy shows us that empire serves as a pre-history, which continuously impinges upon the present, pre-scribing desires and relations. Yet, the birth of the child, even if it must be given away for adoption in a society where colonial discourses still persist, heralds the birth of British multicultural identities in the postcolonial world. Queenie's child, just like her own childhood experiences described in the "Prologue," prompts the reader to consider moments of transition and transformation in culture.

The Production of Culture

In closing, I would like to reflect on the significance of Levy's inscriptions of dislocating moments in British culture, particularly through the dialogue between private and public spheres. Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*,³⁷ published in Britain in the same year as *Small Island*, offers a useful way to approach space, relationality, and cultural production in Levy's work. Gilroy suggests that the British Empire has forged a common destiny of intimate spheres of affiliation, which exist even in the midst of a social twilight.³⁸ For Gilroy, a *multiculture* is what the ethnic and culturally diverse society of Britain might become, that is, "a society that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness," an "unheralded multiculture" "distinguished by some notable demands for hospitality, conviviality, tolerance, justice and mutual care."³⁹ Gilroy argues that the aftermath of British imperialism is still present in the national political life and contends that colonial history has left its ongoing mark on the political and social complexion of Britain as an "enduring consequence[s] of empire."⁴⁰ In Gilroy's view, the colony "can be recognized as a laboratory, a location for experiment and innovation that transformed the exercise of governmental powers at home and configured the institutionalization of imperial knowledge to which the idea of 'race' was central."⁴¹

As we have seen, Levy structures her narrative in ways that make it appear ripe for a multicultural co-existence before and after 1948, particularly through the relationship to Michael and the birth of the multiracial child. As an adult, Queenie offers her own frame for an alternate reading of the “Prologue”:

There are some words that once spoken will split the world in two. There would be the life before you breathed them and then the altered life after they'd been said. They take a long time to find, words like that. They make you hesitate. Choose with care. Hold on to them unspoken for as long as you can just so your world will stay intact.⁴²

There are some words once spoken split the world in two. Before you say them and after.⁴³

Queenie begins to posit what it might mean to speak doubly, to understand doubly, and the dangers associated with these pluralistic processes in a world that is on the brink of acknowledging other realities and ways of being. In these two passages, which open and close one of the last sections of the novel, Queenie expresses anxieties about speaking, indicating that she has now thought deeply about what certain linguistic utterances could mean and how they could shatter the foundations of the known ‘realities’. She seems to be fearful of making an untimely gesture, which would open up linguistic crevasses that would destabilise all previous forms of knowledge and representation. This passage calls attention to Levy’s own metafictional strategies. She disrupts the reading of history by exploring the histories of contact and relation that traverse the supposed divisions of 1948. The “Prologue” stands as an encounter that invites a double reading, prompting Queenie and the reader to look backwards and forwards through history. This episode serves as a form of “reorganized relationality,” to borrow an expression from Gilroy, which emerges through retrospective acts of reading, listening, and interpreting relations between peoples, times, and spaces.

In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha’s epigraph from Martin Heidegger’s essay entitled “Building, dwelling, thinking”⁴⁴ serves as a way of thinking through problems of cultural visibility and belonging-ness:

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*.

Bhabha acknowledges a kind of disorientation associated with the boundary. I argue that Levy’s *Small Island* is located at a similar kind of boundary:

[at] the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement [...].⁴⁵

Levy is preoccupied with the transformation of people and of places. Through techniques of textual dislocation and disorientation, she portrays a society undergoing a metamorphosis, showing a Britain at the threshold of change, torn between discourses and practices of inclusion and exclusion. Arguably, Levy’s novel attempts to resolve the

racial and ethnic conflicts 'created' by Windrush immigration and the encounter with the 'Mother Country' and make visible "the history of African-Caribbean people in this country."⁴⁶ The novel itself is productive of a kind of identity that is relentlessly 'British,' but it does so by calling attention to the unstable historical and social processes of this formation. This structure casts *Small Island* as a new way of understanding multicultural British society, which reorients the prevailing narratives of history and identity. Levy's novel inscribes a new sense of Britishness, born in the colonial space of Jamaica and articulated anew in the mid-twentieth century metropolitan space of London. Levy's novel represents cultural difference and considers new forms of relationality through a pluralistic narrative that seems to aim at resolution and compromise. Thus, *Small Island* is restless, but it is also rooted and routed "through the special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once."⁴⁷ Through historical ventriloquism, Levy reframes the past, highlighting the dynamic, interrelated processes of social transformation. The narrative architecture of *Small Island* provides a retrospective dwelling space, to borrow a term from Heidegger, where Levy houses testimonial accounts and perspectives that might not otherwise be represented.

Small Island calls attention to the boundary moments of social transformation through narrative techniques of disorientation, metafiction, and shifting perspectives. This work of historiographic metafiction resists totalising impulses and exposes fissures of meaning as a means to reconfigure identity. Levy's novel challenges the foundational myth of Windrush migration, typically seen as marking the rise of multicultural, multiracial Britain, by offering a more expansive history of migration and ideological transformation in the twentieth century. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, her narrative depicts the 'thawing' of imperialism through the fractures of colonialism and the rise of migration:

The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin "realities."⁴⁸

Small Island complicates notions of truth, knowledge, and identity by calling attention to the relations between the imagined and the real, the past and the present, home and away. As I have shown in my reading of the "Prologue," Queenie's anxieties about the spatial order foreshadow the motif of dis/location which saturates the novel and the lives of its characters, evident in the movement between here and there, the farm and the city, Jamaica and London, and the home and the world. With the "Prologue," Levy establishes the narrative strategies that shape her approach to the novel as a whole: this self-conscious discourse presents a multi-layered, poly-vocal, and temporally fluid account of history and identity. The narrative brings together multiple, often unreliable representations of encounters, intimacies, and spatial relations under empire. In the end, *Small Island* does show that new ways of belonging must linger in the imaginary until they are ready to be embraced as new realities.

Endnotes

- 1 For extended discussions of this concept of Britishness, see Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997; John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*. Routledge: London, 2004; and John Proctor, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- 2 Andrea Levy. *Small Island*. New York: Picador Press, 2004.
- 3 There were two British Empire Exhibitions, one in 1924 and the other in 1925, staged as ethnographic shows in order to present a fixed image of the British Empire in the years just after the end of the Great War. For more information, see the following website: <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.86> [accessed 31 May 2011].
- 4 Paul Gilroy, "Preface," *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, xi.
- 5 David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, eds. "Second World War" in *Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 436-437.
- 6 The complete document of the British Nationality Act, 1948 (11 & 12 Geo. 6.). See chapter 56: <http://www.uniset.ca/naty/BNA1948.htm>.
- 7 The historical information contained in this first section represents a synthesis of information found in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain since 1504*. London: Pluto Press, 1984 and *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain*. Onyekachi Wambu, ed., London: Phoenix, 1998.
- 8 Irene Pérez Fernández, "(Re)Mapping London: Gender and Racial Relations in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*," *Interactions*, Special Issue: "The Role of Female Voices in Constructing Fictional Maps of Contemporary Britain." 19.1-2 (2010): 29.
- 9 Andrea Levy, "This is my England," *The Guardian*, 19 February 2000. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/feb/19/society1> [accessed 31 May 2011].
- 10 My use of the term "intervals" is taken from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, a citation of Heidegger's lecture on the meaning of home and homelessness in the 1951 lecture, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* David Farrell Krell, ed., San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977, 343-363.
- 11 Fryer, *Staying Power*, 1-13; 33-66; 298-371. These geographies move from the era of Shakespeare, to the era of the abolition of the British slave trade and slavery, the 1900 Pan-African Conference in Westminster Town Hall, the 1917 and 1919 race riots in Cardiff, Nottingham, Liverpool and the creation of the League of Coloured People in 1930.
- 12 To offer an example, the English Romantic painter, J.M.W. Turner depicts the 'black hero' in some of his early paintings, such as *Shipwreck* (1805), *The Rescue* (1802), and *The Deluge* (1805).
- 13 In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy's epigraphs are taken from the works of Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Nietzsche, Frederick Douglass, and Édouard Glissant.
- 14 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. New York: Vintage, 1974, 180-181.
- 15 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 3.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 1.

- 17 Ibid., 2.
- 18 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988, 110-112.
- 19 Ibid., 109.
- 20 Hutcheon, 55;61. For a discussion of this mode of writing, see Ian Watt, "Realism and the Novel Form," *The Realist Novel*. Dennis Walder, ed., London: Routledge, 1996, 219-238.
- 21 For more on issues of temporality, sequence, and progression, see *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*. Brian Richardson, ed., Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002.
- 22 J. Michael Walton, *The Greek Sense of Theatre: Tragedy Reviewed*. London: Routledge, 1985, 1-6. Prologues were composed to introduce Attic drama such as in the work of Euripides or Sophocles. In a book, the prologue is a part of the front matter normally voiced by one of the text's main characters without formal meditation by the author.
- 23 Levy, 1.
- 24 Ibid., 201.
- 25 Ibid., 289. See also Bernard's account of soldiering after World War II, which highlights his participation in the violence of Partition in India: "Thousands were killed in Calcutta. Men, women, children, even suckling babies, it didn't matter who. They called it a riot. Those of us who'd been there in the thick of battle with these bloodthirsty little men knew it was more than that. Muslims butchering Hindus. Hindus massacring Muslims. And who knows what side the Sikhs were on? Rumour said the wounded were too many to be counted, the dead too many to be buried. They were fighting for who should have power when a new independent India comes. Made me smile to think of that ragged bunch of illiterates wanting to run their own country. The British out of India? Only British troops could keep those coolies under control" (308).
- 26 Ibid., 300; 301; 304. In addition, Hortense also uses chocolate at several points throughout her narrative telling as well as Gilbert when he is in the United States.
- 27 Ibid., 291.
- 28 Ibid., 4.
- 29 Levy, 1.
- 30 Ibid., 5.
- 31 Pérez Fernández, "(Re)Mapping London: Gender and Racial Relations in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*," 32 -33. She focuses on the spectacle and the dehumanisation of the Black body under the colonial/imperial gaze.
- 32 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1995, 159.
- 33 Sarah Brophy, "Entangled Genealogies: White Femininity on the Threshold of Change in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 4.2(2010): 109-10.
- 34 Ibid., 240.
- 35 Ibid., 244.
- 36 Ibid., 248-9.
- 37 Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia: The Wellek Library Lectures*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005; Published in the United Kingdom as *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*. London: Routledge, 2004.

- 38 From Paul Gilroy, "Convivial Crimes and Convivial Cultures," *Act 2: Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*, Greenland, 22 April 2006, 1-9, 3. Gilroy develops the concept of a 'social twilight' in greater detail in his earlier work, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.
- 39 Ibid., 108.
- 40 Ibid., 3.
- 41 Ibid. 46.
- 42 Ibid., 407.
- 43 Ibid., 412.
- 44 Bhabha, 1.
- 45 Ibid., 1.
- 46 David Ward, "Mass Reading Project Tackles the Legacy of Slavery," *The Guardian* 11 January 2007: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/jan/11/news.davidward> [accessed 31 May 2011].
- 47 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 3.
- 48 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 338; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1.

Women Writers and the Windrush Generation: A Contextual Reading of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

Sandra Courtman

The MV *Empire Windrush's* arrival in 1948 is repeatedly memorialised as the inaugural moment in West Indian immigration to England. In literature depicting the Windrush pioneers, West Indian men are fully represented either as saga boys hustling for a living, or as middle-class males in the midst of an identity crisis.¹ The work of Andrea Levy and Beryl Gilroy addresses the invisibility of women of the Windrush generation in the memorial timeline. Much of Gilroy's writing, including her autobiography *Black Teacher* (1976), is inspired by the following sentiment: "I decided to set the record straight. There had been Ted Braithwaite's *To Sir with Love* [1959] and Don Hinds' *Journey to an Illusion* [1966] but the woman's experiences had never been stated."² With vastly differing levels of commercial, academic, and literary-critical success, the fictions of Beryl Gilroy and Andrea Levy disrupt the homogenisation of experience and allow us to imagine individual characters, male and female, British born and West Indian and understand their connectedness in that arrival story. Whilst both authors focus on the experience of the Windrush generation's women, this article explores and compares the different contexts in which the novels were written and received. Levy and Gilroy are separated by a generation and this is crucial to our understanding of their achievements. Within the celebratory processes of a Windrush memorial, I explore why one of the novels is a success whilst the other remains in obscurity.

Andrea Levy's award-winning novel, *Small Island*, was published in 2004. For Levy the path to success was paved by the efforts of many women predecessors. She could be inspired by award-winning contemporaries and role models who begin to be published from the 1980s onwards including: Erna Brodber, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1981) and *Myal* (1989); Amryl Johnson's *Long Road to Nowhere* (1985) and *Sequins for a Ragged Hen* (1988); Barbara Burford's *The Threshing Floor* (1986); Grace Nichol's *The Whole of a Morning Sky* (1986); Beryl Gilroy's *Frangipani House* (1986) and *Boy Sandwich* (1989); Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (1987), *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), and *Romance* (1988); Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999); Bernadine Evaristo, *Lara* (1997) and *The Emporer's Babe* (2001); Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (1999); Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2001); and Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (2003).

Beryl Gilroy's writes that her migration novel *In Praise of Love and Children* was "written in 1959" but lost until 1994.³ In contrast to *Small Island*, few people have read *In Praise*. As such, a brief plot summary is helpful in suggesting the ways in which these two novels might be seen to share the same fictional terrain. *In Praise* takes the form of an identity quest narrative, focalised through Melda Hayley whose travels in the Black

Atlantic take her to Europe, New York, and Guyana. Melda's birth is the result of an extramarital liaison between her father and her aunt; growing up, she suffers emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her mentally-ill step mother. She has to be rescued by her much loved teacher, Mrs Penn, and leaves her family in rural Guyana to follow her brother Arnie to London. In Britain, she is able to identify with the abandoned West Indian children she comes across whilst teaching and starts to foster and care for them. Arnie has meanwhile met, impregnated, and subsequently married a blonde, blue-eyed East German refugee, named Trudi. Through Trudi, Arnie and Melda, Gilroy explores the growing number of mixed race relationships in the 1950s Britain and the roots of the prejudice these couples faced. With great honesty, she depicts Melda's shock at Arnie's choice of a white partner especially when faced with the physical signs of Trudi's pregnancy. Growing up in the 1940s, Melda is unprepared for the idea of love between mixed races and this provokes anger: "Trudi, her belly now visibly swelling, bought me tea.[...] Trudi was not of the world I knew. She was different to us in every way—made of flesh over stone."⁴ The two women struggle to come to terms with a relationship built on jealousy and misunderstanding. The novel explores the triangular relationship of Melda, Arnie, and Trudi. Melda and Trudi both suffer in different ways, having lost their homes and families. Eventually they help each other to heal past wounds.

The setting, broad themes, and conclusions of *In Praise* and *Small Island* lead to a similar point of understanding. Thematically, the novels focus on children, girls in particular, whose families gave them away in order to improve their prospects in life. The circumstances surrounding Melda's illegitimacy mean that she is treated so cruelly by her step-mother that she is sent away to Miss Penn. It is precisely because of her own experience of abandonment that Melda can help the children she meets. Hortense is sent away because she is light-skinned and her mother wishes to give her better opportunities. Queenie is sent away to live with Aunt Dorothy because she refuses to accept a life of drudgery on her parents' pig farm. Queenie gives her own mixed race baby to Hortense, believing that this is the best prospect for her child. Thus, in both novels, set in the post-war period, the future of a multicultural Britain is signalled by the birth of a mixed-race child. Moreover, both novels call attention to the prospects, potential, and limits of feminist agency and solidarity in an era of migration and social change. In *Small Island*, Gilbert, Hortense, and Queenie have a difficult relationship built on prejudice, including a misunderstanding that it is Gilbert who has fathered Queenie's child. In the final section, Levy unites Hortense and Queenie in an act of cross-racial sisterhood, when Hortense delivers and finally takes charge of Queenie's baby. Finally, all the characters—male and female, black and white—in *Small Island* and *In Praise* are displaced and have to construct new metropolitan identities that force them to reappraise their prejudices.

I do not intend to debate the relative literary and aesthetic merits of Levy and Gilroy's fiction. Instead, I aim to compare how the different contexts for their writing affect their success—as measured in terms of readership, public recognition, and scholarly attention—in foregrounding the experience of women of the *Windrush* generation. *Small Island* is now fully inscribed onto the *Windrush* memorial and *In Praise* is not. Yet, both women's work is part of an ongoing process of memorialisation and canonisation of black

British writing about West Indian arrival. It is important for literary scholars to attend to this socio-historical perspective with its 'winners,' such as Levy, and its 'losers,' such as Gilroy. In this context, Gail Low's case study of published Anglophone Caribbean Writing 1950-1965 is especially noteworthy because she suggests the importance of understanding "... the network of connections between reviewers, publishers, readers, broadcasters and scholars [...] to the promotion of the fledgling writers from the new Commonwealth."⁵ Nonetheless, although Low examines the phenomenon of West Indian male writers' success in Britain in the 1950s and early 60s, she overlooks the histories of women writers of the same generation, failing to take into account why women writers failed to enjoy the same kind of success as their male counterparts. These occluded feminist literary histories of women writers continue to be reclaimed by scholars such as Evelyn O'Callaghan, Susheila Nasta, Carole Boyce Davies, Alison Donnell, and Sandra Courtman.⁶

To grasp fully the ways in which both Gilroy and Levy challenge our understanding of Windrush migration and its wider symbolic significance, we need to remember that this arrival story has largely been memorialised as masculine. The reasons for this are historical and political. Matthew Mead observes that the cultural memory of the *Windrush* often fails to represent accurately the far from homogenous group of migrants who came to Britain.⁷ Historically, post-Second World War migration from the West Indies was part of a wider crisis in British national identity.⁸ With an empire it could no longer afford and devastated by the losses of the Second World War, Britain was in the process of transition to a neo-colonialist economy, on the brink of social collapse, and in need of cheap labour. The people who landed in Tilbury were part of a wave of economic migration to Britain from Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. However, at the time of its arrival, the *Windrush* provided the media with a focus for anxieties surrounding black, and initially male, immigration from Britain's colonies. *Windrush* has now shifted in the national imagination to symbolise a generation's achievements and their contribution to the making of a multicultural Britain. But whose achievements will be remembered? When and how do women writers respond to the double humiliation of racial exclusion and patriarchal hegemony? We can begin with the historicisation of the docking of the *Empire Windrush* as the defining moment of post war immigration when, it is reiterated, 492 Jamaican males disembarked at Tilbury. Here "The repetition of the '492' achieves in writing what the memorialist makes in stone; an immovable and sedimented object...."⁹ Mead suggests why the preservation of this number is significant in contemporary and historical accounts of West Indian migration:

There were more than 492 West Indian migrants on board the *Windrush*, but this is of little importance [...] In the case of the former, the cultural memory is sedimented not by establishing a correct count but by repeating the same count over and over again. In the case of the latter, a careful archival approach reveals that no correct count is possible; rather we are presented with multiple possibilities, increasingly complexity and the occasional dead end. To be sure, the ubiquitous "492" is not a chance figure, or one chosen, but a figure produced by arbitrary

procedure, provoked by a nervousness about black immigration, and then appropriated by the Caribbean community and sympathetic others.¹⁰

A considered account of the facts we know about *Windrush's* arrival can only suggest the multifarious nature of its passengers and crew, totalling 1027 people, who largely disappear without trace into traumatised post-war Britain. As Mead suggests, knowledge of these factual slippages serves to illustrate that the mythologisation of *Windrush's* arrival was not only symptomatic of wider socio-cultural anxieties at the time but has also contributed to a reductive chronicle of the actual events. In fact, the pioneers who came, in Louise Bennett's famous words, to reverse the process of colonisation were not all West Indian males.¹¹ It is not just the "492" number that is reiterated. It must have taken more than a day to process the arrival of *Windrush's* passengers and although June 22nd is usually given as the historic date of arrival, it would appear that the ship must have docked a day before as June 21st is stamped on some passenger lists.¹² The *Windrush's* "Summary of British and Alien Passengers" enumerates the number of men, women, and children who are British citizens from the West Indies, alien refugees displaced during the War, stowaways, and members of the forces and crew.¹³ Of the 941 adult passengers, 257 were women with 69 of them accompanied by their husbands and 188 travelling alone. Yet this female presence is often reduced to that of the tale of a courageous female stowaway, dressmaker—Evelyn Wauchape—whose relationship to the only other stowaway, Samuel Johnson, remains unknown. It is highly likely that both individuals would have concealed their identity from the port authorities, and Sam King, a passenger on the *Windrush*, contends that Evelyn's real name was Eva Buckley.¹⁴ In terms of the other women passengers, we know nothing of what happened to the 66 displaced Polish women and children who boarded at Tampico, Mexico to be dispersed in camps and hostels across the UK. Of the 108 first class passengers, there are several women including the famous writer Nancy Cunard. The *Windrush's* multiple narratives of class, race and gender are occluded within the "492" male Jamaicans.

Although Andrea Levy was born in England, she has a strong personal connection to the history of *Windrush* through her father's migrant journey. Winston Levy travelled to England on the ship with his twin.¹⁵ He numbered among the men who engendered the kinds of social anxieties that (as we have already seen) were exploited by the media. Yet, by the year of Levy's birth in 1956, media concerns had shifted to reflect the gender demographics of migration. A *Picture Post* article, entitled "Thirty Thousand Colour Problems," depicts young women arriving in Southampton on May 28th 1956 and disembarking from the SS *Irpinia*.¹⁶ Images of respectable-looking women, sitting with their suitcases, are at odds with the headline that reads "Trouble and Distress Are Brewing." These young women (photographed by Haywood Magee) seem unlikely victims of a prostitution racket, but this is what Hilde Marchant's report suggests:

[...] with only a vague idea of what job they want to do, and their qualifications are even vaguer, except *perhaps for their good looks* [author's italics]. It is not unknown that the economics that drove her off the shores of her home have driven her on to the streets of London. A walk round the West End of London or some provincial city like Birmingham, readily confirms it.¹⁷

With this depiction of young West Indian women as morally slack and opportunistic, Marchant is peddling familiar racial and sexual stereotypes. Underlying a seeming concern for their moral welfare is a discourse of miscegenation-fear, comparable to the sort that percolates through Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. Also published in 1956, Selvon's novel is a stream-of-consciousness narrative, either directly or as reportage, about the experience of a group of West Indian 'boys' who immigrate to London. The narrator's views of the prostitutes who trade in Hyde Park is uncomfortably close to the fears expressed by Marchant:

[...] also lately in view of the big set of West Indians that storming Brit'n it have a lot of dark women who in the racket too they have to make a living [...] it have some white fellas who feel is a big thrill to hit a black number and the girls does make they pay big money but as far as spades hitting spades in ain't have nothing like that for a spade wouldn't hit a spade when it have so much other talent on parade.¹⁸

Aside from the narrator's affair with the city, there are no love stories in *The Lonely Londoners*. Selvon's depiction of the fetishisation of the racial 'other' and how this shapes the Hyde Park sex trade represents the perspective of a fictional male West Indian. Marchant's point-of-view, albeit of the female, is representative of a white host nation in the midst of an identity crisis arising from West Indian immigration at the "rate of 3,000 a month."¹⁹ If the mythical "492" black males focused the nation's nervousness about black immigration, then these young women in the *Picture Post* article and *The Lonely Londoners* serve the continued obsession with miscegenation fears. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses issues a grim warning about the desire for whiteness as expressed in a quest for a white partner.²⁰ Moses describes what happens to students who go home with an English wife:

They go back with an English wife and what happen? As soon as they get there, the places where their white wife could go, they can't go. Next thing you hear, the wife horning them and the marriage gone puff. Look what happen to that Indian fellar what married a German girl and went back after he study. He kill the girl, cut she up and put she in a sack and throw she in sea.²¹

The literal dismemberment of the white woman also fulfils a symbolic function: calling attention to the need to critique and deconstruct the false consciousness that produces a desire for whiteness. In a reversal of Black Atlantic history, it is the white girl who is ripped apart and tossed into a sea ghosted by slaves drowned during the Middle Passage. Absent, however, are the perspective and voice of the women subjects. Gilroy and Levy's counter-narrative strategies address the need to give voice to women's experiences. In Levy's *Small Island*, Hortense emigrates from Jamaica to join her husband in England, expecting to continue her career as a teacher. Levy's mother, Amy Levy, did the same, and Beryl Gilroy was a teacher in Guiana before she came to London University. Whether in history or in literature, these women's narratives bear no resemblance to the women described by either Marchant or Selvon. Moreover, as far as my research has discovered, there are very few publications by West Indian women about their migration and arrival experience during the post-Windrush era from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s.

Jamaican Joyce Gladwell's 1969 autobiography, *Brown Face, Big Master*, which depicts, amongst other things, the racism attending her inter-racial marriage is a rare exception.²²

Pioneering women authors like Gladwell and Gilroy are Levy's forerunners. Separated by a generation, Gilroy and Levy wrote during periods of very different production and reception for black British women's fiction. My study of pioneering women writers of the 1960s, such as the Afro-Jamaicans Joyce Gladwell and Sylvia Wynter, the Guyanese Beryl Gilroy, and the Jamaican Creole Lucille Iremonger, explore the ways in which factors such as educational opportunities, access to publishers, potential audiences, and critical reception might have impacted on the woman writer's sense of achievement and ambition.²³ A similar case might be made when we consider carefully the comparative 'success' and 'failure' of *Small Island* and *In Praise*. As arrival stories, the notion of encounter is central to their work and their understanding of how they are seen is as important as what they see in the 'other.' Sarah Brophy writes that *Small Island's* account of the post-war period is premised "on a concept of encounter gleaned from conversations with her mother."²⁴ The work of pioneering women writers like Gladwell and Gilroy is very much concerned with exploring interracial sexual encounters and in representing the emotional and psychological impact of mixed-race relationships. These love stories are a defining part of the experience of a generation of single women who came to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s and who, like Gilroy and Gladwell, met and married white British men. In their lives and their work they confronted the taboo of interracial desire.

Whilst Levy's *Small Island* also represents the trials of "entangled genealogies" arising from interracial sexual desire, she writes about this experience after attitudes to mixed race couples had become socially acceptable.²⁵ Gladwell's 1969 autobiography sold 21,000 copies; it was "serialised in the [Jamaican] Gleaner and [had excerpts read] on the BBC."²⁶ However, under an apartheid regime her presentation of a mixed race marriage led to a ban by South African booksellers. The book was refused in Northern Ireland because her "sexual encounter with the [white] ship's doctor was considered pornographic."²⁷ By the time Levy was writing explicitly about Queenie and Michael's affair, the censorship of Gladwell's genteel encounter would seem incomprehensible. Born in Britain and growing up in a Jamaican family, Levy witnessed her elders' courage and heard their stories. She might concur with a view expressed in 1975 in *Race Today Women* that "[i]n one way or another the existence and vibrancy of the black community today is traceable to the social activities of these black women who arrived first."²⁸

As an example, Gilroy's autobiography, *Black Teacher*, attests to the author's battles to reform a racist education system.²⁹ Gilroy is typical of writers of the *Windrush* generation who have direct experience of familial and societal conflicts arising from a colonial encounter where the desire for whiteness meets a disavowal of blackness. The myth of miscegenation dominates the ground-breaking socio-diagnostic analysis of race in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon devotes two chapters to the subject of interracial love, entitled "The Woman of Color and the White Man" and "The Man of Color and the White Woman." He explores how the "man of color" expresses a strong desire to love a white woman and illuminates the twisted logic underpinning the

quest for a white partner: "I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilisation and dignity and make them mine."³⁰ Selvon also confronts a fear of miscegenation which is at the root of white racism. His characters' liaisons are not without consequences as they face angry fathers or fear police intervention.

In many instances, male writers do not deal with some of the important personal themes that women authors focus on, such as unwanted pregnancies or successful love stories. *The Lonely Londoners* rarely attends in detail to the actual consequences of interracial sex (there is a brief reference to Galahad's child, but no real attention is given to the life of the child or mother) but uses these encounters for ironic effect. Selvon invents the term 'tests' for his male characters: "long before test like Galahad hit London."³¹ This is Selvon being ironic about the sexual experience of his testosterone-fuelled protagonists: "To talk of all the episodes that Moses has with woman in London would take bags of ballad Moses move though all the nationalities in the world and then start the circle again."³² The narrator claims it would take too long to account for all of Moses' conquests and this evasion typifies the ellipses and contradictions surrounding 'the boys' and their relations with the white women they pick up (or are picked up by). In spite of Moses boasting of his sexual experience, he fails to recognise the signs of female orgasm; he assumes that his partner is suffering a fatal paroxysm and that the police will be called:

afterwards Moses nearly dead with fright because the woman start to moan and gasp and wriggle and twist up she body like a piece of wire when Moses ask she what happen she only moaning Moses start to get cold sweat because he know if anything happen to the woman and the police find her in his yard he wouldn't stand a chance the way how things against the boys so he begin to rub the woman down and pat she and try to make she drink some water [...] frighten like hell that the woman might conk off on his hands.³³

When the unnamed woman quickly appears "calm and cool as if nothing happen" he bundles her on to the nearest bus and "Moses hop off again and leave she going to Marble Arch."³⁴ Later in this episode, the narrator reveals that Cap also gives a woman the slip: "Cap get to a corner he tell her to wait [...] he left the girl standing up there and never went back."³⁵ In *The Lonely Londoners* women's stories are left untold, abandoned like their characters on buses and street corners. As has been frequently noted, the dominant narrative is masculinist in orientation, but this is perhaps not surprising as Selvon was writing what he knew to be true in the 1950s. Moreover, this masculinist emphasis goes beyond race and class division. For instance, Diana Athill's memoir of her relationships during the Second World War explains that even Oxford educated and highly intelligent women like her understood that their stories would remain untold. She writes that when she spent time with her Hungarian partner André Deutsch (their attraction was briefly sexual but they became publishing associates) "... he did not find it easy to believe that I (or anyone) would be as interested in a discussion of my own life as I would be in his."³⁶

However, the importance of women's stories had been foregrounded by the time Levy was writing about Queenie and Hortense. Her contemporary Caryl Phillips often narrates from his women characters' perspective. Dorothy's point of view is fully represented in his 2003 novel *A Distant Shore*. Phillips explains that her affair with the Indian Mahmood is unhealthy precisely because she is behaving like one of Selvon's women characters. Dorothy is also complicit in her own silence and passive in managing their mutual desire. He writes that "Dorothy says very little about her own life, being concerned to make sure that the dominant narrative is male."³⁷ Separated by a generation who shifted the dominant narrative from male to female, Levy and Gilroy both explore the complexities and consequences of interracial love from a female perspective.

Different Contexts: Gilroy and Levy

A closer look at the different contexts for Gilroy's and Levy's works helps to shed light on the varying reception of their work. In the late 1950s, there was a growing taste for Anglophone writing from the Commonwealth. Publisher André Deutsch particularly nurtured new Commonwealth writers who were edited by Diana Athill. Athill explains this upsurge of interest as partly an expression of "liberal guilt and curiosity about soon-to-be independent nations."³⁸ West Indian fiction appealed to certain British publishers with metropolitan literary standards but they had few direct connections to Caribbean tradition and culture. Gilroy contends that publishers did not know how to read her work in the early 1960s. Consequently, both her final passage novel, *In Praise*, and her Guyanese reminiscences, *Sunlight on Sweet Water*, were rejected.³⁹ The situation was much changed for Levy by this earlier generation of women writers and Gilroy's experience may help us to understand how pioneering women's invisibility is bound up as much with gender politics and timing as with market tastes or academic agendas.

Beryl Gilroy was born in British Guiana in 1924. In 1951, five years before Levy was born, she travelled to London to continue her work as a teacher. Indeed, her actual story of arrival mirrors that of Levy's mother Amy who provided Levy's inspiration for *Small Island*. Like *Small Island's* Hortense, Gilroy was devastated when her exceptional teaching skills and qualifications were dismissed. She was first and foremost committed to teaching and, unlike many of her male contemporaries in the 1950s, she arrived with no aspirations towards becoming a professional writer. However, she was writing in some form from the moment of her arrival and she published *Black Teacher* in 1976, an account of her determination to find work as a teacher.⁴⁰ Whilst Gilroy was struggling to find a voice and an outlet for her creative work, Levy was growing up in London. Levy is of Afro-Jamaican descent with a Jewish paternal grandfather and a Scottish maternal great grandfather. Although her father was an educated light-skinned accountant who worked for Tate and Lyle in Jamaica, in Britain he could only find work as a post office clerk. When Amy Levy joined her husband in December 1948 to live in one room in London, she could not find work as a qualified teacher (like Gilroy and Hortense) and was forced to take in sewing. In the novel, Gilbert marks the importance of Hortense's newly forming, and significantly downgraded metropolitan identity. After she learns that she will not be accepted as a teacher in England, he attempts to quell her outrage with the

observation: “And a teacher you will be even you are sewing.”⁴¹ The fact that West Indians’ qualifications and achievements were dismissed in the metropole is well documented. *The Heart of the Race* (1985), edited by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe contains many unattributed testimonials to the institutional racism that pervaded the professions. An unnamed black woman who aspired to a career as nurse asserts that:

For many black women who joined the NHS with the intention of becoming nurses, this was to remain an elusive goal. Relegated to the hospitals’ kitchens and laundries, or trudging the wards as tea-ladies, cleaners or orderlies, we were to have first-hand experience of the damning assumptions which define our role here. The patients saw it as fitting that we should be doing Britain’s dirty work and often treated us with contempt.⁴²

Furthermore, women writers of the *Windrush* generation have argued that racist contempt for their skills and qualifications was compounded by patriarchal gate-keeping practices.

An example of how West Indian men and women writers were treated differently is suggested by the case of “Caribbean Voices” and the different opportunities it accorded to its male and female contributors. From 1943-1958, the BBC broadcast an influential weekly programme of stories, poems, and critical pieces back to the Caribbean. The idea had developed out of war time with West Indian service men separated from loved ones. The original programme, “Calling the Caribbean,” was fronted by Jamaican poet Una Marson. In 1946, Henry Swanzy became the editor of “Caribbean Voices” and looked for original unpublished work from the region. Material was sent to Swanzy in London from his Trinidadian based agent Gladys Lindo and broadcast back to the Caribbean. The programme was later edited by V.S. Naipaul. In 2009, two radio programmes celebrated the literary legacy of the series in “Caribbean Voices: Fifty Years On.” These retrospective programmes highlighted the importance of “Caribbean Voices,” which played a vital role in the successful development of many Caribbean authors’ literary careers, including such eminent figures as V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, and Derek Walcott. Looking back to the 1950s, publisher Margaret Busby has suggested that “...there were more opportunities then than now.”⁴³ Athill concurs that “for a time during the fifties and early sixties it was probably easier for a black writer to get *his* [author’s italics] book accepted by a London publisher, and kindly reviewed thereafter, than it was for a young white person.”⁴⁴ The path to publication was eased for male West Indian authors who seemed able to satisfy the growing curiosity about other cultures which was just one of “[a] number of contradictory forces [that] made it particularly conducive for new writers from the Commonwealth to emerge in print in Britain.”⁴⁵

At the same time, the absence of accounts of West Indian women’s writing in this growth area suggests that that the situation was quite the opposite for writers like Gilroy. Alison Donnell’s work on women’s short stories which were broadcast on “Caribbean Voices” finds that women contributed only twenty percent of the programme’s material. She corroborates the idea that women contributors’ careers did not flourish in the same way as their male peers and addresses their continuing obscurity:

Talented writers such as Eula Redhead, Inez Sibley, Marjorie Brown and Edwina Melville remain unremarked upon. Louise Bennett and Sylvia Wynter are the exceptions to this rule, although neither was particularly facilitated in their writing careers by the programme.⁴⁶

Women writers were adversely affected by prevailing literary tastes that combined with strong patriarchal networks. Gilroy describes the period as one in which “I wrote novels as well, [as children’s readers] but they could not get past the readers who were opinionated West Indian males playing the Gender Game.”⁴⁷ The trivialisation of women writers’ contributions is suggested by a reference to the material that Henry Swanzy rejected as commissioning editor of “Caribbean Voices” programmes. Low writes:

Swanzy’s role as gatekeeper was also to keep out certain kinds of writing and it is noticeable that of the 372 contributors a little less than twenty percent were women. Whilst it is too early in my research to pronounce definitively on why fewer women were selected for the programme than men, some of the domestic and romantic biases of the material seem to have irked Swanzy. In one of his earliest letters to [Gladys] Lindo, Swanzy includes among the rejected manuscripts what he calls, “sweetly pretty poems by... spinster ladies, probably teachers...”⁴⁸

Gilroy might have been described as a spinster teacher, but she had ambitions to write a novel about her experience of arrival and settlement in the racist Britain of the 1950s. In style, form, and content, *In Praise* did not fit with the stories of West Indian local colour that Swanzy seemed to favour for his broadcasts. The suppression of writing by women or other marginalised groups is often linked to a choice of subject matter. Many of the small independent presses of the 1980s, such as Virago and New Beacon Press, were founded, in part, to tackle themes that were being silenced or overlooked by mainstream publishers. For instance, The Women’s Press first published Riley’s controversial novel, *The Unbelonging* in 1985. It is the story of Hyacinth, a young black girl who comes to Britain at the age of eleven; following an abusive relationship with her father, she finds herself having to endure the racism and loneliness of a care home.⁴⁹ Gilroy’s fictional concerns are much closer to Riley’s than many of her male contemporaries. According to Laura Niesen de Abruna, Riley’s subject matter encompasses “...the entire female life span and treats issues of family violence, child abuse, incest, rape, gender relations, marital relations, sexism at work, economic oppression of black women, attitudes toward children, and the erosion of respect for older women.”⁵⁰ This is hardly the type of saccharine poetry Swanzy abhorred but to be writing about these taboo subjects in the late 1950s, much earlier than Riley, would ensure that Gilroy was an anomaly.

Nonetheless, it would be unfair to suggest that Gilroy was entirely discouraged by her male peers. There were exceptions such as Andrew Salkey who, as writer in residence at the BBC in the 1950s, was especially supportive of women writers, and Gilroy always found her teaching materials in demand. Ann Walmsley was appointed as Longman’s first Caribbean editor in 1966. She was Gilroy’s first educational publisher, and the author valued her encouragement very highly. However, Walmsley felt she had unwittingly complied with gender stereotypes in her first job in publishing. During an

interview, I asked about her own role in developing Caribbean women's fiction and Walmsley remembered the following:

Was I particularly interested in women writers? I ought to have been. I ought to have said—I'm a woman publisher, I ought to encourage these women to get on and write. But I did for text books—I did a lot of that. Oh dear, talk about falling into stereotypes—I encouraged Jean D'Costa to write for children—but I don't remember very much encouraging women to write fiction—I can't remember anyone who seemed interested in doing that really.⁵¹

This is, of course, a retrospective view and Walmsley is not the only female publisher to offer an important insight into the male dominated publishing industry of the 1960s. Athill's memoirs of the period, *Stet*, suggest that she was often treated more like a subordinate than a business partner.⁵² In hindsight Walmsley is bound to regret any complicity in maintaining gender boundaries, which may have resulted in lost opportunities to develop fiction writers such as D'Costa and Gilroy. We can only speculate on how Gilroy's earliest manuscripts (*In Praise of Love and Children* and *Sunlight on Sweet Water*) might have been received in terms of the dominant literary and publishing apparatus. Gilroy has maintained that the main barrier to her development was not on account of a lack of sympathetic editors, like Walmsley and Athill, but as a result of the role played by "[m]ale readers for publishers."⁵³ Few British publishers would have been able to place Gilroy's work, even experimentally, on account of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the operational critical standard arising from knowledge of prevailing "modes of expression characteristic of a period, a civilisation or a school."⁵⁴

The complex, hierarchical interplay of gender, race, class, and cultural difference played an especially important role in shaping black women's literary production during the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, the tradition of Caribbean literature was only just being recuperated and established through a body of new work. Gilroy describes how much of an outsider she felt when she tried to introduce her work to British publishing houses in the 1950s: "Talking with some about my writing brought the discussion to a dark and barren place. Their class-education had not prepared them for encounters with colonial minds."⁵⁵ It may not surprise us too much that the British publishing houses of the 1960s were resistant to black women's writing, especially as these organisations tended to be dominated by white males of a certain class background. However, Gilroy also met with opposition from West Indian male writers who were employed to read niche manuscripts that might be considered foreign to the British tradition. She observes:

By the middle fifties [...] I wrote some stories. When my work was sent to the male writers from the West Indies to be read, these men, in order to be as erudite as they were expected to be, turned to the idiosyncratic and the fastidious. My work, they said, was too psychological, strange, way-out, difficult to categorise. "Fine", I replied. I didn't have to clothe or feed my manuscripts or write for a slice of bread, so I kept them. They are being published now.⁵⁶

Such remarks indicate that Gilroy needed the sort of sustained, critical and insightful patronage that Athill gave to the young V. S. Naipaul (a male Caribbean author) and Jean Rhys (a white Creole woman writer).

As an example of how important this could be to the completion of a novel, Athill cites a letter from Jean Rhys to Francis Wyndham in which Rhys explains that certain clues helped her overcome writer's block. Rhys was stuck on the second part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and needed to find a way of explaining the reason for Rochester and Antoinette's marriage of convenience and its immediate failure:

‘The second clue was when Miss Athill suggested a few weeks’ happiness for the unfortunate couple—before he [Mr Rochester] gets disturbing letters.’ Starting to follow this suggestion, she saw at once that ‘he must have fallen for her [Antoinette], and violently too’, and at once the marriage came alive and was launched on its complex and agonizing course.⁵⁷

Gilroy was largely isolated from writers, such as Naipaul, and the camaraderie of the male group who mentored each other at the BBC during the years of “Caribbean Voices.” Given encouragement, she might even have had a similar level of success to that of her Guyanese contemporary, E. R. Braithwaite, whose novel *To Sir With Love* (1959), was made into a popular film.⁵⁸ Gilroy was writing in a patriarchal space, in a comparatively barren literary landscape, and her work arrived with no explanations of its historical context. This may be among the reasons why her fiction suffers from didactic interjections about the colonial histories underpinning her characters’ conflicts. At the time when she wrote the novel, colonial history was not taught as part of the British school curriculum. In Britain, the struggle to find a voice depended on the encouragement of West Indian authors who were ambitious and yet far from secure. Nobel Prize-winning V. S. Naipaul has stated that “it is so hard to write where there has been no writing” and describes how he overcame this setback through his BBC connections. Whilst editing “Caribbean Voices,” Naipaul remembered that that “talent was very limited. It was very tedious going through those scripts.”⁵⁹ Rhonda Cobham finds value in this tedium as it enabled Naipaul to learn from other writers’ mistakes.⁶⁰ Arguably, if Gilroy had been able to benefit from seeing the early work of West Indian authors and enjoyed the constructive patronage of those same BBC networks, *In Praise* might have been a different novel. Or perhaps Gilroy was simply ahead of her time. Had her novel been written at the same time as *Small Island*, it would have been subject to very different aesthetic, critical, and historical influences. Of course, we can only speculate on how other conditions and contexts for writing may have shaped Gilroy’s literary production as well as the reception of her work, but these are important issues to consider when reflecting on the wider horizons for black British and Caribbean women’s writing during the post-Windrush and contemporary periods.

Many non-academic readers who took part in a research project, which analysed several hundred reader responses to *Small Island*, appeared to recognise “the novel’s use of perspective as a structural feature with some considering the device’s significance in relation to the immigrant experience.”⁶¹ In comparison, many readers might find the

structure of *In Praise* less successful. In answer to a question about barriers to her general development as a novelist, Gilroy replied that a major factor was a “lack of guidance”: “Someone to take your novel and say, look try to structure it in this way.”⁶² The two novels and their relative technical accomplishments are connected to the author’s respective relations to a particular literary historical moment and aesthetic tradition. Their success is, in part, dependent on very different responses from publishers, awarding bodies, and readers to the structure of the two novels. Whereas *In Praise* is largely narrated through a limited first-person perspective, Levy uses her characters and their multiple perspectives as a structuring device for the novel as a whole. This fragmentation foregrounds the subjectivity of each character, leaving the reader to negotiate meaning based in his or her interpretation of each of these voices and their relations to one another in the fabric of the narrative as a whole. Whilst the stories may have some elements in common it is the narrative structure of the two novels which mark each as of its own time. According to David Lodge in *The Art of Fiction*,

[t]he structure of a narrative is like the framework of girders that holds up a modern high-rise building: you can’t see it, but it determines the edifice’s shape and character. The effects of a novel’s structure, however, are experienced over time—often quite a long time.⁶³

The use of narrative structure and the arrangement of time highlight the distinctive ambitions of each writer. Levy explores a personal history that encompasses the experience of her parents’ generation, but observes that this has grown into “a slightly bigger canvas in that for me now it’s about placing the African-Caribbean experience within British history and how we got here.”⁶⁴ This is why the white racist Bernard’s story is given an equally compelling voice to that of her favourite character, the Jamaican, Gilbert.⁶⁵

The reception of any literary work will inevitably be influenced by the availability of “paratextual framings of texts by elements such as reviews, media representations or events.”⁶⁶ Importantly, the ground for the publication and reading of *Small Island* had already been laid in 1998 when Britain commemorated fifty years of the *Windrush* generation through a series of articles, books, and television and radio broadcasts. Levy’s *Small Island* became emblematic of the struggles of the *Windrush* generation. Although there is no direct reference to slavery, the novel also became the literary ambassador for the 200th Anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill in 2007. Chosen as the text for the “Small Island Read” research project, Levy’s novel was situated “within a frame of commemorative events surrounding the anniversary of the abolition of slavery.”⁶⁷ Anouk Lang explains how *Small Island* came to be associated with the end of slavery through its links to commemorative events:

[...] the biggest mass-reading initiative that has ever taken place in Britain was organised in the cities of Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow and Hull, as part of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill. Fifty thousand copies of Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* were distributed across the UK, along with eighty thousand readers’ guides which provided information about Levy and the topics of slavery and migration. Over a hundred events—talks, discussions,

exhibitions, competitions and workshops—took place in association with Small Island Read, and at least a hundred stories about the project appeared in the local, regional and national press.⁶⁸

These paratextual contexts help to explain the important place of *Small Island* in contemporary British fiction, a reputation that was further enhanced by the BBC adaptation of the novel for television in 2009.

In Praise lacked the type of paratextual framings that would help readers understand its context. Gilroy tends to fill these gaps in knowledge with authorial interjections that ultimately compromise an imaginative engagement with the fictional character. For example, Gilroy's account of Melda, a teacher in London, switches from a first-person narrative perspective to a third-person authorial voice in order to offer a wider account of the failure of multiculturalism:

Some teachers could cope with the white working classes and their concerns, but not with the problems of immigrants. These newly arrived children were co-operative and trusting—until they realised that nothing they did could truly please their teachers. It was as if they were expected to change their culture on the way to school each day, so the teachers could approve of them. Most teachers served only an English meal and if the children could not enjoy it, it was their fault. There were, though, a few teachers who understood that many of these children were culture-shocked. Where there was sympathetic support, it was surprising how quickly the children picked up English and peculiarities of the culture.⁶⁹

This explanation guides its reader, suggesting how to interpret Melda's difficulties in a way that *Small Island* does not. As Lang asserts when writing about reader responses to *Small Island*, a reader's experience of the text will include: "the way in which reading is articulated to others in a dialogic process in which meaning is negotiated rather than fixed."⁷⁰ However, Reader Response and Reader Reception theory are relatively modern branches of literary enquiry. Gilroy, writing much earlier, may well have seen it as part of her job as a writer to fix the meaning and fill in the gaps in knowledge, even though this carries a risk of alienating her readers. She hints at this undertaking in the following commentary: "when I am satisfied that I have said what I want to say, that the reader and I would hear the same echoes and share the same emotions, I am content to think that I have drawn a good enough picture of contemporary reality."⁷¹ Thus, Gilroy indicates that she aims to foster a common ground between author and reader, a strategy that seems rather different from Levy's emphasis on discrepant, sometimes incommensurate, worldviews.

Time, subjectivity, point of view, and character identification are treated very differently in both stories in ways that are suggestive of the theoretical, literary, and aesthetic traditions available to their authors. Gilroy's literary education would have been largely European and realist. Unlike Levy, she had no black female role models to look to and had read only one West Indian novel in British Guiana, namely Edgar Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder* (1941).⁷² She writes: "Whichever part of the British Empire had spawned us, we knew our Shakespeare, our Wordsworth, our Dickens, our war poets."⁷³ Gilroy begins her story of arrival in a conventional linear time frame and her choice of the

first-person narrator inevitably restricts her perspective to that of a single character. However, Melda's story strains at the leash of its simple structure through the introduction of flashbacks to Guiana, digressions concerning family members in New York, and authorial interjections, which seem to have little to do with advancing the plot. In many ways, we can see Gilroy experimenting with techniques that have subsequently become staples of postmodern fiction, such as temporal fragmentation and metafiction. Levy's *Small Island* circles back to earlier times (constantly cycling through the periods of "1948" and "Before") and deviates from linear plot progression. From the 'Small Island Read' research project, it seems that contemporary readers largely accepted the temporal fragmentation in Levy's novel. The project observed that Levy's skills in narrative technique had mostly helped "readers to overcome destabilizing effects such as chronological shifts and use of dialect."⁷⁴

Postmodern Caribbean narratives have established a fictive continuum between past and present by moving much more freely in space and time. For instance, in Curdella Forbes' collection of short stories, *Songs of Silence* (2002), the narrator explains that these digressions and diversions are integral to her use of a Jamaican cultural form:

My head don't work straight like other people head. Sometimes my head weave stories inside itself, spinning a whole Anancy web of things that don't really go so but always feel realer than the things that go so. [...] Anything you want to think, you think, but in truth and in fact that is how we tell story where I come from. It don't haffi come straight for else it not sweet, and is just so it go.⁷⁵

The idea of relating 'one true story,' which offers a definitive version of the past in a linear structured narrative, has been challenged by postmodern literature and theory. We now understand why the quest to represent a narrative truth or stabilise meaning is problematic for an author like Gilroy. She was writing in a pre-postmodern literary fictional and theoretical mode. Unlike Forbes and Levy, she had few examples of any other structural model that might help her resolve these issues of cultural representation. The postmodern novel problematises what we know about the subject of its representation. In her work on postmodern fiction and history, Linda Hutcheon explains the ways in which the aesthetics of postmodern fiction serve to represent the world (anew) to readers:

In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not, however, disconnect itself from history or the world. ...[it] asks its readers to question the process by which we represent ourselves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We *can* try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural.⁷⁶

By the time Levy writes *Small Island*—with its multiple narratives which fracture both time and perspective—post modern fiction has already been engaged for several decades in questioning the authority of the truthful subject and the idea of an objective narration of historical events. As mentioned, Levy structures her work by dividing chapters by character name as well as by shifting temporal perspectives, which move between "1948"

and “Before.” These devices destabilise the single trajectory of any of the narratives. The use of polyphony to structure the novel increases dramatic tension by interrupting the flow of events as each chapter moves to a different character and time. Although a sense of continuity may be frustrated by these interruptions and shifts, each chapter is narrated in a realist style, and it is relatively clear where we are in the story and whose point of view is being presented.

Levy’s apprenticeship as a writer was not without its difficulties. She only began writing in her thirties and struggled to find literary examples that would help her give voice to a distinctive black British perspective. In interviews, she has spoken about growing up black in what was still a very white England and how at that time there was little written about the black British experience. In terms of a black British canon, she claims that, like Gilroy, she began writing in a fictional void where it was difficult to interest publishers in new black British writing. However, between 1994 and 1999, Levy honed her craft in three novels, *Every Light in the House Burnin’* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), and *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). By the time *Small Island* was published a decade later, it was riding on the crest of a new wave of fiction by black British and Caribbean women writers (including figures listed in the introduction to this article). In “Caribbean Voices: 50 Years On,” Busby suggested that it was now male writers who were negatively affected by publishers “looking for the next Monica Ali.”⁷⁷ Where Gilroy was writing in an era that was not supportive of black women’s writing, by the twenty-first century, the publishing situation had changed dramatically for postcolonial women writers such as Levy.

In Praise is one of the first works to depict the estrangements of a Caribbean transnational family moving across three continents. In an interview with Roxanne Bradshaw, Gilroy argues that “[i]t is a very important book if you understand its construction.”⁷⁸ Although the comment goes unchallenged by the interviewer, Gilroy could have explained how her early fiction addresses conditions which were later theorised by postcolonial scholars. Notably, her son, Paul Gilroy, applied his considerable intellect to the historical conditions underpinning diasporic modernity in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).⁷⁹ Beryl Gilroy suggests that *In Praise* “is the most misunderstood book of mine.”⁸⁰ Misunderstood and under-nourished by fresh critical insights, Gilroy’s entry in the *Bloomsbury Guide to Women’s Literature* states: “There has been little criticism of her writing to date.”⁸¹ This critical silence has meant that Gilroy has been *the* major critic and theoriser of her own work. Many of her thoughts were collected together and published as *Leaves in the Wind: Collected Writings* in 1998, and she continued her habit of analysing her own work right up until her sudden death in 2001. In the aforementioned interview with Bradshaw, Gilroy explains how her readings of *In Praise of Love and Children* affect her audiences. The author speaks of being “overcome by the way they [members of the audience] cry.” She attributes this emotional reaction the novel being “a very profound book, very profound.”⁸² Such a positive self-evaluation is risky, but by this stage in her life and career, she probably cared little what critics thought of her. Towards the end of the interview, Bradshaw questions the author’s self-regard: “It seems to me from all you have said about your upbringing that you were raised with very high self-esteem.”⁸³ Sexism and racial abuse are damaging to self

esteem, and we might recognise Hortense's affectations as a defence mechanism. Levy uses Hortense's self-regard to provide much needed humour at moments of high drama. Gilroy's use of humour may be less successful; she admits that "[a] lot of people miss the humour in my writing. I think it is excruciatingly funny. All the things I write."⁸⁴

The effective use of humour is just one of *Small Island's* literary accomplishments in a story made relevant because of its timeliness. Levy observes: "I think this country is kind of ready to listen to that story now. It's been 60 years since the *Empire Windrush* came."⁸⁵ When Levy won the "Whitbread Book of the Year" in 2005, the judges' chairman was Sir Trevor McDonald. Growing up in Trinidad during the *Windrush* era, he was part of its history.⁸⁶ Whilst McDonald denied backing Levy's entry, he told a *Guardian* interviewer that it "emerged as a clear winner" because "it is a beautifully observed novel of a period of English history which many people seem not to know very much about."⁸⁷ Maria Helena Lima suggests that Levy's fictional terrain is personal: "It seems as if a return to the past is required for her protagonists to move on."⁸⁸ Whilst Gilroy writes in the heat of the moment, Levy's texts seem to address an audience made ready by their historical distance.⁸⁹ *Small Island's* place is inscribed in the *Windrush* memorial as a multiple prize-winning novel, a radio production, and a BAFTA-nominated television adaptation. It seems that *In Praise* has slipped between the cracks—metaphorically speaking—the victim of a shifting literary timeline which saw the promotion of writing by West Indian males in the 1950s. In the 1980s, a decade that saw the reclamation of suppressed and marginalised women's writing, Gilroy's work remained largely overlooked. Re-reading Beryl Gilroy in dialogue with Andrea Levy, we can reclaim overlooked feminist literary genealogies as well as shed light on the ways in which shifting political and ideological contexts have shaped both the production and literary historical account of black British and Caribbean writing.

Endnotes

- 1 *The Oxford Dictionaries Online* gives the definition of “saga boy” as “playboy.” This term refers to a well-dressed, West Indian male who is a known chaser of women.
oxforddictionaries.com/definition/saga+boy [accessed 26 August 2011].
- 2 Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*. Joan Anim-Addo, ed., London: Mango Publishing, 1998, 9.
- 3 Beryl Gilroy, “In Praise of Love and Children,” (unpublished paper, n.d.), 1.
- 4 Beryl Gilroy, *In Praise of Love and Children*. London: Peepal Tree, 1996, 55.
- 5 Gail Low, “‘Finding the Centre?’ Publishing Commonwealth Writing in London: The Case of Anglophone Caribbean Writing, 1950-1965,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 37 (2002): 21-38, 25.
- 6 For example: Evelyn O’Callaghan, *Woman Version*. London: Macmillan, 1993; Sushelia Nasta, ed., *Motherlands*. London: The Women’s Press, 1991; Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*. London: Routledge, 1994; Alison Donnell, “Heard but not Seen: Women’s Short Stories and the BBC’s Caribbean Voices Programme,” *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt, and Emma Smith, eds., Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011, 29-43; Sandra Courtman, “‘Lost Years’: The Occlusion of West Indian Women’s Writers in the Early Canon of Black British Writing,” *Diasporic Literature and Theory- Where Now?* Mark Shackleton, ed., Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008, 57-86.
- 7 Matthew Mead, “Empire Windrush: The Cultural Memory of an Imaginary Arrival,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.2 (2009): 137-149, 137.
- 8 Mead, 137.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 140.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 146.
- 11 Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse,” *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse*. Paula Burnett, ed., London: Penguin, 1986, 32.
- 12 Names and descriptions of passengers arriving on M.V. Empire Windrush, Tilbury Docks, June 21/22, 1948. PRO/BT/1237/9411. “Moving Here: 200 years of Migration to England”: http://www.movinghere.org.uk/search/hitlist.asp?keywords=passenger+list+of+WINDRUSH&person=no&community=3&theme=0&date_from=&date_to=&source=0§ion=C&submit2=Search [accessed 4 March 2011].
- 13 “Summary of British and Alien Passengers”: http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php?title=MV_Empire_Windrush#Passenger_list_BT_26.2F1237 [accessed 9 March 2011].
- 14 Cited from interview with Sam King in Mead, 142.
- 15 <http://www.andrealevy.co.uk/biography/index.php> [accessed 3 March 2010].
- 16 Hilde Marchant, “Thirty Thousand Colour Problems,” *Picture Post* 9 June 1956, 38.
- 17 Marchant, 38.
- 18 Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*. Harlow: Longman Caribbean Writers, 1985 (first published Alan Wingate, 1956), 107.
- 19 Marchant, 28.
- 20 See chapters “The Woman of Color and the White Man” and “The Man of Color and the White Woman,” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. trans. Charles Lamm Markman London: Pluto Press, 1986 (first published Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1952).
- 21 Selvon, 133.

- 22 Joyce Gladwell, *Brown Face, Big Master*, 2nd edn., Sandra Courtman, ed., Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean Classic Series, 2003. See Courtman's introduction for a discussion of the conditions which facilitated the publication of Gladwell's rare autobiography in 1969.
- 23 Elsewhere I have written more fully about the conditions which affected these women writers' careers. Gladwell's case is discussed in the introduction to a reprinted edition of Joyce Gladwell, *Brown Face Big Master*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean Classic Series, 2003. See also Sandra Courtman, "Not Good Enough or Not Man Enough? Beryl Gilroy as the Anomaly in the Evolving Black British Canon," *A Black British Canon?* Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 50-74.
- 24 Sarah Brophy, "Entangled Genealogies: White Femininity on the Threshold of Change in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 4.2 (2010): 101.
- 25 From Brophy's title.
- 26 Joyce Gladwell, letter to the author, November 7, 1996.
- 27 Joyce Gladwell, letter to the author, November 7, 1996.
- 28 This quotation originally appeared in "Race Today Women," 1975, 110. It is cited in Elyse Dodgeson, *Motherland: West Indian Women to Britain in the 1950*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984, 62.
- 29 Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher*. London: Cassell, 1976; 2nd edn. London: Bogle L'Ouverture Press, 1994.
- 30 Fanon, 63,
- 31 Selvon, 48.
- 32 Ibid., 102.
- 33 Ibid., 103.
- 34 Ibid., 104.
- 35 Ibid., 106.
- 36 Diana Athill, *Life Class: The Selected Memoirs of Diana Athill*. London: Granta, 2009, 290.
- 37 Caryl Phillips, *A Distant Shore*. London: Secker and Warburg, 2003, 203.
- 38 Diana Athill, *Stet*. London: Granta Books, 2000, 103, cited in Low, 25.
- 39 Beryl Gilroy, *In Praise of Love and Children*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1996; Beryl Gilroy, *Sunlight on Sweet Water*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1994.
- 40 See also Courtman, "Not Good Enough or Not Man Enough? Beryl Gilroy as the Anomaly in the Evolving Black British Canon," 50-74.
- 41 Andrea Levy, *Small Island*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004, 464.
- 42 Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Virago, 1985, 43.
- 43 Margaret Busby, BBC World Service broadcast, "Caribbean Voices: Fifty Years On," ed. Colin Grant 7 July 2010: see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/i/p008grqf/> [accessed 4 March 2011].
- 44 Athill cited in Low, 25.
- 45 Low, 35.
- 46 Alison Donnell, "Heard but not Seen: Women's Short Stories and the BBC's Caribbean Voices Programme," *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, 31.
- 47 Beryl Gilroy, "Reflections," *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*. Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale, eds., London: Longman, 1999, 15.
- 48 Low, 31.
- 49 Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging*. London: Womens Press, 1985.

- 50 Laura Niesen de Abruna, "The Sea Change of Our Sisters: West Indian Women Writers in England," *Institute of Commonwealth Literature Collected Seminar Papers*, 42.2 (1992): 40.
- 51 Author's personal interview with Ann Walmsley and Louis James, Bedford Square Gardens, London, 31 May 1995. Transcript in Sandra Courtman, "Lost Years: West Indian Women Writing and Publishing in Britain, c. 1960-1979", Vol. 2. (Unpublished thesis, University of Bristol, 1998), 305.
- 52 See Athill, *Life Class*, 357-364. Athill describes her 'partnership' with Deutsch in the following way: "Dictatorships work: that is why they are so readily accepted, and if they are demonstrably more or less just, as they can be to start with, they are accepted with a gratitude more personal than can be inspired by other kinds of regime" (363).
- 53 This is in response to the following question put to the author: "What were the main barriers to your development as a novelist/creative writer?" Author's Interview with Beryl Gilroy, 3 August 1995, Hampstead, London.
- 54 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge, 1986, 4.
- 55 Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, 211.
- 56 Ibid., *Leaves in the Wind*, 213.
- 57 Athill, *Life Class*, 475.
- 58 E. R. Braithwaite, *To Sir, With Love*. London: Bodley Head, 1959. The back cover blurb of the fourth impression carries a photograph of the young author with the caption "The world needs all the Mr Braithwaites it can find," *Sunday Times*.
- 59 Podcast of V. S. Naipaul speaking on the BBC broadcast "Caribbean Voices: Fifty Years On."
- 60 Podcast of Ronda Cobham Sander speaking on the BBC broadcast "Caribbean Voices: Fifty Years On."
- 61 Anouk Lang, "Enthralling but at the same time disturbing': Challenging the Readers of *Small Island*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 44 (2009): 128.
- 62 Author's Interview with Beryl Gilroy, August 3, 1995, Hampstead, London.
- 63 David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*. London: Penguin, 1992, 216.
- 64 Teddy Jamieson, "The Author Andrea Levy on Racism, Rejection and Writing," *The Herald Magazine* 6 January 2007: 9-11, 9.
- 65 In answer to a question from one of the listeners, Levy remarked that Gilbert was her favourite character in *Small Island*, "World Book Club," (BBC World Service broadcast, February 6, 2010). Available as a BBC podcast, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/wbc> [accessed, March, 3, 2010].
- 66 Lang, 127.
- 67 Ibid., 127,
- 68 Ibid., 123-124.
- 69 Gilroy, *In Praise of Love and Children*, 58.
- 70 Lang, 127.
- 71 Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, 11.
- 72 Beryl Gilroy, "Letter to the Author," July 20, 1996.
- 73 Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind*, 201.
- 74 Lang, 123.
- 75 Curdella Forbes, *Songs of Silence*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2002, 93, 95.

- 76 Linda Hutcheon, "Telling Stories: Fiction and History," *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Peter Brooker, ed. London: Longman Critical Readers, 1992, 235.
- 77 Busby, BBC broadcast "Caribbean Voices: Fifty Years On."
- 78 Roxann Bradshaw, "Beryl Gilroy's 'Fact-Fiction': Through the Lens of the 'Quiet Old Lady,'" *Callaloo*, 25.2 (2002): 383.
- 79 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.
- 80 Bradshaw, 394.
- 81 Claire Buck, ed. *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*. London: Bloomsbury, 1992, 578.
- 82 Bradshaw, 391.
- 83 Ibid., 396.
- 84 Ibid., 395.
- 85 "Andrea Levy's *Small Island* Looks at Post-war Immigrants," *The Jamaica Observer* 17 April 2005, 5.
- 86 John Ezard, "Small Island Claims Whitbread Prize," *The Guardian* 26 January 2005: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/books.whitbreadbookawards2004/> [accessed June 10, 2010].
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*. Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2005: 57.
- 89 Gilroy, *Black Teacher*, front publisher's blurb: "This is a story of her triumph over injustice, hate, indifference...."

“Or perhaps I should describe the old, wild-haired man”¹: Representations of Ageing and Black British Identity in Andrea Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and Joan Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight*
Dr. Charlotte Beyer

Introduction: Ageing and Marginalisation

Beryl Gilroy has said about Western society that it has “developed various ways of casting aside the lives of the old.”² In fiction, elderly characters are frequently stereotyped and marginalised, according to Mike Hepworth.³ Certainly, the word “twilight” in the title of Joan Riley’s novel seems indicative of this relegation of old-age fictional characters. However, fiction is also a rich “source of ideas about the ageing process and... our individual subjective experience of growing older in contemporary society.”⁴ Until recently, however, discussions of black British narratives of ageing and marginalisation have been relatively absent from literary scholars’ debates. Offering a comparative discussion of the ageing experiences of the first Windrush generation in Andrea Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* (1994) and Joan Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), I explore areas of these two texts that have received relatively little attention from critics.⁵ Specifically, this essay focuses on representations of ageing and the role of subjective memory in storytelling, suggesting the figure of the ageing black body as a powerful figurative representation of the larger collective history of migrant experience. Through an examination of the authors’ use of realist forms of memory writing, I demonstrate that Levy and Riley retrieve historical experience, examine the construction of identity discourses, and introduce narrative strategies that promote reader identification. As will be seen, Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* explore the problematic of ageing and race in their art and celebrate those lives cast aside by British society.

Strategies of Memory Writing

Andrea Levy and Joan Riley are two of the most important black British women authors to have emerged in recent decades. Their popularity has coincided with black British history and culture deservedly achieving a much more prominent place in the collective imaginary. Yet, both writers were once seen as marginal figures. Laura Niesen de Abruña observes that Riley’s realism did not always find favour with critics;⁶ likewise, early in her career, Levy too “struggled to get published in a climate where magical-realist fiction dominated.”⁷ Perhaps, they may have simply been ahead of their time, if we are to judge by the recent interest in reclaiming black British voices through initiatives such as “Caribbean Histories Revealed” (National Archives),⁸ “The Separation and Reunion Forum,”⁹ and

“Mapping Memories: Reminiscence with Ethnic Minority Elders.”¹⁰ These projects focus on personal histories and the uncovering of the past, employing the very kind of narrative techniques used by Levy and Riley in their fictions.

Both Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* explore and retrieve black British individual and collective histories using a fictional form. I want to begin my analysis by examining the narrative techniques and formal processes that Levy and Riley employ in order to express the black British collective experience through the lens of the individual, particularly through the use of memory writing and a daughter-mediator character. These aspects of Levy’s writing (and, I would argue, also of Riley’s) “have not been addressed; in particular, its formal intricacies and its treatment of historical silences have not received adequate attention” from critics.¹¹ This essay explores such formal intricacies by looking at Levy and Riley’s recasting of individual histories through narratives of ageing: stories which use subjective and partial memory writing as formal processes to access those past experiences and emotions which do not otherwise ‘translate.’

According to Cesar and Sharon Meraz, black British women writers have taken on the task of representing the “reality of aging for the West Indian immigrant in London [...] and experiences of ‘displacement and disconnection.’”¹² This is long overdue, as Maria Helena Lima argues, “it used to be that to be Black and British was to be unnamed in the official discourse.”¹³ Similarly invisible in literature is the issue of old age, Hepworth concludes: “Old age has been described as the ultimate challenge for the novelist because it is about people who are living through the final period of their lives.”¹⁴ Representations of old age add nuance and complexity to conventional novelistic plots constructed around individuation and life journey, such as in the *Bildungsroman*, the developmental narrative model which, according to Mark Stein, is prevalent in a significant number of black British texts.¹⁵ Of course, neither *Light in the House Burnin’* or *Waiting in the Twilight* is a *Bildungsroman* in the traditional sense, nor are Levy and Riley’s ageing characters afforded the luxury of white middle-class spiritual ‘journeying’ in old age.¹⁶ On the contrary, their characters are subjected to marginalisation and sub-standard treatment, not simply because they are old but also because they are black. Discussing her own experience, Gilroy shows how such categories of oppression intersect: “I am thinking about my being Black and growing old in Britain. Will my old age, I wonder, be a calamitous plunge deeper into the underclass, or simply part of the general heritage of the struggling old, regardless of race or class?”¹⁷ Gilroy’s choice of words—“calamitous”, “deeper”, “underclass”—underlines the negative expectations associated with black British ageing also reflected in Riley and Levy’s fictions.

In recounting fictional histories of post-Windrush individual working-class men and women, their alienation, losses, and resilience, Levy and Riley’s novels demand our engagement. Using retrospective memory writing, which encourages readers to identify with the ageing characters’ journeys, *Light in the House Burnin’* and *Waiting in the Twilight* reappraise late 1960s-early 1980s British cultural geographies, and redress the silences surrounding portrayals of black British ageing experiences. Pam Schweitzer reminds us of the significance of life-story telling for the re-visioning of historical

discourses: "Sharing stories with people of the same generation or with much younger people helps to develop a sense of oneself as a participant in the great social and historical upheavals of the last century."¹⁸ Chris Weedon echoes this point in her assessment of black British writing: "[Fiction] allows for the imaginative exploration of experience as it is lived by individuals and social groups and of the possibilities of living differently."¹⁹ Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* therefore enrich recent black British social and cultural history from a fictional perspective, through such intergenerational sharing of stories.

Levy and Riley's fictions recount past events through flashbacks, as well as introduce episodic or anecdotal reminiscences, to explore the circuitous and subjective routes of memory. Riley's omniscient narrator allows access to Adella's thoughts and memories, as Weedon explains: "[Riley] writes the voices of the characters into the text. The immediacy of this technique forces the reader to engage with difference and with the impact of racism and patriarchy on both white and Black subjectivities."²⁰ Adella's memories of the past are central to the narrative: "her act of re-membering constitutes the novel and is a final attempt to gain control of her life."²¹ In Levy, the daughter-mediator uses memory writing to narrate the story of her father; which mingles with her own childhood recollections. This demonstrates the connectedness of their stories, and that the boundaries of individual narratives may blur in relation to one another, as well as to collective histories. *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Waiting in the Twilight* draw on a range of realist narrative techniques, such as retrospective reflection, internal monologue, first-person and omniscient perspectives, and episodic narrative structure. The novels use dialogue and dialect to foreground the processes of linguistic and cultural mediation and exchange, through memory-sharing and story-telling, between individuals and the community. These strategies enable the narratives to capture the rhythm and feel of black British vernaculars, thereby lending the prose a sense of vibrancy, immediacy, and authenticity, and foregrounding the effects of 'voice'. Using such strategies, both novels, in their differing ways, seek to explore and clarify the relationship between past and present for individual characters and their families, through realist narrative conventions and complex portrayals which avoid nostalgia or idealisation of the past.

Levy and Riley's novels rewrite recent historical master narratives through the revisionary processes of memory writing. In both texts the theme of 'light' and references to (in)visibility function as prompts for this process. Both Levy's *Every Light in the House Burning'* and Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* make references to themes of light and visibility, as an aspect of their representation of experiences of marginalisation and ageing, issues which Stuart Hall and Beryl Gilroy have also spoken about.²² Riley's novel uses the theme of light to expose the "hidden reality"²³ of black British ageing. Levy too is clearly aware of the significance of visibility, as a theme and effect, in relation to her work:

for me the starting point of writing books has always been about wanting to make the unseen visible, wanting to show the experience of my parents' generation and the children that came after, having to live in this country, quite a hostile environment, and how [they] cope with that.²⁴

It has been said of Levy's writing that her characters are: "just people who, save for the accident and drama of race, would be invisible."²⁵ Both *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Waiting in the Twilight* therefore use the idea of 'light' to interrogate issues of (in)visibility in relation to gender, race, and age, and to voice the unspoken. Riley highlights the risks writers take in interrogating such topics: "Granted there are questions, uncomfortable questions. But questions which create debate, however hostile, keep a normally hidden reality uncovered and raise the possibility of change."²⁶ Similarly, Levy's novels "confront silences in that they insist on the importance of remembering and speaking of one's own past, however painful a process this might be."²⁷

The painful aspect of the process of delving into the past is foregrounded by the fact that Levy and Riley's ageing characters still harbour secrets, surprises, and painful silences at the time of their deaths. Riley's Adella feels that motherhood outside wedlock means she shamed her family; "The shame sat on her, pushing her down further into her chair, the room suddenly full of disturbing scenes and memories from long in the past."²⁸ She is overwhelmed with regret, as she remembers the lengths poverty drove her to: "If only she had not needed those other men... all Beaumont knew how she had managed with the children."²⁹ These revelations are important, as they let the reader understand the implications for Adella of patriarchal and colonial oppression, and how it makes individuals feel responsible for their own exploitation. Or, as Weedon says: "[racism] produces arrogance in its perpetrators and humiliation and anger in its victims."³⁰ Adella's repressed anger and feelings of humiliation contribute to her physical ailments and strokes, as she embodies the damage inflicted by colonialism and patriarchy.³¹ Thereby, her ailing, ageing body takes on a symbolic dimension, representing black British working-class women's suffering.

In Levy, too, painful family secrets are suggested in the revelation that Angela's father has a twin brother whom he lost contact with, and who since died: "First, I find I have an uncle in this country. Second, that he's my dad's identical twin and lastly, that he is dead. I had learnt more about my dad in those few minutes than in most of the years that got me to that point."³² Similarly, the background to his Jewish name—Jacobs—is not explained. Such family 'silences' and repressions highlight the problematic nature of migration. These 'silences' speak of the migrant's difficulties of reconciling cultural and ethnic differences, when the personal and collective histories of the past do not 'translate', and therefore become unspeakable: "He never talked about his family or his life in Jamaica. He seemed only to exist in one plane of time—the present."³³ Evidently, Levy and Riley's ageing characters have experienced fractured familial relationships and painful or shameful secrets. Therefore, the process of uncovering layers of characters' personal history, some repressed and impermissible, takes on an archaeological function of unearthing and re-appraising lived experience, thereby recasting history from a different angle. The two novels use memory writing as a narrative strategy and a formal tool which serves to strengthen and celebrate communities, and their capacity for survival and resistance. Memory writing within these texts is a formal process which releases powerful emotions and bodily identifications, as Beryl Gilroy insists: "memory is a child of the guts and the emotion, of the brain and heart and the lips. It is the dresser of time."³⁴

In Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight*, fictionalised life-story telling and memory writing transmit and share experience in a contemporary society where fragmentation of communities hinders oral inter-generational transmission of knowledge:

Many cultures rely on oral history as a means of educating the next generation and continuing their cultural heritage of stories, experiences, and knowledge. In Western society, knowledge is often transmitted in written forms.³⁵

Both texts use the narrative device of the daughter as mediator between the older black British character and society, a link connecting the generations in history and real-time, Carol in Riley: "She still had Carol, Carol who had never disappointed her, and who she knew would always be with her,"³⁶ and Angela in Levy: "I don't know what we'll do when you're not here', my dad said."³⁷ Both quotes reflect a neediness, in emotional and practical terms, on the part of the ageing characters, as well as highlight the responsibility borne by the daughter in mediating those needs. The daughter-mediator thus becomes a highly significant figure, for her character enables the continuation of intergenerational and community bonds, and embodies the processes of female individuation and subject-formation.

Portraying such intergenerational relationships is crucial to black British women writers, says Myriam Chancy:

By focusing on the effects of a legacy of British colonialism and concurrent racial discrimination and marginalization in the lives of the elderly and the young, it becomes apparent that a crucial facet of West Indian life in Britain is the rupture of cross-generational bonds.³⁸

The figure of the daughter-mediator in Levy and Riley represents the evolution of black British identity and a younger generation successfully negotiating black Britishness. In *Waiting in the Twilight*, Adella proudly muses: "She liked the way people talked about her daughter. The way they had to say how she had respect and didn't let the big job change her."³⁹ The daughter-mediator represents an embodiment of younger women's ability to devise survival strategies in patriarchy,⁴⁰ and establishes an emotional link between the reader and the ageing characters, as she makes use of her understanding of British society to assist the older generation. Thereby, the daughter-mediator characters provide the reader with an additional perspective on the profound effects of ageing, illness, and race marginalisation on families and family relationships. The novels foreground desperate experiences of loneliness, and the pain of loss. This is evident in the texts' portrayals of the importance which companion animals have for these elderly characters, for whom pet cats and dogs provide an emotional outlet and non-judgmental companionship. Such themes are part of the difficult, yet necessary, fictional recasting of individual and community histories taking place in Levy and Riley's novels, through the processes of memory writing. Lai comments:

Ethnocultural minorities often face the danger of losing their cultural assets if their stories and experiences are left untold. Through life review and reminiscence, older adults from minority groups can pass on their

experiences and cultural knowledge to the next generation and build a stronger ethnic identity for their ethnic group.⁴¹

Individuals and communities are thereby able to not only claim ownership of their history, but to share it with others, too, as Pam Schweitzer argues: “Reminiscence is also a means of celebrating difference, bringing communities with different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds together to exchange life experience.”⁴²

Andrea Levy and Joan Riley’s memory writing recasts issues of identity and agency, and generates intimacy and emotional engagement. Gilroy comments on the importance of memory to the experience of ageing and retaining a sense of self/identity: “How right she had been about memory. It is right to double-take, leave out, accentuate, and change.... We can do what we like with the chameleon of memory.”⁴³ Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* suggests that the act of telling someone else’s story whilst also telling your own is a bearing witness, which can effect change, as Lima notes: “[Levy] chooses realist conventions because of her faith in the power of representation—because of her belief that if you can represent reality, you can attempt to change it.”⁴⁴ Levy and Riley’s fictions voice the life stories of ageing black British men and women, thereby creating spaces for such hitherto marginalised accounts and characters in contemporary British fiction. Their texts also promote change, by confronting readers with the fictionalised memories, hopes, sufferings, and injustices of those characters, thereby engendering empathy and identification.

Narrating Ageing Bodies

Levy and Riley narrate ageing bodies with humour, anger, compassion, and an acute sense of the exhausting struggle the characters are engaged in, fighting to refuse their own victimisation whilst retaining subjective agency and a sense of personal dignity. In both *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Waiting in the Twilight*, the characters’ ageing bodies and physical deterioration are central to their portrayal. Hepworth argues that old age and the ageing body have typically been associated with negativity in Western culture: “there is no doubt (at least in western civilizations) that one of the most disturbing images of later life is that of physical decline.”⁴⁵ The words “waiting” and “twilight” suggest that being black, old and female is merely a half-existence before the end. In their representations of ageing and the body, Levy and Riley explore the impact of illness, isolation, loss of dignity and social status, and the treatment of elderly black British individuals by the health system and local communities. Levy and Riley’s novels thereby incorporate a strong element of social criticism. By refusing to take “the scenic route”⁴⁶, *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and *Waiting in the Twilight* courageously confront readers with painful and sometimes controversial subjects surrounding the ageing body and dying, which challenge societal taboos, and encourage openness around these important issues.

In Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight*, Adella’s experiences her ageing and illness as degrading, and overshadowed by loneliness, passivity, and decline. Adella sees this coming, but feels powerless to change her situation:

Suddenly the endless stretch of lonely hours filled only by the flickering lights of the television was too much to bear. Since she became sick all she ever did was fill the hours with memories, uncomfortable, half-buried memories; some good, some bad. All left her lonely and bitter, weighed down with the feeling that she had wasted her life.⁴⁷

As an ageing black disabled woman, Adella's experiences in *Waiting in the Twilight* clearly predate equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation, as she is sacked from her job when her poor physical condition affects her time-keeping: "She felt weary as she walked down the stairs, her bad leg dragging more than ever as she left the building for the last time. [...] The tiredness weighed on her heavily and she felt old beyond her time."⁴⁸ Loss of physical health and mobility results in loneliness and isolation for Adella, as the disparate urban settings of the 1970s-1980s have little to offer the forgotten elderly in terms of community, neighbourliness, or practical and emotional support. Both Levy and Riley show how institutions, which traditionally offered companionship and cared for the vulnerable, such as the Church and the NHS, are compromised by unacknowledged issues of racism, sexism, and class prejudice. Reflecting on society's propensity to ignore older black people, Beryl Gilroy asserts: "We are patronised by word and gesture and given minimal thought in the distribution of resources."⁴⁹

Riley's portrayal of Adella's ageing in *Waiting in the Twilight* highlights this experience of being patronised and forgotten. Riley's critical account of Adella's treatment echoes other critical interventions against the prevailing "scenario, which represents old age as a time of waiting to die."⁵⁰ In fact, Adella has been exploited and disrespected most of her life, and ageing merely amplifies this experience. Although cast as a victim, Riley also shows Adella's resilience and courage as she copes with migration, motherhood, working life, and domestic violence. She even purchased the family home with her savings. She has worked hard, in an unassuming way, to make her way in a new country, and raised her children as pretty much the sole breadwinner. However, it is the repossession of her home following her husband's abandonment, the loss of her material foothold in British society, which crushes her fighting spirit: "They had pulled the heart out of her when they took her house."⁵¹ Verbally and physically abused by the philandering Stanton, Adella's self-esteem sinks further and she becomes a victim of domestic violence. After her first stroke, Stanton abandons her, and Adella is forced to care for her children as the sole breadwinner, as hardship and exhaustion gradually take their toll. Riley's portrayal of Stanton exposes his weakness, brutality and selfishness, whilst also acknowledging the negative ways in which experiences of migration and racism in Britain challenged his masculinity and sense of worth, and thereby changed him. By allowing her protagonist to remain devoted to the delusion that Stanton will return to her if only she keeps the faith, Riley demonstrates the dangers of denial. Similarly, Riley condemns the escapist fantasy of migration as providing a road to financial success. Adella is racked with regret, as her final thoughts circle around her life's disappointments, and her own perceived shortcomings and failings.⁵² Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* thus delivers a devastating criticism of a Britain, in which black old age womanhood is experienced as

lonely and invisible, and perceived by others as having nothing valuable to contribute to society anymore.

Representations of Adella's ageing body in *Waiting in the Twilight* emphasise the physical weariness and chronic pain which rob her of self-esteem and quality of life: "She felt older and older, as the pain in her bones increased. She was always lonely now, cut off from the life outside,"⁵³ and "Adella sighed, feeling the ache deep in her back, the burning pain in her legs that got worse as the days slipped by."⁵⁴ The alienation Adella associates with her ageing body is reinforced by her sense of isolation and (to some extent) self-imposed exile. Pam Schweitzer comments on sharing life stories and feeling respected and valued, and how these may work as therapeutic tools: "In reminiscence everyone is the expert on his or her own life and is recognised as an individual with unique experience to impart."⁵⁵ However, isolated and disabled, Adella increasingly depends on her daughters to motivate her to get out of the house, rather than live the shadowy existence slumped in front of the television which she is sliding into: "The only outings she took now were when one of her daughters came by to take her out. They would tuck her into the car as if she was sick."⁵⁶ Adella's dog is her only constant companion, but when she loses physical mobility and becomes housebound, she is unable to meet the animal's needs and becomes increasingly dependent on her daughter taking the dog out for walks. Although she is clearly unwell, the health system fails to understand and engage with Adella's needs. Only when her daughter Audrey takes charge, does she get the specialist appointment she needs, a small victory which ultimately turns out to be too little too late: "It had been good to see the doctor climb down, to know her daughter had made him do so."⁵⁷ However, as the daughter-mediator and the doctor discuss Adella in the third person, their conversation places her in an infantilised position which deprives her of authority and a voice:

Since they started coming with her, things were always better and the man had to listen to them because they could talk like him. The two of them continued to talk and she looked around the bare room wondering why she bothered to come.⁵⁸

Riley's moving and incisive portrayal of Adella's thoughts allows the reader to share both her small sense of victory, as her daughters' insistence forces the doctors to climb down, and her angry frustration at being infantilised and patronised.

The closing chapter of *Waiting in the Twilight* depicts Adella's final demise, with Riley using stream-of-consciousness narration to depict the dying Adella's dream-like state of mind. Riley's storytelling mode matches Adella's drifting in and out of consciousness, as the pace of narration is slowed down, to capture the drawn-out waiting of Adella's last hours. Those hours are spent in agony and dread, first waiting for an ambulance to take her to hospital to be provided with vital medical attention, then waiting on a trolley in a hospital corridor for a bed, then waiting for a doctor to tend to her and give her the treatment she so desperately needs: "Time slipped past, dragging and hanging heavily, but moving on and on."⁵⁹ While Adella's consciousness fluctuates, the reader observes her distraught daughters discussing why the hospital is not doing more to help their mother: "she's been lying here all day, and they haven't even bothered to give her

something to make her feel better.”⁶⁰ The tragedy of Adella’s life (and death) is that the reader is only too aware that Adella’s overriding desire for recognition, expressed in her final words, “All dat respect,”⁶¹ has not materialised, and will not do so after her death. This loss of authority and lack of acknowledgement in old age is a wide-spread phenomenon for black Britons: “Many have not experienced the respectful treatment they expected and hoped for as elders.”⁶² Gilroy echoes this observation: “Some of our young people have lost cultural respect for old age and the ability to recognise the needs of the aged.”⁶³ In Riley’s novel, the ageing black body’s lack of authority mirrors a collective black British experience of marginalisation in old age.

During the course of Adella’s last moments, Riley uses the interplay between fantasy and realist discourses to portray the bleakness of Adella’s dying, and to have Adella’s imagination reward her patience, by conjuring for her the unconditional love and acceptance, which real life could never give her. In her portrayal of Adella’s delirious state, Riley uses fantasy to facilitate some degree of relief for Adella beyond the grim reality of an undignified death. In her imagination, Adella is able to reverse some of her life’s most painful losses, as the fantasy discourse of stereotypical romance imagery permits her a deathbed scene reunion of sorts with a now reformed Stanton: “She saw him through the mist, a faded brown picture, with the painting of coconut palms and a calm sea behind him.”⁶⁴ The contrast between the realist and fantasy discourses foregrounds the grim realities of old age finality for Adella, and highlights Riley’s criticism of that reality, and the need for change to transcend the oppression which underlines it. In other contexts Riley has expressed her reluctance to be seen to unambiguously endorse fantasy, and *Waiting in the Twilight* echoes this anxiety about escapism. The novel’s portrayal of Adella, and her need for vacuous western films and television entertainment, reflects Riley’s ambivalent position regarding the status of popular culture, between on the one hand, fantasy as an alternative to an unbearable and painful reality, and on the other, as destructive self-delusion.⁶⁵ However, such fleeting moments of imagined gratification illustrate the humanity of Adella’s character and the power of language to suggest alternative realities: “She wanted to tell them that she was all right now, that she had not felt better in a long time. Everybody was there and they were not condemning her. They knew she had done her best.”⁶⁶ Despite Riley’s ambivalence towards fantasy, or perhaps precisely because of it, *Waiting in the Twilight* convincingly and movingly depicts a survivor heroine who certainly commands her readers’ respect and affection, as her inner life repeatedly demonstrates her resilience and humanity.

Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* is narrated by the daughter-mediator Angela, a strategy which offers a different and perhaps more emotionally direct reading experience from Riley, by using an overtly personalised narrative perspective, and foregrounding an enduring marriage and family community.⁶⁷ Losing physical mobility, alongside the symbolic loss of status and purpose typically associated with retirement, has a devastating impact on Angela’s father’s sense of self-worth and his masculine identity: “I could tell that my dad was worried by what was happening to his body.”⁶⁸ The issue of black British masculinity has received relatively little scholarly attention;⁶⁹ however, Levy’s complex and emotionally intense portrayal provides us with an

opportunity to explore its construction and representation. Neither a victim nor an idealised character, the multi-faceted nature of Angela's father's character is reflected in the portrayal of him as the family breadwinner, with a fiery temper and a disciplinarian streak.⁷⁰ Angela's father is a proud man, and in taking care of his appearance and making a point of formality, he is upholding the cultural inheritance of the Caribbean 'Sunday Best' traditional dress code as a marker of respectability.⁷¹ He has worked hard and contributed to society, been a good father, husband, and provider for his family – a man of principle, resilient and loyal. However, as the family cat Willie becomes increasingly important to Angela's father in his old age, after his children have left home, his emotional response to the cat's disappearance at the end suggests his unacknowledged (but understandable) neediness. His response also reflects the detrimental effects of emotional repression for black British males struggling to reconcile stereotypes of conventional masculinity with race and class inequality.

Gradually, Angela's father relinquishes his patriarchal authority, as he loses his sense of self, and his ageing body is relegated to a deteriorating and alienated 'other'. When Angela visits her father in hospital, his loss of authority becomes clear to her, as she discovers the doctors have spoken to her mother about his condition and explained the various tests, but not to him. The silence not only reflects his loss of self-determination but also indicates the difficulties of communication within the NHS caused by differences of race and class, issues also raised by Riley in *Waiting in the Twilight*. This perceived loss of personal power is particularly poignant and devastating for Angela's father, whose masculinity is compromised as a result. The father's sense of loss of authority and status in retirement suggests that ageism reinforces the intersecting nature of race, class, and gender oppression. As in Riley, Angela finds herself in the paradoxical situation of having to be the one to speak up on behalf of her ageing parent. Angela receives only impersonal "professional sympathy"⁷² when trying to initiate a discussion about her ageing father's plight, and is met by a patronising dismissal of her request for information about hospice treatment. This passage has a strong affective dimension, encouraging the reader's emotional response to, and identification with, these sad and harrowing experiences.

Levy foregrounds the loss of self in old age, in Angela's account of her father's physical decline: "My dad began to walk with a stick, leaning on it heavily and dragging his leg behind him... he was ageing quickly, like a speeded-up film sequence, almost minute by minute."⁷³ Levy's references here to specific film-making techniques evoke a disturbed sense of chronology and time, a strategy which supports "the idea that the present is always elusive helps us to understand the dilemma at the heart of ageing—namely the problem of making sense of the experience of time passing and coming to terms with change."⁷⁴ Angela's father's loss of mobility conveys both his individual suffering, and the loss of social standing in old age for black Britons. The reactions of Angela's friends to her description of the seriousness of her father's condition are also indicative of the cultural repression of the challenging realities of old age and terminal illness, resulting in isolation and silence. Eventually the severity of Angela's father's illness is mediated through writing, in her mother's letter: "Gradually he is losing his grip

on life. The brain scan showed the cancer had escaped to the brain and caused the paralysis on the left side. The doctor said that because of this they couldn't treat the cancer on the lung."⁷⁵ Having agreed to keep the truth about his condition from Angela's father a little longer, allowing him to go on believing he is only experiencing the after-effects of a stroke and will recover in time, the letter makes it quite clear that he will not and cannot recover. The narrator's response is one of empathy and despair at the failure to find anything but clichés to offer: "Shall I get you a cup of tea, Dad?' I said. I didn't know what else to do. I felt helpless. I wanted to do something, I wanted to take his pain away."⁷⁶ As in Riley, it falls to the daughter to take up a mediating role of helper/translator for her father, to enable communication between him and the white-dominated establishment: "Dad—would you like me to see the doctor for you? See if I can get some stronger pills for the pain?"⁷⁷ This offer of help is gratefully received, as the ageing father presumes his daughter more capable of translating his needs across cultural and racial barriers: "Yes, you go—you know how to talk to him—you know what to say."⁷⁸ This important passage illustrates the reversal of roles between the father and the daughter-mediator, with the latter assuming linguistic control and social authority.

Like Riley, Levy depicts the discriminatory practices surrounding Angela's father's treatment by the medical establishment. The fact that Angela only manages to secure decent home nursing care for her father through her connections; that the hospital ward is large, impersonal, and deprived of resources; that Angela's mother is forced to leave her husband in the casualty department without him having been settled into a bed at a ward, are all indications of understaffed, hectic, cramped health care conditions for ageing black British working-class people: "I always thought you were sent home from hospital when you were fit. Perhaps once, but now they needed the beds."⁷⁹ The humiliation of Angela's father being told to soil himself, because hospital workers are too busy to assist him in going to the toilet, is shocking and scandalous to Angela. The reader experiences the father's dehumanisation through Angela's eyes, which further encourages reader empathy and identification. Angela's vision of murderous rage, as her father is objectified by the nurse's dismissive term, "old man Jacobs,"⁸⁰ exposes the gap between fantasies of anger and the reality of passive despair which relatives of patients in such situations understandably feel. Levy's depictions of Angela's anguish at her father's pained screams, and his subsequent suicide attempt as a last resort to maintain dignity and control⁸¹, are all the more poignant, because they are achieved through an understated, pared-down prose.

In Levy, the physical process of the body shutting down is mirrored in the narrative drive towards closure, in Angela's despairing words: "There was pain there – not physical, not for me, but pain that you can't see coming, that smacks you inside and pulls and rips at you. No aspirin or plaster can help."⁸² Shocked by Angela's burst of raw emotion, and her controversial wish that he may die: "I wanted to let him go now. I didn't want any more memories of him like that... I wanted him dead. I wished him dead,"⁸³ the reader identifies with her wish, seeing that it has its origin in love, not cowardice or denial. Levy courageously portrays taboo in her representation of death. Such complex and difficult emotions in relation to death reject a sanitised glossing-over of the experience:

I could hear my dad crying out, horrible, moaning sobs... I began to get angry with him. Why couldn't he die gracefully, with dignity? Fading silently from life with a gentle smile and a touching last request. So his family could stand round his death bed and weep and mourn their loss. No, he had to die kicking and screaming, being pulled from life, being robbed. The loudest noise he had ever made in his life... The first rail against injustice.⁸⁴

Angela's father's refusal to fade away quietly reflects the book's insistence on his humanity, and insists on his right to be heard, to not be silenced and sanitised, but be real. Angela's gesture of trust and continuity, in insisting on the humanity of touch, transcends the father's ageing and diseased body, ravaged by steroids which had seemed to become an unrecognisable 'other': "I... laid my hand on top of his. His hand that I always held to cross the road."⁸⁵ The image of hands connecting consolidates the emotional and physical bond between parent and child, but also reflects Angela's authority as the daughter-mediator, having to take control.

The endings of both novels underline the difficulty of closure. Where Riley's novel integrates a 'happy ending' fantasy that allows Adella to let go of life, into the closing chapter through sections of stream-of-consciousness, Levy's novel presents an alternative, separate, last chapter for that vision. In this closing chapter, tellingly entitled "The Death," Angela's anecdote of the pet cat Willie's decision to take herself away to die alone, on her own terms, stands in contrast to her father's undignified and shabby hospital death. Levy's 'double ending' powerfully emphasises the significance of self-determination in old age. In their use of fantasy discourse and alternative endings, both *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Waiting in the Twilight* thus resist the shabby finality of their ageing characters' deaths. They insist that their characters' deteriorating physical health and abjection in old age result from their bodies and minds being subjected to the dis-ease of a racist, classist, sexist society. In both novels, the ageing black body stands as a powerful figurative representation of the wider collective history of black British experience. Levy and Riley both resolutely break with the convention described by Brennan, whereby: "realistic literary representations that portray characters until the moment of their deaths are a rarity."⁸⁶ Instead, Levy and Riley's brave and aching beautiful portrayals of the ageing body and dying are complex, passionate, and realistic - and refuse "the scenic route".⁸⁷

Conclusion: Across Generations

Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* reappraise black British experience, ensuring that ageing black characters' lives have not been forgotten, and that younger generations strive to change their conditions. Examining black British ageing is to engage creatively and emotionally with recent black British history – in Riley's words, not "as something which the dominant ideology decides is history [but] in terms of how it's actually been experienced generationally."⁸⁸ In *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Waiting in the Twilight*, Levy and Riley's uses of realist memory writing and representations of ageing enable marginalised and ignored voices to

be heard across generations. Thereby, both novels reject the story of silenced victimhood for their ageing characters, by foregrounding intergenerational connections, as a celebration of continuity which sustains postcolonial and black British identities in the face of an ever-evolving and diversifying society. Fiction plays an important role in promoting such identifications, and can: “articulate the affective and emotional dimensions of oppression and the processes of resistance and solidarity that produce new forms of subjectivity and identity.”⁸⁹ Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* and Riley’s *Waiting in the Twilight* explore ideas of bodily abjection in their depictions of what ageing feels like for their characters, and insist on their ageing fictional characters’ humanity and complexity, their resilience and imaginations. In these two novels Levy and Riley make elderly characters and their histories the main story. They present, at the centre of the story, black British working-class characters whose ageing experiences spur our outrage, and whose histories will not be cast aside.

Endnotes

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- 3 Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000, 23.
- 4 Hepworth, 8.
- 5 An exception is Lynda Aitken, Gabriele Griffin, *Gender Issues in Elder Abuse*. London: Sage, 1996, 68. This text makes brief reference to Riley's theme of old age, and discusses the novel's portrayal of intersecting categories of oppression; however, Aitken and Griffin don't engage with its literary merits.
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Stranger in the Empire: Language and Identity in the 'Mother Country'

Ann Murphy

Joyce is right about history being a nightmare—but it may be the nightmare from which no one *can* awaken. People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.

—James Baldwin¹

In 1953, James Baldwin first published an essay, "Stranger in the Village," which offers an incisive, painful, and enduring examination of racism and American identity. In the opening to the essay, the expatriate Baldwin describes his visit to a small Swiss village whose residents have never before seen a person of African descent. He describes his experience as follows:

Everyone in the village knows my name, though they scarcely ever use it, knows that I came from America though this, apparently, they will never really believe: black men come from Africa—and everyone knows that I am the friend of the son of a woman who was born here, and that I am staying in their chalet. But I remain as much a stranger today as I was the first day I arrived, and the children shout *Neger! Neger!* as I walk along the streets.... there was no suggestion that I was human: I was simply a living wonder.²

The thrust of Baldwin's argument concerns what he regarded, in 1953, as the quintessentially *American* struggle of peoples of European ancestry to acknowledge the humanity and shared citizenship of people of African ancestry or, in Baldwin's words, the "necessity of the American white man to find a way of living with the Negro in order to be able to live with himself."³ In the course of this complicated essay Baldwin speculates on the differences between a European arriving for the first time in Africa and an African arriving for the first time in Europe.

Baldwin describes these experiences imaginatively, indeed novelistically, using the description of differences to make rhetorical and political points about race relations in the United States. His insights into the varying power dynamics of each encounter may elucidate many of the experiences of people of African descent who were, at that historical moment, arriving in Europe in unprecedented numbers in the post-war counter-migration from former colonies to Europe (though these people were not, of course, encountering white Europeans for the first time). Baldwin's essay thus offers us a perspective through which we can begin to examine Andrea Levy's fictionalised account of the arrival of the *Windrush* generation of West Indians in Britain, in her novel, *Small Island*.

At the same time, Baldwin's essay is equally revealing for what it does *not* say, especially about the sexual dimensions of the colonial and post-colonial encounter. In

discussing the Western imperial movement into Africa and Asia, for example, Anne McClintock refers to the “long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment,”⁴ and the “persistent gendering of the imperial unknown,”⁵ while Stuart Hall, discussing the counter-migration of West Indians and others to Britain, describes “the problem of the problem, so to speak—the core issue: [as] *miscegenation*.”⁶ Baldwin, however, in this essay does not directly address the subject of interracial sexuality so essential to the encounter between races; indeed he scarcely mentions women at all. Nor does he address the different ways that race and power intersect for women on each side of the encounter. Yet both of these questions are central to *Small Island*.

Consequently, a comparison of the two texts is as intriguing for the thematic connections between them as for the ways they diverge. Baldwin's essay, of course, is a primary document, recounting the perspective of an African-American man living in France in the mid 1950s, while Levy's is a novel, a fictionalised account written more than a generation later, of the *Windrush* generation and the experiences of African-British people. In drawing on a primary text by an African American male writer living in Europe to explore the themes of a black British female writer of a later generation, I do not want to imply a facile 'universality' of postcolonial themes. Indeed we find many profound and suggestive differences between the two: including sexuality, especially interracial sexuality, which Baldwin (in this essay) elides as well as gender and language, and humour.⁷ Despite these significant differences, I propose that a comparative reading of the two texts might allow us to, in Helen Scott's words, “heed Said's call to reunite texts with their 'worldly situation'—one of imperialist conquest and global inequalities.”⁸ Reading the texts together, I suggest, offers us a fuller understanding both of Baldwin's original insights as well as their limitations and of Levy's subsequent imaginative rendering of an historical experience that both illustrates and challenges Baldwin's claims. While Baldwin was writing at a moment when African American claims upon citizenship were becoming more insistent and the Civil Rights Movement strengthened and accelerated, Levy is describing, in hindsight, through the lens of history, a different crucial and pivotal moment of transition in the intersecting experiences of, and relationships among, Afro-Caribbean immigrants from British colonies and white, working-class and lower-middle class Londoners during and after World War II. The relationship of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the white world of England is quite different from the relationship of African-Americans to the nation that had enslaved them, though the dynamics of imperialism, power, and racism in the two texts are dishearteningly similar.

Set against the upheaval of a cataclysmic war fought—at least ostensibly—against the racist ideology and imperial domination of the Nazis, Levy's novel explores the cruel and dehumanizing ways that class, race, and gender constitute barriers to human community in the waning days of the British Empire. Built on the interlacing of four different first-person narratives, the novel also shifts back and forth in time, weaving a rich cumulative portrait of five individuals: Hortense, Gilbert, Queenie, Bernard, and Michael (although we never hear Michael's voice directly). These characters are often blinded or dominated by the ideologies of race, class, and gender that have shaped their lives; they sometimes appear dangerously, indeed tragically, incapable of seeing or

understanding one another and themselves. At the same time, four of these five people are capable of varying degrees of empathy and humor, and of recognising—if only briefly—the humanity in one another, of bridging the racial estrangement Baldwin describes.

Two elements in this historical moment of counter-migration and contact that Levy depicts are strikingly similar to those Baldwin discusses in his essay: the vastly different power dynamics implicit in the white and the black encounters of Otherness; and the way language often constitutes an obstacle to, rather than a means of, human connection, inscribing and reinforcing racial and class differences. In many ways, the blindness of these characters to and about each other, reflected in their misunderstandings of one another's words, illustrates the degree to which both people of 'colour' and white, working-class people have been erased from the discourses of power and have no language to understand one another. In the words of Anne McClintock:

The colonial journey into the virgin interior reveals a contradiction, for the journey is figured as proceeding forward in geographical space but backward in historical time, to what is figured as a prehistoric zone of racial and gender difference.... According to this trope, colonized people—like women and the working class in the metropolis—do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency.⁹

Levy's novel reclaims the voices and emotions and experiences of men and women, including colonial subjects and England's working class, all of whom struggle in the course of the novel to express their "human agency" and to find their place in time and history.

Historically, significant differences exist between the racial encounters depicted in Levy's novel and in Baldwin's essay. Most strikingly, the West Indians expected, upon arriving in Britain, that they would be recognised as citizens of the 'Mother Country': they saw themselves as vital to the survival of England and as part of its Empire.¹⁰ Furthermore, they had resources available to them as a distinct community from a separate and beloved, known homeland; they had a strong sense of themselves and their cultural history. Despite the Harlem Renaissance and the critique of race and racism proffered by authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois, I would argue that such resources—stemming from the sense of a collective, imagined community—were not always available to African Americans at the time Baldwin wrote his essay: or, at least, these resources are not acknowledged in his essay. Indeed, Baldwin's solitude as a Black man in that frozen white Swiss village is the most powerful element of his essay and his argument.

The novel's Jamaican characters include two Royal Air Force (RAF) airmen, Gilbert and Michael, and Gilbert's wife, Hortense, an educated school teacher. The British characters are two working-class or lower-middle-class Londoners: Queenie, a butcher's daughter and a housewife who rents rooms to the West Indians, and her husband, Bernard, a clerk who returns from the war in India still trapped by his racism and fear. All three Jamaicans arrive in England either during or after the war, eager to fight and/or

work on behalf of the British and to start a new life there, convinced by years of colonial propaganda that they are equal citizens of the 'Mother Country' and Empire, not second-class subjects of colonial rule. Instead, of course, they encounter virulent racism and violence from many of the people whom they had been taught to regard as fellow citizens in an England they had been taught to regard as home.

Most persistently, Gilbert and Hortense, whose experiences we hear in their own voices, find that the 'Mother Country' neither recognises nor acknowledges their humanity; indeed, it literally cannot understand their theoretically-shared English language. Instead, Gilbert, Michael, and Hortense look "black" and less than human to most white English residents, whether in London's East End or in a Yorkshire village, and their speech, as we shall see below, is often incomprehensible to the English, in part because the Jamaicans are far better educated than the working-class English people they encounter. But while the white characters see all of the Jamaicans as undifferentiated Others, blind to their humanity and deaf to their words, we, as readers, hear the voices of the individual Jamaican characters as unique and distinct, shaped by class and gender and character.

Levy highlights the ways in which all of the personal voices in the narrative are inflected by empire, albeit in different, highly individual ways. Hortense, for example, opens her background narrative by establishing her status in the colony of Jamaica: "The sound of my father's name could still hush a room long after he had left Savannah-La-Mar. Every generation in our district knew of my father and his work overseas as a government man."¹¹ Gilbert opens his by boasting of his looks and criticising British food: "My mirror spoke to me. It said: 'Man, women gonna fall at your feet.' ... How the English built empires when their armies marched on nothing but mush should be one of the wonders of the world."¹² Each of these two voices is distinct in its colonial snobbery and insecurity, its confidence and sensuality, and much of the novel's power derives from the contrapuntal effect of these vivid, interlacing narratives, rendering as intensely vivid these characters whom the English cannot see or hear.

At the same time, 'hearing' the voices of the two white characters, Queenie and Bernard, allows us to understand more fully their personal histories, their vulnerabilities and desires, and the way their fears and bigotries have been shaped by their culture and class and gender. The novel opens with Queenie's story of a childhood experience going to "Africa" at the British Empire Exhibition, an encounter that contains elements of sexuality and fear. This episode presents dramatically Queenie's first discovery of the 'surprising' humanity of the "black man who looked to be carved from melting chocolate," as well as her racist presumption that he is "civilized—[because he was] taught English by the white man."¹³ By contrast, Bernard's voice comes to us only mid-way through the novel, and his searing and humiliating war experiences in India mark him as palpably as Queenie's childhood encounter with exoticism marks her: "We were packed like cattle on to the train in Bombay when we first arrived I India. Hundreds of troops. We walked three abreast into the station but were quickly outnumbered. Brown people all around."¹⁴ For Bernard, the only compensation for his suffering and sexual inadequacy is his reflexive

contempt for people of other races. Various colonial hierarchies and practices of othering emerge, highlighting the variously alienating effects of empire on individuals.

These interlacing first person narratives heighten the reader's awareness of how cruelly racism blinds nearly all of the characters in the novel, but especially the white characters, both to shared human experiences of love, hate, fear, and need as well as to an understanding of the unique qualities that make each individual so profoundly different. While most readers will see and hear significant distinctions among the West Indians, the British characters in the novel see the West Indians as undifferentiated others defined entirely by their race. The Jamaicans, by contrast, see the white characters with such widely varying perspectives that some readers may have trouble reconciling the Queenie of Gilbert's narrative to the character of the same name in Hortense's account. Indeed one of the most striking qualities of the interlacing first person narratives in the novel is that the self-perception of each character, conveyed by his or her voice, differs so radically from the way the other characters in the novel see that person.

Despite the persistent, claustrophobic effects of race / class / gender blindness that dominate the novel, we as readers are aware of the deep, hidden human connections between them, connections none of the characters ever fully realizes. Both Queenie and Hortense, for example, are in love with the charismatic and elusive Michael, and both women respond to Gilbert initially because of his physical resemblance to Michael. This secret erotic connection between Queenie and Michael, Hortense and Michael, and Gilbert and Michael, becomes crucial toward the end of the novel when Queenie, who has just given birth to Michael's child, asks Hortense and Gilbert to adopt the mixed-race baby, knowing that her husband and neighbours will never accept him.¹⁵ While neither woman ever knows that the other knows (and loves) Michael, the mixed-race child of Queenie and Michael helps bring Hortense and Gilbert together, and points the characters and the novel to an ambiguously hopeful and racially mixed post-colonial future.

Power and Race in Encountering Otherness

The experiences of this *Empire Windrush* generation of West Indian immigrants both illuminate and challenge Baldwin's description of the differences between white men arriving in Africa and Africans arriving in Europe:

I thought of white men arriving for the first time in an African village, strangers there, as I am a stranger here, and tried to imagine the astounded populace touching their hair and marveling at the color of their skin. But there is a great difference between being the first white man to be seen by Africans and being the first black man to be seen by whites. The white man takes the astonishment as tribute, for he arrives to conquer and to convert the natives, whose inferiority in relation to himself is not even to be questioned; whereas I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a people whose culture controls me, has even, in a

sense, created me, people who have cost me more anguish and rage than they will ever know, who yet do not even know of my existence.¹⁶

It is precisely this combination of astonishment, racial superiority, and ignorance that greets the West Indians in England, although Levy reminds us that it is the experience of both black men and black women. Furthermore, the response of the Jamaicans, or a part of their response, is, just as Baldwin describes, a mixture of anguish and rage, most particularly inspired by the recognition that they are, as human beings, at best invisible to the English—not, as they were led to expect, fellow citizens—and at worst sub-human barbarians or animals.

Michael, and later Gilbert and his mates, arrive in England from the West Indies in the midst of the Second World War, having enlisted in the RAF not to conquer or to convert but to save what they think of as the 'Mother Country.' As soldiers they are partially insulated from the extremes of racism they and other West Indians will encounter after the war, when they are no longer protected by their uniforms. Yet their experiences are still remarkably like those of Baldwin in that small Swiss village. During their first visit to a small Yorkshire village, Gilbert observes that he and his fellow West Indians attract the same kind of attention a gecko receives from a dog:

A gecko sensing a dog remains as still as death. [a dog] seeing a gecko is suddenly caught by passionate curiosity... Fearing the unexpected he moves stealthily round the creature, never—even for a second—taking his gaze from it... The entire village had come out to play dog with gecko. Staring out from dusty windows, gawping from shop doors, gaping at the edge of the pavement, craning at gates and peering round corners. The villagers kept their distance but held that gaze of curious trepidation firmly on we West Indian RAF volunteers. Under this scrutiny we darkies moved with the awkwardness of thieves caught in a sunbeam.¹⁷

The West Indian men are seen as objects of the colonialist gaze in this isolated Yorkshire village; these men become, as Gilbert notes, mere "darkies" (a word Hortense has never heard before arriving in England). They become awkward, and most tellingly they begin to internalise this perspective: to see themselves as illicit, like thieves. Where Baldwin's essay focuses on the cruel echoes of American racism in the ignorant response of the Swiss villagers—those children shouting "*Neger! Neger!*"—Gilbert, whose vision is the most consistently generous and thoughtful of the four voices in the novel, recognises here and throughout his narrative the fear and trepidation that lie behind the scrutiny and ignorance.

In the language of postcolonial theory, Gilbert recognises "recurrent doubling in male imperial discourse... the simultaneous dread of catastrophic boundary loss... associated with fears of impotence and infantilization and attended by an excess of boundary order and fantasies of unlimited power."¹⁸ In effect, his description of this encounter challenges and complicates the experience Baldwin describes. He returns the gaze of the imperialist villagers and depicts his vision of them through language, offering a narrative account that manifests considerably more compassion and humor than the villagers do. In the process of describing the encounter he reclaims and asserts his own humanity.

Furthermore, the English response to the West Indians soldiers is more varied and complex than the reaction of the Swiss villagers Baldwin describes in his essay. When the Yorkshire villagers do finally come out to inspect the West Indians, one old man says,

'We're all in this together, lad. We're glad to have you here – glad to have ya' ... [while a woman, arguing with her husband about the West Indians' language, says] 'There, I told you. They speak it just like us, only funnier. Ta, ducks, sorry to bother ya,' ... [and a middle-aged man asks them why they would] 'leave a nice sunny place to come here if you didn't have to' [but is clearly offended when Gilbert responds,] 'To fight for my country, sir.'¹⁹

Despite this variation in response, however, and the humor of the Yorkshire villagers' perspective on the 'funnier' language of the Jamaicans, it remains true that the most prevalent and systematic reaction of the English is the kind of ignorant racism Gilbert so vividly captures in describing the experience of one of his friends: "let me not forget James [a fellow West Indian RAF volunteer], perplexed as a newborn, standing with military bearing surrounded by English children—white urchin faces blackened with dirt, dried snot flaking on their mouths—who yelled up at him, 'Oi, darkie, show us yer tail.'"²⁰ In his account of encounters with poor, white English villagers, who regard the West Indians as animals, Gilbert conveys them, in turn, as dirty, ignorant, and inhumane. As Gilbert's description suggests, Levy's rendering of this cultural encounter includes dimensions that did not exist for Baldwin, as an American in Switzerland. Not only is the response of the white English citizens more varied than those of the Swiss villagers, but the reaction of Gilbert and his friends to the English contains, in addition to anguish and rage, subversive elements of humor, class superiority, and disappointment in the poverty and ugliness of the 'Mother Country,' in the discrepancy between the legends of glorious empire they had been taught and the realities of a war-torn small island they encounter.

The paradox here is that the ideology of empire had, ironically, shaped their belief in their own place as participants in England's culture and history, and raised their expectations of what that "home" island would be like as well as their place in it. Like Baldwin, then, they arrive in England "among a people whose culture controls" them, but unlike Baldwin, who feels that even the most illiterate Swiss villager is "related, in a way that [he is] not, to Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Aeschylus... [and] the cathedral at Chartres,"²¹ the West Indian immigrants in Levy's novel, while certainly shaped and damaged by white British culture, feel not so much intimidated or coerced by that culture as appalled by its shabbiness, its smallness. They witness "the emerging vision of Britain as a beleaguered island race, rather than a great imperial power."²² Indeed the 'Mother Country' proves, in Gilbert's words, to be a

filthy tramp... Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead.... She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says 'Who the bloody hell are you?' ... There was a pained gasp at every broken-down scene [the West Indians] encountered."²³

As colonial subjects, accustomed to seeing whites in positions of power and unaccustomed to seeing white people work in any menial capacity, they are shocked to see white women labouring in restaurants and factories, surprised to hear the uneducated language of the working class English people they meet, and appalled to encounter bland, boiled food and a cold, colourless winter landscape. The “small island” of the title might refer as easily to the narrow, bland and provincial England as to the sunny Caribbean island of Jamaica, but these islands prove to be significantly different.

Even more powerful than their disappointment in the tawdriness of England at war, however, is their shock at being alternately threatening and invisible to those they have enlisted to protect from Nazi aggression, to those who in Baldwin’s words “do not even know of [their] existence. “But for me I had just one question,” Gilbert says, “—let me ask the Mother Country just this one simple question: how come England did not know me?”²⁴ He goes on to explain:

Ask any of us West Indian RAF volunteers—ask any of us colony troops where in Britain are ships built, where is cotton woven, steel forged, cars made, jam boiled, cups shaped, lace knotted, glass blown, tin mined, whisky distilled? Ask. Then sit back and learn your lesson. Now see this. An English soldier, a Tommy called Tommy Atkins.... Ask him, “Tommy, tell me nah, where is Jamaica?” And hear him reply. “Well, dunno. Africa, ain’t it?” ... It was inconceivable that we Jamaicans, we West Indians, we members of the British Empire, would not fly to the Mother Country’s defence when there was a threat. But, tell me, if Jamaica was in trouble, is there any major, any general, any sergeant who would have been able to find that dear island?²⁵

What Gilbert discovers is precisely what Baldwin describes in his essay, that “white men have for black men a reality which is far from being reciprocal; and hence all black men have toward all white men an attitude which is designed, really, either to rob the white man of the jewel of his naiveté, or else to make it cost him dear.”²⁶ Thus, for both, a fundamental goal is, again in Baldwin’s words, “that the white man cease to regard [the black man] as an exotic rarity and recognize him as a human being.”²⁷ Yet, in *Small Island*, those being seen as an “exotic rarity” are, radically and presumptuously, visiting the small island of England to save it from annihilation in war. This underscores the ignorance and racism of the English; it also positions the RAF soldiers in a different power dynamic than the one Baldwin imagines. Where Baldwin’s African-Americans are most often bitterly aware of white racism and resistant to it, Levy’s black colonial subjects are caught up in a more ambivalent sense of accommodation and resistance to empire.

Language as Obstacle/Hearing Race, Class and Gender

Levy’s novel complicates Baldwin’s analysis in several ways: by adding the voices and perspectives of *both* black and white people, both women and men; by exploring the role of class in shaping the ideology of empire and inhibiting the full development of black and white people; and by depicting the way humor and resilience help the Jamaicans in surviving injustice. In all of those cases, Levy focuses in particular on the way language

often complicates human connections rather than facilitating it. Language is, of course, fundamental to human identity, and the dilemma of the capacity of the Other to speak (and be heard by the dominant group) has been a recurring theme in postcolonial literary studies. We may think, for example, of Joseph Conrad's classic rendering of white men encountering the 'inarticulate' Other in *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1902) as well as of Chinua Achebe's cogent analysis of Conrad's refusal or inability to "confer language on the 'rudimentary souls' of Africa."²⁸ Perhaps for this reason it is the capacity of the West Indian immigrants not simply to speak English but to speak it clearly and, in the case of Hortense, to speak a Caribbean-inflected, educated English that causes the greatest initial surprise and resentment among many of the white people they meet. Through the constant failures of white English and black West Indians to understand the words of one another, we most vividly see the painful dimensions of differences in race, class, and cultural difference.

Hortense's first conversation with Queenie illustrates the way social class, marked by accent and diction and culture, reflected by idioms and by deeply engrained assumptions about race, make human communication and connection across these divides virtually impossible. Queenie comes to visit Hortense on her first day in the shabby and deteriorating house where Queenie quite bravely rents out rooms to several West Indians. Hortense, a strict and rigid woman proud of her light skin and her upper class connections as well as of her training as a teacher, is utterly appalled by the squalor of the tiny attic room, so far removed from her expectations of imperial England. She is cold and silent to Queenie, and their first encounter flounders almost immediately:

'Cat got your tongue?' [Queenie asks. And Hortense thinks] What cat was she talking of? Don't tell me there was a cat that must also live with us in this room. 'My name's Mrs. Bligh,' [Queenie] carrie[s] on. 'But you can call me Queenie, if you like. Everyone here does. Would you like that?' The impression I received was that she was talking to me as if I was an imbecile. An educated woman such as I. So I replied, 'Have you lost your cat?'²⁹

Despite the humor of the encounter, the obliviousness of each woman is heartbreaking: neither of these strong and forceful women truly sees or hears the other; Hortense is as blinded and deafened by her class snobbery and inflated expectations of imperial England as Queenie is by the insularity of her social class and its reflexive racism.

Hortense's first shopping experience in London contains a similar painful mix of humour and heartbreak. This educated woman, who prides herself on her refined language and elegant speech, finds that few white English people can understand her Jamaican-inflected English with its Victorian sense of correctness. When she asks for a tin of condensed milk at the grocery store, she finds that the storekeeper cannot understand her:

[...] this red man [the storekeeper] stared back at me as if I had not uttered the words. No light of comprehension sparkled in his eye. 'I beg your pardon?' he said. Condensed milk, I said, five times, and still he looked on me bewildered. Why no one in this country understand my

English? At college my diction was admired by all. I had to point at the wretched tin of condensed milk, which resided just behind his head.³⁰

Like Gilbert in his encounter with impoverished Yorkshire villagers, Hortense is shielded by her initial self-confidence (her diction was admired by all at college). Also like Gilbert she is ultimately wounded not simply by the racism she doesn't yet understand but more profoundly by the failure of the 'Mother Country' to understand the language it has taught her, and thus to be able to respond to her as a human being. Unlike Gilbert, Hortense is unable to come to terms with the pain of repeated experiences of racism.

These language complications make vividly and painfully concrete the deeper miscommunications across racial, class, and gender divides. These misunderstandings culminate in one of the most powerful moments in the novel, a scene fraught with all these issues of racism and sexuality, language and ignorance of shared human community. In this scene, Gilbert makes an impassioned speech about racial justice to Bernard, Queenie's husband, a man who has returned belatedly from his humiliating and harrowing wartime experience in India and is shocked to find that his wife is renting rooms to West Indians. He is even more stunned to learn that she has just given birth to a mixed-race child. The scene opens when Queenie asks Gilbert and Hortense to adopt her child, acknowledging with pain that she will not be able to raise it herself safely in the racist world of post-war England. One of the many ironies of this scene is that the child's father is Michael, the man Hortense also loves, although Hortense does not know the child's parentage. Another irony is that Hortense, through whose voice we hear Gilbert's response to Bernard, begins in this fraught and painful moment to value and admire Gilbert, the man whom she had married without love, by hearing him speak:

Gilbert sucked on his teeth to return this man's scorn. 'You know what your trouble is, man?' he said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man. White. No better, no worse than me—just white.' Mr Bligh moved his eye to gaze on the ceiling. 'Listen to me, man, we both just finish fighting a war—a bloody war—for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side—you and me. We both look on other men to see enemy. You and me, fighting for empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. Am I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end?'³¹

It is an intensely powerful moment, and Hortense's response is naturally one of enormous pride and admiration. In this moment she fully recognises and acknowledges the many wonderful qualities the reader has already seen in Gilbert, qualities to which her snobbery (and life-long obsession with Michael) had previously blinded her: "I realised that Gilbert Joseph, my husband, was a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence. Noble in a way that would some day make him a legend."³² Gilbert's language, which is both less educated than Hortense's and potentially incomprehensible to many working-

class English people, here defines a vision of the future for the country and creates hope for his connection with his wife. He asserts exactly the subjectivity and reciprocity that Baldwin so bitterly desires. But the cruelest irony of the moment is contained in Bernard's reply: "I'm sorry... but I just can't understand a single word you're saying."³³ Whether Bernard's lack of understanding is personal or linguistic or political, his response defines the extent to which race, class, and empire render him deaf to Gilbert's humanity. In Baldwin's words, Gilbert's "inferiority in relation to himself is not even to be questioned."³⁴ Anguish and rage remain integral to this encounter.

New Visions

Baldwin's essay, which imagines an encounter between Europe and Africa, white and black, ends on a note of consciously willed, not completely plausible hope:

The time has come to realize that the interracial drama acted out on the American continent has not only created a new black man, it has created a new white man, too. No road whatever will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village where white men still have the luxury of looking on me as a stranger.... This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again.³⁵

His words are strikingly close to those of Gilbert, in his impassioned statement to Bernard: "No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must."³⁶ Levy's novel, exploring precisely the encounter Baldwin imagined, ends with the same note of deliberate optimism, as Hortense, holding in her arms the child of Queenie and Michael, joins Gilbert in the street as they prepare to move into their new house and to build their lives together in the Mother Country: "I adjusted my hat in case it sagged in the damp air and left me looking comical" says the ever-dignified Hortense. She adds: "A curtain at the window moved – just a little but enough for me to know it was not the breeze [as Queenie watches her child depart]. But I paid it no mind as I pulled my back up and straightened my coat against the cold."³⁷ Levy presents an ambivalent moment of pain and humour, hope and continued misunderstanding, as Gilbert and Hortense, brought together by Michael's child as well as by the shared experience of racism, move not, it is clear, to an ideal life, but certainly to one filled with greater possibilities than Baldwin was able, in 1953, to imagine, certainly greater than those Queenie and Bernard have before them.

Endnotes

- 1 James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, 2: <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/Whiteness/stranger.htm> [accessed 26 June 2011]. Baldwin's essay was written while he was living in exile abroad. First published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1953, it was republished two years later as part of his collection, *Notes of a Native Son*. It thus marks a liminal moment in the Civil Rights Movement, brilliantly articulating some of the anger and frustration and desire that forged that Movement, but not yet informed by the sense of collective purpose and hope the Movement would generate.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., 7.
- 4 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 22.
- 5 Ibid., 24.
- 6 Stuart Hall, "Reconstruction Work: Images of Postwar Black Settlement," *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. James Procter, ed., New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, 92.
- 7 In other texts, notably *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Baldwin examines the intersections of race and sexuality, often in ways that challenge hegemonic norms.
- 8 Helen Scott, "Reading the Text in its Worldly Situation: Marxism, Imperialism, and Contemporary Caribbean Women's Literature," *Postcolonial Text* 2.1 (2006): 1.
- 9 McClintock, 30.
- 10 Andrea Levy. *Small Island*. New York: Picador, 2004, 117.
- 11 Ibid., 31.
- 12 Ibid., 105.
- 13 Ibid., 5-6.
- 14 Ibid., 281.
- 15 For more on adoption in Levy's work, see John McLeod, "Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption," *Critical Survey* 18:2 (2006): 45-55.
- 16 Baldwin, 3.
- 17 Levy, 113-4.
- 18 McClintock, 26.
- 19 Levy, 115.
- 20 Ibid., 117.
- 21 Baldwin, 3.
- 22 David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 436.
- 23 Levy, 116.
- 24 Ibid., 117.
- 25 Ibid., 118.
- 26 Baldwin, 4.
- 27 Ibid.

28 Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1988, 255.

29 Levy, 187-88.

30 Ibid., 274.

31 Ibid., 435.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Baldwin, 4.

35 Ibid., 8.

36 Levy, 435.

37 Ibid., 438.

A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative¹

Maria Helena Lima

At a conference in London, several years ago, the topic for discussion was the legacy of slavery. A young woman stood up to ask a heartfelt question of the panel: How could she be proud of her Jamaican roots, she wanted to know, when her ancestors had been slaves? I cannot recall the panel's response to the woman's question but, as I sat silently in the audience, I do remember my own. Of Jamaican heritage myself, I wondered why anyone would feel any ambivalence or shame at having a slave ancestry? Had she never felt the sentiments once expressed to me by a Jamaican acquaintance of mine? 'If our ancestors survived the slave ships they were strong. If they survived the plantations they were clever.' It is a rich and proud heritage. It was at that moment that I felt something stirring in me. Could a novelist persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story?

—Andrea Levy²

While reviewers of *The Long Song* (2010) have played around with several generic labels—historical novel, fictional memoir, metafiction—and these possibilities definitely underscore the range of Andrea Levy's creativity, the author wants to leave no doubt as to the occasion for her story, as my epigraph indicates. Levy joins a distinguished group of writers across the African Diaspora who, since the last decades of the twentieth century, has attempted to recover elements of the narrative structure and thematic configuration of slave narratives.³ The widespread rewriting of the genre in the post-abolition era has served to re-affirm the historical value of the original slave narrative and reclaim the humanity of the enslaved by (re)imagining their subjectivity. For a long time, slave narratives were considered unreliable as a historical source, mainly due to the nature of history writing itself (top down) and ideological differences (to put it mildly). However, as more slave narratives were discovered and republished, mostly in the late sixties and seventies in the United States, the rewriting of such stories has become central to a contemporary effort to re-imagine that history from the point of view of the subaltern. More importantly perhaps, (neo-)slave narratives still need to be written to expose systemic inequality and the unjust treatment of black peoples everywhere. As Lars Eckstein writes, "while most colonial testimonies of slavery have long disappeared from the working memory of today's Black Atlantic societies, the prejudices and stereotypes they conveyed have not."⁴

For slave narratives were propelled by the Enlightenment demand that a 'race' place itself on the Great Chain of Being primarily through writing. As Henry Louis Gates notes, the earliest texts by black writers in English were "the central arena in which persons of African descent could establish and redefine their status within the human community."⁵ Although the Enlightenment was predicated on man's ability to reason, as Gates writes, it also made the "absence" of reason the criterion by which to circumscribe the humanity of the people and cultures of colour that Europeans had been "discovering" since the

Renaissance.⁶ Of course no one questioned then the premise that reason (and history) could only be found in writing. If slave narratives affirm the democratizing potential of print literacy, equating, to quote Gates again, "the rights of man with the ability to write," the African-American literary tradition has been initially galvanised by the faith that literature can make the case for full black participation in American democracy. Revisiting the historical era of slavery, the neo-slave narrative takes us back to the origins of the African Diaspora and the African-American literary tradition and reassesses, from a contemporary vantage point, the promises of literacy. The neo-slave narrative thus participates in a widespread re-evaluation of the legacy of modernity, especially as this is ratified by the ideologies and institutions of print literacy. Novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*⁷ reconsider the dawning of the modern legacy from the perspective of a present moment when its political promise is widely felt to have been exhausted and betrayed. Most contemporary African-American neo-slave narratives not only signal their scepticism through a strong discomfort with their own literary modality—the ability to write has not granted African Americans full citizenship—but also remind readers of the complex subjectivity of the formerly enslaved.

While I do not want to conflate the history of slavery in the United States with the three hundred years of slavery in the British Caribbean, most of the theorizing on the neo-slave narrative has been done in the Americas. I would even dare to claim that perhaps one of the reasons for this silence since many black British neo-slave narratives have been published recently is the unwillingness of the academic establishment to come to terms with that part of British history: Britain's "Heart of Darkness," to borrow a title. At a recent public reading by Andrea Levy, one of my students asked the author whether perhaps in thirty years or so there won't be a need for a separate category of 'Black British Writing,' "whether British Literature would indeed include everyone." Levy answered that she doubted thirty years would be enough to end inequality in Britain: "and a separate category is necessary to mark that difference, to remind people of the existence of inequities."⁸ The passage from the novel that Levy chose to read on this occasion to a standing-room only audience—the conversation between Miss July and Clara—reminds us of the multiple words Jamaicans have been using to avoid being black.⁹ Because the novel ends with a plea for news of Emily Goodwin (July's mulatto child with the last overseer at Amity Plantation), Levy brings readers' attention to the present century. She has received more than one letter of descendants of "an" Emily Goodwin who did not know their great-great-grandmother had slave ancestry, and how grateful they were for *The Long Song*.

To go back to the novel, then, *The Long Song* initially eludes generic classification. Like Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) which, according to Vincent Carretta, can (and has been) read as "a spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, travel book, adventure tale, slave narrative, rags-to-riches saga, economic treatise, apologia, testimony, and possibly even a historical fiction,"¹⁰ reviewers did not know what to call the book when it first came out. Rather than the conventional "white frame" vouching for the authenticity of the narrative, Levy has the formerly enslaved woman's son, a successful printer/publisher in 1898 Jamaica, introduce his mother's story. While Thomas Kinsman's

Foreword emphasises the urgency in the factual telling (the remembered and the known horrors of slavery), readers also come to expect artistic merit in the narrative, as he would “make her tale flow like some of the finest writing in the English language.”¹¹

The Long Song further emphasises the need for a type of story that would instil pride rather than shame in the younger generations. When Levy wonders why the young woman in the audience feels “any ambivalence or shame” at having slave ancestors,” she introduces the possibility—though crucially framed as a question—that “a novelist [could] persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story.” The fact that Levy phrases it as a question is important, I think, because it speaks to her own sense of discomfort with the binary. While her initial impulse seems to be simply to turn the narrative of oppression on its head, to replace a story of shame with a story of pride, that initial impulse gives way to something else—the recognition that the story cannot follow such simple teleology. Her story has to be metafictional to avoid precisely the trap of such binaries.

The Choice of Metafiction

Do the slave narratives in fact represent a distinct literary genre? If not, why not? If so, what are its distinguishing characteristics? Are these characteristics relatively uniform throughout its history? What are the sources of variation and change? Is change great or small during that history? Are the narratives a popular or an elite literary form? Do they represent a species of autobiography? Why (and how) do they begin? Why (and how) do they come to an end? Such questions converge in the cluster of meanings implicit in the term *authority*: the condition of begetting, beginning, continuing, and controlling a written text. In Hegelian terms, the issues are parentage, propriety, property, and possession.

—John Sekora¹²

While the initial questions John Sekora asks of antebellum slave narratives can be starting points in the exploration of almost any literary genre, he identifies the issues of authority and property as applying mostly to the writing that had freedom as its immediate telos. Indeed, slave narrators often took great liberties in the telling of their presumably distinct and peculiar stories of bondage and escape, moulding their narratives in such a manner as to produce the greatest political and emotional effect. Even if some of the narrators did not own their own bodies, they managed to have some authority in constructing the version of their lives they wished known. Because of such silences in slave narratives due to authorial compromises to white audiences and to self-masking from a painful past, Morrison characterises her role in writing *Beloved* as “a kind of literary archeology.” As she writes, “on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply.”¹³ Morrison felt the need to access the interior life of slaves via her imagination to bear witness to “the interior life of people who didn’t write [their history]

(which doesn't mean that they didn't have it)" and to "fill in the blanks that the slave narrative left."¹⁴

To highlight the extent to which slave narratives were founded upon a fundamental lack of knowledge, Levy chooses metafiction for her story, a retrospective narration that foregrounds narrative itself as a process, forever incomplete, of gathering the material that both is and is not her character's experience. As readers, we follow July's tale in its sometimes conflicting versions, and are reminded that even under the most deplorable conditions, agency and strength characterise Afro-Caribbean peoples. Metafiction enables Levy to enjoy the authority of mimetic realism through a postmodern subjectivity. While self-consciousness is as old as the storytelling tradition itself, the term "metafiction" is new. William Gass defines it as "fiction which draws attention to itself as artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."¹⁵ Self-consciousness has been central to African diasporic literatures if we consider Equiano's narrative as one of their first manifestations. Whether he was born in the United States or in an African village, Equiano speaks to the book, raising it to his ear to hear its answer, a moment Gates argues amounts to "a fiction about the making of fiction."¹⁶ The trope of the Talking Book, a strangely insistent metaphor that appears in many of the eighteenth-century black texts published in English is, according to Gates, our best evidence that the earliest writers of the Anglo-African tradition were self-conscious readers of each other's texts.¹⁷ Black Atlantic writers after Equiano have made their concern with writing central to their work, portraying the enslaved's painful journey to freedom as parallel to the journey from orality to literacy. All stories seem to connect reading and writing with freedom and equality.¹⁸

Gates' argument in *The Signifying Monkey*—that black literature has always theorised about itself—is central to my reading of *The Long Song* as a metafictional neo-slave narrative. Levy seems particularly interested in writing against existing literary, generic, and/or aesthetic traditions. The narrator-author inscribed within the text openly acknowledges to the reader her presence and her power of manipulation. The subject of artistic invention is a thread running through her thematically self-conscious tale that is neither parody nor an acknowledgment of literature's exhaustion, to use John Barth's term,¹⁹ that usually characterise "white" metafiction. Instead of a site of negation, *The Long Song* conjures up limitless possibilities. Levy's narrative emphasises personal and collective memory and the continuous interplay of past and present as an alternative to chronological linear time. Madelyn Jablon notes that metafiction is not a refusal to confront reality but an insistence that such a confrontation must start with the redefinition of the term and renewed attention to the language used in its description.²⁰

While passages interrupting the temporal flow of the narrative are also part of the conventions of the original genre and its antislavery appeal, Levy's telling is consistently metafictional, calling attention to the writing itself and the choices involved throughout. The antebellum slave narrative is primarily told in the past tense, which is then punctured by a different time frame describing a less remote past when the formerly enslaved obtains information that she did not have during the escape itself. Richard Yarborough suggests that the absence of the first-person point of view in African American narratives

before the twentieth century can be accounted for by the audience for which these books were written. These writers were primarily addressing a white-middle-class audience and did not want to establish the kind of intimacy and self-disclosure that the first person point of view requires. Yarborough notes a change with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, “one of the single most important steps in the evolving conceptualization of the black self and the changing presentation of that self in narrative form.”²¹ He also notes that “more recent writers have seemed especially interested in dramatizing the tension between perception and reality, between the exposition of self and the masking of self,” but only in passing does he acknowledge that several of the books mentioned “appear to be modeled after slave narratives.”²² Levy’s narrator/writer initially wants her readers to believe they are reading someone else’s story: that she and July are not one and the same.

Levy’s narrator is playful in her masking of self, to use Yarborough’s words, teasing us to awareness. The novel starts with a rape scene that does not sound like a rape since the white man’s penis, like the yellow and black cloth offered in exchange, is “a limp offering.” Kitty seems more upset about the gift than the “rude act.” After the one-paragraph description of the rape, the narrative stops for the first time:

Reader, my son tells me that this is too indelicate a commencement of any tale. Please pardon me, but your storyteller is a woman possessed of a forthright tongue and little ink. [...] Let me confess this without delay so you might consider whether my tale is one in which you can find an interest. If not, then be on your way, for there are plenty books to satisfy if words flowing free as the droppings that fall from the backside of a mule is your desire.²³

Here readers familiar with the slave narrative will remember Lydia Maria Child’s editorial preface to Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents* where she seemingly apologises for presenting a narrative that is so frank about sexuality—she may be accused of “indecorum”—but in the narrative itself, Jacobs turns the issue of propriety against her white readers, emphasizing that the standards for chaste female behaviour cannot be applied to a slave girl. Like Jacobs’ protagonist, July chooses her lover. It is July who attempts to seduce the new overseer, Robert Goodwin, using the book about Scotland as an excuse. “Neither a ruffian nor a drunkard,” Goodwin was a gentleman, “the son of a clergyman with a parish near Sheffield,” whose father had the “highest contempt for white men who abuse their position with negroes.”²⁴ Insisting further, July tells him she is “a mulatto, not a negro”—that it would not be wrong for them to become lovers since his father is not even there—to no avail at that point in the story.²⁵ Of course the narrator is quick to whisper to her reader the truth that “that is not the way white men usually behaved upon this Caribbean island.”²⁶

In addition to warning about the tale’s propriety, the narrator is also educating her readers as to what constitutes good writing. Her narrative is not what readers at the time may have been accustomed to, and she uses a bold image to convey her feeling about the literary conventions of her time. Readers unfamiliar with Levy’s humour may be turned off by the ethos of the passage, but we soon realise that the playfulness of the

different versions of July's birth—"a further version had a tiger, with its long, spiky snout and six legs, sniffing at the baby July, thinking her as food"—serves to prepare readers for what is to follow. She's "speaking fact, even though the contents may seem equally preposterous."²⁷ By resisting mimetic representation, Levy prevents us from feeling what I'm going to call conventional pity (for lack of a better word) for the enslaved people at Amity Plantation.

It is only when talks of freedom end up in a full-fledged war that readers of *The Long Song* realise the extent of the unfriendliness of Jamaican planters. John Howarth, the owner of the plantation named Amity and for many years "the saddest widower upon the whole island,"²⁸ is driven to suicide by what he witnesses during the 1831 Christmas Rebellion. But it is not the sight of the bodies of the slaughtered slaves "rotting in the sun for a few days," or the punishment for running messages to rebel slaves, a small boy "sealed into a barrel [...] roughly pierced with over twenty-five long nails hammered into the shell [...] rolled down a hill" that makes Howarth "question his God for allowing such barbarity within a world he knew, and gasp at the cruelty of his fellows."²⁹ It is witnessing a fellow *white* man, a missionary, being defiled in front of his wife and children that drives Howarth over the edge:

a righteous anger fermented within his belly until he felt sickened, ashamed and disgusted [with] the sight before him now: nine white men dressed as women. Nine gentlemen dressed in a clutter of bonnets and petticoats urged to humiliate, torment and torture a fellow white man before his children, before his wife. Tarring and feathering a man of God. A missionary. A Christian soul! To John Howarth this was cruelty beyond all reason. This was shame.³⁰

Levy chooses metafiction not because of the limitations of realism in representing slavery (in Sherryl Vint's argument), but due to the haunting nature of a past that has been repressed and still needs to be confronted.³¹

When contrasted to other contemporary neo-slave narratives that attempt to conjure, again in Morrison's words, "an illiterate or preliterate reader," Levy's novel imagines its ideal audience as fully literate, never disavowing the literary mode and the emancipatory promise of print literacy. Like Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (1851), which borrows heavily from classic British literature and the narratives of other escaped slaves, *The Long Song* gives readers a sense of a person educating herself in what she considers to be a proper literary style.

In a way, we read July's narrative to witness her self-education, but we are never to forget that her son, who is editing the text, has had the privilege of a British education becoming one of the finest printers upon the island of Jamaica:

But my mama began her life as a person for whom writing the letters ABC could have seen her put to the lash, for she was born a slave. The undertaking of committing her tale to words that might be read and set into printed form was, at first, quite alarming for her poor soul. [...] My particular skill is an ability to find meaning in the most scribbled of texts. Give me writing that looks to have been made by some insect crawling

dirty legs across the paper and I will print its sense, clear and precise.
Show me blots and smudges of ink and I will see form.³²

Thomas Kinsman's life conforms to the rags-to-riches paradigm of the optimistic Enlightenment. By the time he was twenty-one, he was no more an apprentice, but employed by Linus Gray as a journeyman printer and, like him, of the deistic belief.³³ Gray bequeaths "all his real and personal property" to "the negro Thomas Kinsman, so that he may walk within this world as he deserves—as a gentleman."³⁴ Moving to Jamaica, Kinsman attends Church with the hope one of the white men there will give him work, but it is "a Jew who had never once attended [...] St. Peter's who goes to his office to require a press for the first edition of a newspaper he was to publish which was to be called *The Trelawney Mercury*."³⁵ Here we are again reminded of the author and her power in re-imagining Jamaica's past: it is an Isaac Cecil Levy who gives Thomas his first big job.

Reading *The Long Song*, then, does not allow us to forget that a vibrant journalistic tradition developed alongside the tradition of slave narratives and novels. Indeed, as Robert Reid-Pharr notes, "there was an impressive amount of cross-fertilization between different genres of black writing in early national and antebellum America."³⁶ Likewise, the earliest traditions and techniques of intellectuals and authors across the African Diaspora may not have been so much lost as ignored. We "forget" that there were pioneers of the Black Atlantic unless we read the *Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment* (1772-1815) edited by William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and realise what has been left out of literary history. Levy is able to reshape our understanding of the past not only by blurring generic boundaries, but by consistently calling attention to the writing itself. She also makes us question the embedded ideologies found in both the writing of history and the historical narratives that supposedly offer realistic representations of slavery.

The Rewriting of History

"Slavery is a long day of the master over the slave and of nights turned to days. But how long can the master's daylight continue to rule our nights?"

"Forget. Memory is pain trying to resurrect itself"

—Fred D'Aguiar³⁷

Simply by rewriting the stories of lives and events of a distant past, authors of neo-slave narratives want to explore the closely woven bilateral relations between individual history and national history, also typical of the historical novel. But contrary to the traditional historical novel, neo-slave narratives do not conform to either official historiography or bourgeois ideology. These narratives mean to be innovative as they seek to rediscover and rewrite a significant part of history that has been deliberately forgotten and/or denied. Neo-slave narratives are Sankofa texts, to extend Frances Smith Foster's conceptualisation: "Sankofa—an ancient Akan concept with direct bearing on the question of what's fiction, what's real, what's important—translates as the following

imperative: 'We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; so we can understand why and how we came to be who we are today.'³⁸ Sankofa invites us to listen to the stories of our past, to select what is good, and to use that good for positive growth. Sankofa, Foster writes, is "the benevolent use of knowledge. For it to work right, we have to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion; or, as [her] grandmother would say, we have to 'consider the source.'³⁹ Despite the pain, July must go back and remember as much as the black British need to know their history before Windrush.

Levy's narrator often interrupts her tale with her son's questions and her resulting confusion:

'But this is the time of the Baptist War, Mama,' he tell me. 'The night of Caroline Mortimer's unfinished dinner in your story is the time of the Christmas rebellion, when all the trouble began.' [...] I must write all I know of Sam Sharpe, the leader of this rebellion—of his character and looks. I should make it clear how every negro believed themselves to have been freed by the King of England [...].⁴⁰

The narrator addresses her readers directly, claiming it is not indolence that prevents her from a fuller account. She wants us to remember that news "did not travel as it does today," urging us to search for other versions of what happened at the time. We should peruse the pamphlet "written by a Baptist minister named George Dovaston with the title, *Facts and documents connected with the Great Slave Rebellion of Jamaica (1832)*" although she has not witnessed any of the events described there. We should avoid the pamphlet written by the planter John Hoskin, "for the man is a fool who does blame only the sons of Ham and men of God for what occurred."⁴¹ Readers are taught a hermeneutic of suspicion, again to invoke Foster, as they are confronted with competing versions of history rather than one hegemonic account. Who tells history? In whose name? To what purpose? These questions are central to Levy's narrative, her interrogation of the past from an ex-centric position. The history of slavery was neglected for a long period not only because the world's premier historians privileged a white-European version, but also the descendants of Africans initially tried to forget slavery when combating segregation and fighting for civil rights. The figure of the slave was generally perceived as a symbol of black inferiority and subjugation. Only the past prior to the Middle Passage was valued. Slavery in the new world was considered a long dark period during which blacks were denied individuality and even their humanity. Reduced as they were to the condition of chattel, enslaved Africans could not possibly be perceived as cultural or historical subjects.

But reading many of the books Levy acknowledges at the end of *The Long Song* allows us a different understanding of enslaved Africans while obviously making us better readers of her novel. We find in James Walvin's *Black Ivory*, for example, a historical materialist context for the Baptist War depicted in the novel. According to Walvin, "planters were right to fear black Christianity, for in the British West Indies it led the slaves to resistance and ultimately to the campaign for black freedom."⁴² Bringing the enslaved within the Christian fold would complete the process of de-Africanisation: the more the British *talked* about black freedom, the more the news of that debate filtered back to the

slave quarters to encourage black aspirations. The Baptist preachers are the ones to persuade the negroes that “they are as worthy as white man” and that the King himself has given them their freedom.⁴³ Walvin describes this period of transition as follows:

What we can see, increasingly, in the slave islands was a growing body of Christian slaves, no longer joined by ‘raw’ Africans, encouraged to think of freedom by news from Britain, but faced by a resistant plantocracy. Moreover, the planters had to work their slaves harder, often at tasks the slaves did not like, because the supply of Africans had dried up. As long as the slave trade continued, Africans could be thrown into the fields—the shock troops of the plantocratic system—to do the hard work. After 1808 many slaves who might (because of their ‘Creole’ status) expect better, more favored work, found themselves reassigned to manual work. Disgruntlement spread rapidly.⁴⁴

When revolt broke out in the west of Jamaica, during Christmas 1831, it involved more than 20,000 slaves mostly from areas where the Baptists had their followers and their chapels. As leader of the first revolutionary war (as the rebellion is now called in Jamaica), Sam Sharpe was the master of his audience. According to Walvin, those who heard Sam Sharpe speak never forgot his voice or his message. A bright man, described by one who met him as ‘the most intelligent and remarkable slave [he had] ever met with,’ Sharpe preached that “whites had no more right to hold black people in slavery, than black people had to make white people slaves.”⁴⁵ Black preachers seized upon the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as grist to their mill; the language, imagery and tales of oppression, of freedom, of promised lands, of salvation to come were ideally suited to a suggestive reinterpretation. Paradoxically, Christianity was both oppressing and liberating by providing the enslaved with such narratives of freedom while demanding that they forget where they came from. Walvin adds that the “fourteen white deaths, and material damage amounting to more than one million pounds, were avenged by more than 500 killings and executions, including Sam Sharpe.”⁴⁶

But depicting the excessive retaliation for the Baptist War is only part of the critique the novel offers. Levy’s neo-slave narrative also sets out to recover the culture of resistance born and developed inside the plantation economy. Take, for example, the figure of the obedient house-slave. Within a given plantation, one could distinguish the slaves who worked in the fields from those who worked in the master’s house. The stereotype of the house-slave depicts her/him as an obedient servant who accepts her/his condition happily, wants to please the master at all costs and is even ready to betray other slaves in order to obtain a few privileges. Such stereotypes have even been reproduced in the slave narratives themselves. This figure is connected to the master’s point of view and to the latter’s psychological and moral need to reinforce his benevolent and paternal role. The house-slaves were probably less inclined to rebellion than the field-slaves, but they adopted subtle ways of resistance, perhaps less explicit and open, but nonetheless effective. In Levy’s novel, an example of covert resistance can be found in replacing fine quality linen with simple cotton bed-sheets for the Christmas dinner table. Even July could smell “Godfrey’s mischief.”⁴⁷ Against the belief that “Niggers cannot render civilised music,” Levy depicts the Amity plantation fiddlers “playing in the

yard for the servants' gathering" as "no more clatter or unrecognizable tune—the sound of a sweet melody came whispering through the open window. For [...] it only amused them to play bad for white ears."⁴⁸ More daring, perhaps, is Nimrod's justification for stealing: "whatever is your massa's, belongs to you. When you take property from your massa, for your own use, him loses nothing. For you be his property too. All is just transferring. Everything you now hold is still your massa's property. You just get a little use of it."⁴⁹ Even John Locke would not be able to argue with the logic of such redefinition of property.⁵⁰

Neo-slave narratives further detach themselves from historical novels in that they give more importance to re-imagining historical memory than to linear narration per se. In their effort to re-present unwritten history, neo-slave narratives are part of a broader context characterised by the importance and necessity of remembering, testifying and passing on those parts of history that are so negative, horrible, and traumatic that they seem unreal. What July remembers cannot be found in history books. Not only is the novel a memoir of July's experience, but it is also introduced as a narrative based on memory. History and memory are never completely merged, however, due to the metafictional nature of the telling. We must remember that while the original slave narratives aimed to recover history, neo-slave narratives are based on re-imagining the subjectivity of the enslaved. In *The Long Song*, history and memory function to deconstruct and rebuild the concepts of community, home, and family.

Alternative Endings: A Sankofa Aesthetics and Forthcoming Sequel

When a griot dies, it is as if a library has burned to the ground. The griots symbolize how all human ancestry goes back to some place and some time, where there was no writing. Then the memories and the mouths of ancient elders was the only way that early histories of mankind got passed along [...] for all of us today to know who we are.

—Alex Haley⁵¹

Slavery breaks July's family in more ways than the obvious separation of a mother from her children. That July is lucky to be reunited with her first born—whom she abandons in the hope that he be given more opportunities than the life of a slave—does not mitigate the fact that her baby girl is stolen from her by the child's white father and his English wife. On the surface, with the *Long Song* Levy seems to be offering a belated response to the African-American neo-slave narratives by women which were, according to Elizabeth Beaulieu, "designed not merely to reclaim their enslaved maternal ancestors' stories and reposition their role in American history, but also to refute the stereotype of the enslaved women as breeder."⁵² Beaulieu emphasises that the significance of American neo-slave narratives in the 1980s was not merely literary and historical.⁵³ The women writing neo-slave narratives then were responding to the stereotypes that much of black popular culture reproduced by focusing solely on a black male subjectivity at the expense of real black women. Like Levy, such writers were also concerned both with the past and with the future: "their special talent rests in their ability to use the past [...] to evoke the promise of the future."⁵⁴ While *Beloved* seems to ask the question of what motherhood

could mean under slavery, however, Levy's character becomes a writer, not a midwife. It is only July's mother, Kitty, who exhibits conventional maternal behaviour, placing her child's life above her own. When July runs away after witnessing the overseer shoot Nimrod once in an attempt to blame him for Howarth's suicide, Kitty reappears in the story as a Nanny Maroon figure, who flies to save her daughter's life. Although no one has actually seen what happened, it is Kitty's superhuman strength that allows her not only to save her daughter, but to revenge the many times Tam Dewar raped her.⁵⁵ Kitty's execution for killing the overseer painfully resembles a lynching:

When the flap finally dropped on that straining scaffold July, hidden within a corner of the square, watched as Kitty, kicking and convulsing at the end of her rope, elbowed and banged into the two men that dangled lifeless as butchered meat beside her. Her mama struggled. Her mama choked. Until, at last stilled, her mama hung small and black as a ripened pod upon a tree.⁵⁶

Such descriptions are common in neo-slave narrative as they are to evoke the "strange fruit" images used during the Civil Rights Movement to call attention to lynching and other forms of genocide taking place in the United States at the time. Historical novels may function as counter-memory (to borrow a term from Michel Foucault), enabling the process of reading history against its grain, of taking an active role in its interpretation rather than a passive one.⁵⁷ Reading Levy's *The Long Song* as counter-memory allows us/her to intervene in history rather than merely chronicle it. July's story offers a better understanding of the past with the goal of strengthening possibilities for a more meaningful, richer, black British present and future (remember that young woman in the audience in my first epigraph).

For Levy sees her writing as rooted in an inextricable unity of ethics, politics, and aesthetics, unlike David Dabydeen who continues to champion the realm of the aesthetic over any political and/or ethical claims. As Lars Eckstein describes, Dabydeen sees art as "an initially autonomous, self-justifying domain."⁵⁸ Dabydeen's 1984 celebration of a slave's unbroken spirit becomes, in my reading, a celebration of his uncolonised sexuality: evident in the speaker's sexual fantasy about the slave owner's wife in "Slave Song" as well as the depiction of the white woman's secret desire to be raped in "Nightmare." Dabydeen's claims in the introduction to the 2005 edition of *Slave Song* have not made the poems more palatable:

The poems in this volume [...] are largely concerned with an exploration of the erotic energies of the colonial experience, ranging from a corrosive to a lyrical sexuality. Even the appetite for sadistic sexual possession is life giving, the strange, vivid fruit or racial conquest and racial hatred.⁵⁹

One does not even have to be a feminist to be troubled by the way in which the rage of the cane cutter is assuaged by fantasies of abusing and/or mutilating a white body.

I'll mention two more recent neo-slave narratives that manage to avoid such stereotypical representation. Joan Anim-Addo retells Aphra Behn's story from the point of view of the African princess, significantly changing the plot of *Oroonoko*. When newly transplanted, Africans lost language, status, culture and family; they had to find a way to

survive in a hostile environment. Anim-Addo's *Imoinda*, then, uses Behn's story only as a point of departure for, in her version, both mother and baby survive. Following the birth of her daughter, a child of rape by the white overseer, Imoinda mourns the circumstances of her child's birth, but Esteizme, her maid, claims the child is "hope for new life again."⁶⁰ Imoinda's child thus represents the emergent nation, the Caribbean nation. Imoinda remembers her humanity, her capacity to love, however much slavery has sought to break her. Because Oroonoko is unable to adapt to his new circumstances, his only prideful solution is to kill himself. *Imoinda* denies conventional representations of the enslaved as the mute subaltern which dominated the history of both pro-slavery and abolitionist literatures. Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* (2008) also evokes the trauma of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade by a creative excavation of the unmarked grave of an African boy buried at Sunderland Point, Lancaster.⁶¹ Like an archaeologist, in a multitude of voices, she invokes the spirit of this young boy by creating an identity, family, history, culture, religion, a home for him: from 'Sambo' to Bilal, a Fulani Muslim boy whose body the poet inhabits to give him full humanity. Whether fictional, poetic, performative, or visual, neo-slave narratives demand that we re-evaluate not only a vexed history of trauma and violence, but also urge us to re-consider the modern history of the representation of black bodies and selves.

The privileged position Levy affords her narrator also separates her novel from other neo-slave narratives. Positioning the narrator of her story of slavery first as an actual character in the drama and consistently removing her from the narrative do not allow readers to forget the fact that she is *writing* rather than telling her story to someone else. Levy thus establishes an intimacy between readers and a narrator who has absolute authority over the story, something not found in other neo-slave narratives. The narrator's first attempt at ending her story with an allegorical funeral for colonial slavery that "died July 31, 1838, aged 276 years" seems the logical place for July to stop her tale, as the date marks the end of the apprenticeship system, officially granting full freedom to the formerly enslaved.⁶² Thomas Kinsman does not allow his mother to end the story there, however, demanding to know more about the circumstances of his birth. When July "did look upon this tiny newborn," she thought of him as "the ugliest black-skinned child she had ever seen."⁶³ July stops using "fiction" to revise, in a sense, her life-story since from this point on the narrative is consistently in first person. She commands her readers to "ask *my* son to tell you of those days"⁶⁴ (emphasis added), not lamenting the loss of his mother but rejoicing at the English preacher and his wife's upbringing: Thomas was a freeman from his second year. And true to the Enlightenment's mission, knowledge does make the "savage" virtuous:

'The salvation of the savage' was Mr Kinsman's mission. He believed that even the blackest negro could be turned from sable heathen into a learned man, under his and God's tutelage. My son was given a Christian education within his school and Mr Kinsman was pledged to write a paper upon the progress of his learning for the *Baptist Magazine* in London.⁶⁵

Although July wants us to believe that it is to spare her readers that she wants to end the narrative, she does not want to be forced to remember and suffer “every little thing again.”⁶⁶ When slavery ends, July stays with Caroline Mortimer, who refuses to sell her property despite her neighbours’ generous offers—she wants to make Amity the most prosperous estate in Jamaica to revenge her brother’s suicide. When Caroline realises the pitiful conditions within the dungeon at Amity (used to keep the slaves in check), she orders it closed and starts to teach July how to read and write to engage her as her assistant until she hires a new overseer to manage the plantation. Robert Goodwin tries to restore their confidence by treating the formerly enslaved fairly, for he has learned from his father that “England [...] must be cleansed of the abominable stain that slavery placed upon it.”⁶⁷ But “you must prove to the Queen, the people of England, and your mistress,” he tells his workers, “that you are worthy of the kindness that has been shown you.”⁶⁸ The new overseer’s kindness makes July fall in love with him. Although Goodwin seems to be in love with July, he marries Caroline to take July as his mistress since his father had instructed him “a married man might do as he pleases.”⁶⁹ It is the portrait entitled *Mr and Mrs Goodwin* that reveals to Caroline whom her husband truly fancies: “So furious was Caroline that the artist had caught her husband’s folly, that she insisted he take back the portrait to his studio to rectify this error.”⁷⁰ Caroline looks strangely sad in the portrait because her husband has only come to her bed twice in a whole year of married life despite the fact that she wants children. It is the negro that the artist Francis Bear includes to “[add] a reliable touch of the exotic” to the work that bears her husband’s affectionate gaze.⁷¹ July gives birth to a “fair-skinned, grey-eyed girl” later named Emily.⁷² She feels as if she is Robert’s real wife and believes her basement apartment to be truly home.

This illusion is shattered very soon, as Goodwin loses control of the Amity Plantation workers, who refuse to work more than the forty hours a week required of them by King William and the law of England now that they are “free”: “We no longer slaves and we work what suits.”⁷³ Rather than bringing in the crop at Christmas time, the workers’ energy is focused on their old provision grounds and gardens, “for those lands that once they had been forced to tend as slaves so there might be food enough to eat, within the liberty of their freedom now flourished, with produce and profit.”⁷⁴ Failing to receive the gratitude and devotion he expects from the workers, Goodwin institutes measures that smell of desperation: even “[t]o fish the river is no longer permitted.”⁷⁵ Because he wants to charge “a full week’s wage in rent for every acre of land worked,” and no one “could ever earn sufficient to pay it,” they take a solemn oath that “No one would pay the rent upon their houses,” and “not one person amongst them would work even a day for Robert Goodwin.”⁷⁶ Without their labour, much of the land at Amity Plantation falls to ruin.⁷⁷ Such devastation brings on a nervous breakdown, and it is only July’s baby that is able to bring Robert back.⁷⁸ The Goodwin’s are reassured that boatloads of hard-working coolies are on their way to have their plantation working again. But the doctor does prescribe a “long visit back home, to England, so he might better convalesce away from the source of his unease.”⁷⁹ Robert does not want to see July anymore and even begins to have loud sex with Caroline: “Faster and faster, the bed had bumped upon her ceiling. And although

July blocked up her ears with her fists, the missus did not think to stifle Robert Goodwin's mouth when he at last discharged his final cry."⁸⁰ When departure day arrive, Molly sides with the masters and steals Emily from her mother, saying she's going to feed her, and leaves for England with them.

Here the editor of July's narrative interrupts her yet another time, challenging the happy ending she attempts to sketch, another attempt at preventing her readers from feeling sorry for her:

'Mama, this is not written in truth,' says he. [...]

'You wish your readers to know that after Miss July's baby had been cruelly seized from her by Robert and Caroline Goodwin and taken to England, that she then went on to manage a shop within the town entirely untroubled, and there grew old making first, preserves and pickles, before becoming the mistress of a lodging house? [...]

'Then can you perhaps tell me who was that woman—that half-starved woman—with the stolen chicken under her clothes?'⁸¹

For it is on a day he is on jury duty that Thomas Kinsman runs into his mother, who has since then lived in his household. It is Thomas who urges July to write down her story so that her "precious words" would not be lost to all. Although her son wants to know of those years since his sister was stolen from their mother, to the moment he finds a starved July in the courtroom, she refuses to depict the troubles and the harassment from planters free negroes have had to endure. July chooses what stages of her life she wants known:

But for me, reader, my story is finally at an end. This long song has come full up to date. It is at last complete. So let me now place that final end dot...

Perhaps, I told my son, upon some other day there may come a person who would wish to tell the chronicle of those times anew. But I am an old-old woman. And, reader, I have not the ink.⁸²

When reading July's allusion to the title of her narrative readers are reminded that *The Narrative of the Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* identifies slave singing as "testimony against slavery": "slaves sing when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of the heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears."⁸³ July is done telling the story of her life and of everything she has both witnessed and endured in a Jamaican plantation.

The end of the novel also reminds us of an earlier exchange about the possibility of representing truth in art or, to say it better, on the question of whose reality actually gets represented: "Observing the artist painting the view of the lands of Amity into the background of the picture, Dublin Hilton, the old distiller-man, observed that he had not included the negro dwellings. 'But they are there before you,' [...]. At which the artist barked upon him, that no one wished to find squalid negroes within a rendering of a tropical idyll."⁸⁴ Despite the attempt at exposing the "untruth" in the painting, the artist ultimately has control over his creation. In a way, Levy creates her own aesthetics by

conceptualizing writing as both a means of self-discovery and transformation—as an artefact of consciousness. She begets her narrative, to go back to my second epigraph, and the novel's afterword even prepares us for a sequel, certainly another Sankofa text:

If any readers have information regarding Emily Goodwin—her circumstance, her whereabouts—I would be very obliged to them if they could let me know it. A letter to my print works here in Kingston, addressed to Thomas Kinsman, would always find me. [...] But here I would also give one word of caution to any wishing to eagerly aid me with this request. In England the finding of negro blood within a family is not always met with rejoicing. So please, do not think to approach upon Emily Goodwin too hastily with the details of this story, for its load may prove to be unsettling.⁸⁵

For we have already been warned that “the tar brush [...] is quick to lick.”⁸⁶ *The Long Song* continues the author's project of rewriting British history to include her ancestors—to use narrative as way to re-imagine identity. For instead of thinking of identity as an already established fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, Stuart Hall urges us to think of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted *within*, not outside, representation.⁸⁷ Given the skewed structures of growing up in diasporic societies, of attempting whatever social rank or position in the racial colour structure, according to Hall, it is not surprising that Caribbean people of all kinds, of all classes, experience the question of identity as an open question.⁸⁸ I guess the title I chose for an earlier essay on Levy's fiction, “Pivoting the Center,” would still apply here: “[*Small Island*] is much more than a social history of Black people in Britain at a pivotal point of the country's economic and political development. The novel pivots the centre, for very little of hegemonic whiteness is left at the novel's end—and this is not the reason we cry.”⁸⁹

Levy chooses metafiction in response to a specific crisis in narrative, not the generalised crisis in narrative, but a more profound challenge that has to do with the relationship between racial subjectivity and the uneven development of modernity. Because in a way fiction that calls attention to itself in the telling *is* the most realist genre, *The Long Song* leaves us with the unflinching humanity of enslaved peoples as they have managed much more than survival: July seems almost superhuman in her optimistic unwillingness to see herself as a victim. Levy tells us that “instead of a sense of horror, [she has] emerged from the experience of writing the book with a sense of awe for those millions of people who once lived as slaves.”⁹⁰ If history has kept them silent, Levy concludes, “then we must conjure their voices ourselves and listen to their stories. Stories through which we can remember them, marvel at what they endured, what they achieved, and what they have bequeathed to us all.”⁹¹

Notes

1. I'm indebted to Wendy Knepper, Rob Doggett, and Stephanie Iasiello for insightful suggestions for revising this essay. The flaws that remain are mine.
2. Andrea Levy, "The Writing of *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy": <http://www.andrealevy.co.uk> [accessed August 8, 2011].
3. Neo-slave narratives include such diverse works as Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings* (1979) and *The President's Daughter* (1994), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990), Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge* (1991), J. California Cooper's *Family* (1992) and *In Search of Satisfaction* (1994), Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1994), Louise Meriwether's *Fragments of the Ark* (1994), Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994), Lorene Cary's *The Price of a Child* (1995), Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle and Yarico* (1996), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), Valerie Mason-John's *Borrowed Body* (2005), Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda* (2008), and Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2008), to name only a few.
4. Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006, 113.
5. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Introduction: The Talking Book," *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772-1815*. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and William L. Andrews, eds., Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998, 2.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.
7. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
8. Andrea Levy, Reading at SUNY Geneseo on April 29th, 2011 (Milne 201 at 4 p.m).
9. *Ibid.*
10. Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano: African British Abolitionist and Founder of the African-American Slave Narrative," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Audrey A. Fisch, ed., Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 48.
11. Andrea Levy, *The Long Song*. London: Headline Review, 2010, 3.
12. John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (Summer 1987): 482.
13. Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. William Zinsser and Russell Baker, eds., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, 112.
14. *Ibid.*, 192; 93.
15. William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*. New York: Knopf, 1970, 25.
16. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 158.
17. Gates, "Introduction," 3.
18. Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 153.
19. John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *The Atlantic* (August 1967): 19-33.
20. Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, 7.

21. Richard Yarborough, "The First-Person in Afro-American Fiction," *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*. Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Patricia Redmond, eds., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, 115.
22. *Ibid.*, 119.
23. Levy, *The Long Song*, 7.
24. *Ibid.*, 165; 204.
25. The reversal of roles in this passage reminds me of Cindy Weinstein's reading of sentimental fiction against the antebellum slave narrative to demonstrate how the two genres intersect with and challenge one another. For Weinstein, the emphasis on hiding as opposed to revealing is a consequence of one genre being "factual" and the other "fictional," but she acknowledges there is more to the difference than that. Sentimental novels, she writes, are "committed to restoring a transparency about character and relationships as they try to create, at least in the endings of their novels, a coherent, domestic, middle-class world, where children know who their fathers are and husbands and wives know the make-up of one another's blood type" (Weinstein 121). In the world the slaveholders created, where fathers would not acknowledge the children they had with the slaves, there were to be no such assurances. See Cindy Weinstein, "The Slave Narrative and Sentimental Literature" *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Audrey A. Fisch, ed., Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 115-34.
26. Levy, *The Long Song*, 207.
27. *Ibid.*, 10; 11.
28. *Ibid.*, 57.
29. *Ibid.*, 113.
30. *Ibid.*, 113-14.
31. Sherryl Vint, "'Only by Experience': Embodiment and the Limitations of Realism in Neo-Slave Narratives," *Science Fiction Studies* 34 (2007): 241-61
32. *Ibid.*, 2.
33. *Ibid.*, 298.
34. *Ibid.*, 300.
35. *Ibid.*, 302.
36. Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "The Slave Narrative and Early Black American Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, 140.
37. Fred D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1994, 137; 138.
38. Frances Smith Foster, *'Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, xvii.
39. *Ibid.*, 5.
40. Levy, *Long Song*, 77.
41. *Ibid.*, 78.
42. James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994., 274.
43. Levy, *Long Song*, 67.
44. Walvin, 274.
45. *Ibid.*, 276-77.

46. Ibid., 277.
47. Levy, *Long Song*, 64.
48. Ibid., 66; 72.
49. Ibid., 87.
50. Caroline Mortimer had chosen to grant July an education in the great house, so she would know what it feels “to be a white man’s child” (Levy, 38). Although her father, the overseer Dewar, never truly recognizes her as his child, July feels she belongs in the great house. As Levy describes her, “July had gone from being a filthy nigger child—used only to working in the fields—into the missus’s favoured lady’s maid, who boasted her papa to be a white man even though it was Molly that had the higher colour” (Levy, 44). July is described at sixteen as “an excitable young woman with crafty black eyes, a skinny nose, and narrow lips that often bore a smile of insolence” (Levy, 45). At this point in the narrative, however, July only attracts the attention of a free black, Nimrod, who is described as “black as sin, ugly, sly, rough, rude, and no taller than a girl,” and who fathers July’s first child (Levy, 87). As in Levy’s other novels, skin colour will never guarantee either decency or evil in her characters, and readers can expect to find redeeming traits in all the human beings she creates.
51. Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976, viii.
52. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, 149.
53. Beaulieu’s argument that black women writers chose to author neo-slave narratives to reinscribe history from the point of view of the nineteenth-century enslaved mother focuses on Sherley Anne Williams’ *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), J. California Cooper’s *Family* (1991), Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979).
54. Beaulieu, 156.
55. Levy, *Long Song*, 130.
56. Ibid., 135.
57. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977.
58. Eckstein, 156.
59. David Dabydeen, *Slave Song*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005, 10.
60. Joan Anim-Addo, *Imoinda: or She Who Will Lose Her Name* (a play for twelve voices in three acts). London: Mango Publishing, 2008, 92.
61. Dorothea Smartt, *Ship Shape*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008.
62. Levy, *Long Song*. 139.
63. Ibid., 143.
64. Ibid., 144.
65. Ibid., 144-45.
66. Ibid., 147.
67. Ibid., 167.
68. Ibid., 171.
69. Ibid., 217.
70. Ibid., 227-28.
71. Ibid., 222.
72. Ibid., 227.

73. Ibid., 236.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 241.
76. Ibid., 241; 244.
77. Ibid., 263.
78. Ibid., 265.
79. Ibid., 266.
80. Ibid., 270.
81. Ibid., 281.
82. Ibid., 304-05.
83. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892) with an introduction by Rayford W. Long, ed., New York: Collier Books, 1962, 58.
84. Levy, *Long Song*, 232.
85. Ibid., 308.
86. Ibid., 186.
87. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford, ed., London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 222.
88. Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," *New Left Review* 209 (January/February 1995): 7.
89. Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black: Write British: from Post Colonial to Black British Literature*. Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2005, 79-80.
90. Levy, "Writing of *The Long Song*."
91. Ibid.

Coloured

Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar

Ganesh walked in the intense Texas heat, wondering how on his first trip to America, the land of opportunity, he managed to miss the grand vistas of beaches and mountains shown on the BBC and instead only found dumpy cityscapes similar to the outskirts of Calcutta. The dry dust of Houston held little promise of fulfilling Ganesh's desire for the blue sparkling water of American beaches, warmer in the Gulf of Mexico than the frigid waters of the English Channel. No, locked by land, and doomed to boredom, he had one more night to suffer.

Ganesh had come to Houston with the address of the only person he knew on the North American continent, Simon O' Shea, a childhood friend who wasn't even American. Nor, as it turned out, was he here, in the country. Simon, in typical unpredictable fashion, was back in Ireland on a holiday.

'Look me up mate, if you ever leave this sorry rock,' Simon said. He tipped his hat to Ganesh. The last time he'd seen Simon, over two years ago, after graduation from Oxford. Bound for his next adventure, Simon left Ganesh standing on the train platform at Paddington Square, squinting against the fading sunlight. This was one of the first times since boarding school the two were separated. After breathing in the last of the train fumes, Ganesh loped home, ignoring the pitying gazes of the household, and he went straight to his room.

Of course, once there, the next easiest thing was to pull her out. His blunt fingernails searched for the discrete lip signaling the small compartment he'd carved in the rich sandalwood of the bed. Finding it, he used his pinky nail, the one that drew unending looks of disgust from his mother, to pry it open. Inside the inches of space hid his secret treasure. He lifted her out, a slip of the full woman, his redhead.

At first he'd been scandalized when Simon brought the books into his room, the pictures of fleshy naked women, hair of all different colors, their penetrating eyes meeting his own in the way an Indian woman never would, as if they knew the strange whirlpools swirling inside him. Simon laughed at his astounded expression and then the slow blush creeping up his light brown neck and over the tops of his ears.

'Look, there's heaps more to be had at home, mate. Heaps. Some even on the telly.' Simon snorted at Ganesh's trembling hands, and pushed his friend's shoulder with a meaty white palm, wiry hair sprouting from the knuckles, as his light blue eyes showed only merriment.

'Honestly mate, I know your parents have a girl picked out for you and everything, but before you settle down, they should let you go on last ride. See the world. Taste the world,' here Simon gave Ganesh a wink that tinged his face red.

Ganesh, unable to subdue the centuries old Brahmin blood running through his veins, couldn't keep the entire magazine Simon insisted was a present. So he selected his favorite woman, peeled her from between the slick pages, and placed her under his pillow at school. When time came to go home, guilt knocked loudly at the thought of his mother finding her, and so, apologetically, Ganesh separated his love from her considerable assets.

Sweat trickling down the inside of his collar, Ganesh sighed. Swearing and women aside, Simon had been a prize to know in school. All alone in the world the minute his parents set sail for the return journey to India, Ganesh had been mercilessly teased by the boys at prep school. His soap, scented with the lightest of sandalwood, drew wrinkled noses from the other boys and although Ganesh was a sure bet for a full meal on fish and chips night or kidney pie and liver, it wasn't until Simon's arrival and companionship that Ganesh made into the secret societies.

'Let's tie one on, old chap,' was Simon's favorite line, whether they were in the midst of studying, or unnecessary boredom, as he called it.

'Man wouldn't survive on his own,' Was another of Simon's sayings, 'without the power to tie 'em on and forget the rest.'

'Let's do tie one on,' Ganesh mutters to himself, glancing down either side of the street. Down to the left, a few slow moving men confirmed that Ganesh was not the only one affected by the heat. Their worn shirts and faces weren't unlike those in the John Wayne epics he would sneak out to while his parents thought he was at temple. The thing was he *would* go to the temple; after the stolen cinema, arriving in time for the priest to sprinkle holy water, smelling faintly of roses, on Ganesh's bent head, contrite amidst the other worshippers. He would receive the sacred ash mark, grey, and then the small red stripe with a contrite soul. His cupped palm accepted the *prasad*, the food blessed by Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and the temple's patron deity, a blessing he later transferred a small banana leaf to take to his mother. In this way Ganesh felt no conflict between going to the temple and making time for his John Wayne movies. As he knew from watching Simon's juggling of daily Mass and neighborhood pubs, a smart bloke knew how to manage his time.

At the moment, however, the temple, his mother, and their blessings were far away from what he was about to do. A good thing, since his mother would have been horrified at the thought of hundreds of years of Brahmin lineage riding his shoulders into a Texas bar.

He headed for the nearest bar, swinging the door open with one hand. He had wanted the swinging doors of the movies, but it appeared there were none to be found. So he did the next best thing, strode into this bar, holding this torso straight so as to emerge in a broad muscular expanse like the hero of a Wayne epic. But the door was heavier than expected, much sturdier than the sandalwood exterior of his youth. The dark wood of this particular saloon turned, how unexpected! Inward. Ganesh crashed into it like a young cow.

Why would they put a handle on something you have to push? he wonders, trying to ignore the fact his arrival into the bar was reminiscent of a Western, only he was playing the role of the gawking newcomer, rather than the debonair stranger.

Nevertheless, entrance aside, he managed himself to a seat without further incident.

He smiled to the left and right to reassure people that he was all right, but was met with unblinking flat-lipped stares. He found it unsettling being the sole object of attention under these unflinching orbs of different colors. He wondered how John Wayne overcame the stymieing gazes. How could Ganesh draw life into the heavy stone that his heart had become? His nerve had sunk like ten tons to the bottom of his liver. Chin up, Ganesh reminded himself, chin up, swivel legs in, and order. You've seen this done a hundred times. He coughed into the stillness.

A sharp memory of Simon's voice, crisp, cool, and mocking, helped him regain his bearings. 'When you're in a pub, the world over, you're the boss.' Simon's voice came from over his shoulders, poking into Ganesh's hunched shoulders.

The two were out of school for the winter holiday, ostensibly to visit Simon's parents in Manchester, but they'd chosen to stay in their dormitory at university instead. Simon's parents, traveling on business, hadn't bothered to inquire why he'd elected to stay, and Ganesh's parents, holding implicit trust in their only son, hadn't reason to question his visit to his classmate's home. The two boys had full range of the empty hostel, save for the eldest proctor who kept to himself, a drunk, Simon cheerfully explained. Simon, set on finishing out Ganesh's 'proper education,' included pub etiquette in the course of the weekend's education.

'I'll have a gin and tonic,' Ganesh said, happy to hear firm tones rather than the quaking he felt in his vocal chords. The man behind the counter lifted an eyebrow. Ganesh began to doubt himself. Despite the room's dank interior he felt himself go hot under his arms. Gin and tonic? Was that in fact what he meant? Was it a woman's drink he'd just ordered? Brahma save me, he thought, ignoring the fact that his desire to drink American alcohol was the least likely of a Hindu god's concerns.

Ganesh felt the room contract around him. What would Wayne do right now? he thought, seeing the watching group of men in the corner shift their stance.

The man behind the counter said nothing, just flicked a small towel at the bar top where Ganesh was resting his arm. Ganesh blinked.

'I beg your pardon?' this time he heard the dreaded squeak. There were guffaws around the room. I've turned into my namesake, he thought, Ganesh, half man, half elephant. Why won't this man serve me? Ganesh looked across the counter into the bar mirror, half expecting to see an elephant head in place of the top half of his reflection. No, instead all that stared back at him were his own brown eyes, and, he realized, the eyes of everyone else in the room.

He wished the stone that had been his heart, now hiding in his liver, would stop beating so he could fall down dead.

Somehow she appeared, there was no other way to say it, she appeared at his elbow, and her hip perched on the lip of the counter, skirts full and blue. A blue so sharp it hurt his eyes, encasing a slim but flared waist traveling up to so much exposed white flesh, Ganesh felt a different kind of heat tingle his earlobes.

'There ain't nothing here for the likes of you, colored,' Ganesh heard someone mutter as he admired piles and piles of rich, red hair.

Never in real life had he seen red hair –

The flick of the cleaning towel in his face broke Ganesh's line of vision just as he caught sight of two of large blue eyes. They reminded him of the Queen's commissioned coronation crown, with sapphires rumored the size of robin's eggs.

'Colored?' Ganesh echoed, then sat up with a start.

Something in his mind, something that resisted the pull of the liquid blue he was dissolving into was working. Grandfather's stories of rough treatment at the hands of the British; when he couldn't ride in the same train car as the whites, when he couldn't apply to be a civil servant because all those jobs went to the colonials. A world he'd never had to experience, walking on certain sides of the street, not being allowed to travel, an India subject to the British crown, his family managing estates and never owning them. These legacies from another era tingled at the back of his neck.

Ganesh laughed, knowing the reason for the strange silence since the moment he'd walked into this establishment.

'I'm not colored, I'm English!'

His proclamation, his brisk tone, elicited no change in his observers.

'English?' the woman was the first to ask. He tilted his head toward her, imagining raising her hand to his lips, the back of her palm cool and fresh against the dryness of his mouth. Under her full attention, he could only nod.

'You from England then?'

'I moved there for university,' he said, feeling the inside of his palm itch. The palm knew what lie underneath those layers of cobalt blue skirt, knew the shape, color, and sweetness of it sitting only six inches away. 'From India,' the last rushed out in a sigh.

'What's it like?' She asked, the rims of her pupils expanding so that blue encroached on black.

'England? Or India?' He imagined her draped in a Bernassi sari, gold, purple and pink, soft silk rustling against her skin. Red was even more vibrant when not printed on paper.

'Either,' she said. Was it his imagination or was she learning her torso towards him?

'Indian. That's the same as colored to me,' the bartender's voice rumbled into Ganesh.

The red haired beauty at his side pouted.

'Now Jack, you stop it. This here's a man living in England. He's our guest. It's an honor sir,' she said flipping her arm at the elbow and presenting her hand to in a flourish Ganesh. He was so close to her he could see slight marks around her wrist, little puckers as if she'd been tied up.

Ganesh reached for her hand whose slender fingers were fluttering in front of his parted lips.

'Touch her and you'll die, dirty nigger,' the man, Jack evidently, was closer now, edging into Ganesh's eardrum. He saw the watching group on the move; they seeped toward him, eyes hooded.

'Jack!' she protested but let her hand drop to the counter. She glanced down at Ganesh and this time there was no mistaking the fact, she was inclining her head forward, as if she were tossing her hair over the crown of her head. It was a slight motion but Ganesh thought he saw purpose in those firm pupils.

She swung her crossed legs in a wide arc, and was down off the bar in a rustle of fabric. Underneath the sound of taffeta moving she hissed entreatingly, 'Get out of here.'

For a second he blinked, not sure if he heard the actual words or his mind was putting words into the fabric. She jostled his elbow as she swept past him and cut her eyes past his shoulder toward the door so that this time there was no mistaking the message. She was telling him to leave.

'Now Melba, don't get in stuff you don't understand,' Jack, who it turned out was a rather large man, said, as Ganesh stumbled down from his stool. His shoulders were massive, made for pulling the ox cart. Large club-like hands, unsuited for mixing drinks, hung at his thick waist.

I'm done for, Ganesh thought, knowing Simon's duck and weave boxing instructions were pathetically moot, as he watched a human semicircle form between him and door.

'Jack, sweetie, you don't want to harm this man, who's our guest, now do you?'

'Melba, I'm warning you. I saw him. He was about to touch you. Touch a white woman, that's all they wants. And who knows what would have happened next.'

'I think I seen him last night, hanging around the fire escape, waitin' to break into one of my girls' rooms.'

There was a collective growl at this declaration and Ganesh felt light headed. Trapped in a pub, no weapons, over a misunderstanding—this was the fate of his karma, for being a disobedient son and loose Brahmin.

'Oh, y'all stop it now. Why, I've never seen him before in my life,' she, whose name was Melba, laughed, full of rolling musical tones.

'Naw, it was him alright. Greasy bastards, reaching above their place. Try our women? Not in this life.'

'You heard they had a nigger over in Johnson County actually rape a woman.'

'Paul Hilbarn's wife. Whoever that coon was, he touched a man's wife, d'you believe it?'

This time the grumbling was accompanied by hands rubbing across mouths and pant legs.

'You cain't teach 'em. Nothin' can teach these bastards.'

'Nothin' but a good beating. All coons need that once in a while. To remind 'em of their place.'

'Or a good lynching,' the meat cleaver said, spitting on the ground.

Ganesh's blood ran cold and he felt an irresistible urge to relieve himself.

'Lynching?' Melba laughed again, this time twirling out into the center of the room, filling up the space between Ganesh and the men with the shifting flares of her skirt.

'Don't your boys have enough to do? Bored with me already?' she pouted, a fat red lip lolling toward her chin, her shoulders moving flexing, showing off all her rounded places.

'Melba, you move out the way,' an older man said, rubbing his knuckles together, over his worn blue jeans. His long sleeve shirt had seen better days since a few missing buttons had been replaced with safety pins.

'This here is men's business. You get upstairs until somebody's ready for you.' His hair was thinning so even the dim bar light reflected on his shiny forehead.

'Hugh's right, Miss Melba, you're new here, so you don't quite know the way of things. The men do the picking, you see? Not the girls,' Jack said.

'You know once we're done here with the coon, we'll explain everything to you, right proper,' the older worn looking man, Hugh, said.

Melba's mouth turned down into a frown and she shook her skirts and stomped a heeled foot against the wood floor so that it rang out.

'Well, I guess tonight's not the night after all.'

She made like she would flounce back toward Ganesh.

'Night for what?' Hugh asked. She glanced over her shoulder but then turned around, and shook her head.

'Night for what?'

She had her hands winding through her hair, braiding it, which was promising. She flashed a smile and cocked her head to one side.

'I know times are tight boys,' she said, fingers raking through her long locks. 'I know those wells aren't easy to find and many of you are a bit light in the pockets.'

'Melba,' Jack said, his voice sounding feral, a cat searching for its prey.

'Tonight I'm feeling a teensy bit wild,' Melba said.

'Maybe like I could do my routine, right here on the bar, like I used to do, before the country tightened up its rules on us dancing girls,' she pouted.

Several men, Hugh and Jack in front, moved forward, but not toward him, Ganesh realized.

Toward the white, white shoulders in front of him.

The shoulders and torso rising out the taffeta dress, more flesh emerging by the second.

'One condition.'

They were staring transfixed, Ganesh included, as the ivory fingers roamed down the length of her waist to flip up the edges of her skirt. He could see the back curve of her leg, and was shocked to see patterned black stockings criss-crossing up her legs but stopping at her thigh.

The stillness of the moment surrounded the rolling of those long, long tresses until they came to rest on top of her head. Now everywhere the eye looked there was white, white.

'One condition,' she said. Her hands paused at the front laces of her gown.

They took a collective swallow.

'You let him go.'

All of sudden, the energy in the room snapped back to Ganesh. Across a perfectly rounded valley lay his escape. And suddenly the world outside the pub was the last thing on his mind.

'Nigger lover,' Hugh hissed. The words exploded in the small bar. Hugh, surprisingly meaty for his age lunged forward to grab Melba. She screamed and halted mid-strip routine as Jack and a few others began to close in around her.

Ganesh froze, even though he may have gotten out undetected. They were about to desecrate his love before his eyes. He counted their number.

Ten.

Ganesh stepped forward.

Melba retreated until she bumped his chest. She whirled, spinning to face him, but instead of relief in her eyes, he saw panic.

'Idiot,' she hissed, this time without affection.

Idiot?

But he was going to give his life to save her.

'Run,' she screamed, shoving him forward. Ganesh looked down and saw blood where she had so recently stood. Then she bolted past him toward the door, but Jack grabbed her by the hair and jerked her to the floor.

The last vision he had of his love, before feeling the cool night air, was of her brilliant hair fanned around her, spreading around her, on the floor. Red was the color he saw as he ran. Red, red, red; the night was still and dark before him, a deep black, deep enough to be violet. And the moon was an ivory almond barely hanging in the sky.

Letter to Motherwell

Rhona Hammond

Walking home from the supermarket with a bag full of bread and dry cleaning I thought about my children. I smiled to myself and remembered compliments received from passersby and daycare teachers. Then I looked up and caught sight of the newspaper advert on the lamppost. SHOCK CHILD RAPE FIGURES. A few metres down the road the next poster said something in Afrikaans about the South African cricket team. I was being reminded that I was in Port Elizabeth, where the security forces tortured Steve Biko and the main street is named after Govan Mbeki.

Tractorman waved as I walked to the daycare centre. He moved his big red tractor round in neat circles and trimmed the grass of the school playing fields. The sun beat down but he was wearing a woollen beanie hat. Wheelbarrowman had what looked like a t-shirt under his baseball cap to make something like a foreign legionnaire's cap and he waved too. I had given them these names because we saw them every time I collected Mhairi from school. Tractorman was my favourite because he had responded the first time we waved hello to him. I had picked him out because he had a red tractor and I said to Mhairi, 'Look! It's Tractorman. He has a tractor just like Grandad's.'

The hill was not very steep but the casuarina needles made it a bit slippery underfoot. Students drifted along on their way to the shopping centre for lunch or to catch a taxi. Some smiled, some didn't.

The big dogs threw themselves at the gate, as usual, then a couple of cars sped past, far too fast for the neighbourhood and I was glad once more that I didn't actually drive in this country because they all drove like maniacs. Unrestrained children bouncing around on seats and laps or even in the back of pickup trucks, utes, bakkies, whatever you call them. Those flatbed trucks which aren't as popular in the UK. Working cars, the border collies of the roads. On my right the yardman for the big white house washed a Toyota Corolla as if it were a Mercedes in the security cage built to protect it from the outside world. The newly spread asphalt was still very smooth and black and shiny. The midday heat was intense. Not far to go now.

It would be safer in a car. None of the other daycare mothers walked to collect their children. Mina, the maid who came with the apartment, had warned me never to talk on my phone in public, in fact, to switch it off so no one would know that I had one. She said it was sure to be stolen. In some ways I hoped that by being friendly to the gardeners and yardmen that I passed every day on my travels around the 4km square patch of PE that was my home they might help me if anything bad ever happened, if anyone ever tried to rob me. What did I mean 'tried'? It would be unlikely that they would fail, more just a question of the force that would be used and how well I would handle it. I was terrified it might happen when I was out with both girls.

Everyone warned you, the fear of crime was all pervasive. TV and radio adverts offered you special windows for your car and steel doors for your house. I stopped listening to Algoa FM because in between the American R'n'B music the news bulletins were full of local court reports about brutal murders and rapes. In the shopping centre with the pram I would go to the toilets when I saw the security guards for the bank making cash deliveries because they had their hands on their machine pistols and I did not want to be caught in any cross fire.

The shopping centre security guards knew me because of the children. They held the keys to the baby change room. They wore burgundy jumpers with grey trousers and chatted to their friends by text message on their flashy mobile phones, looking up to say hello and smile at the baby. I wondered if they had children, where they lived, what they did after work, this boring, boring work wandering around a tiny shopping centre all day. Security guards at the shops, in cars driving round the suburb, at my husband's work. Security guards at the fun fair alongside the police who liked to gather in groups of four or five and chat. They were everywhere; so normal they didn't even stand out really. Even in London there hadn't been so many security guards, or did I just not notice them because I wasn't particularly concerned?

Sometimes at the shopping centre I would see the white woman with the little black girl in her pram. This mother was older than me, easily in her early forties, and her daughter was about the same age as Skye. She stood out because she had no nanny not because she was attractive and well dressed. I smiled and nodded at her as mothers do but I never actually spoke to her, even though I wanted a friend. It did not seem like the correct thing to do.

I asked Gladys, my babysitter, what she would be doing over the long weekend. Would she and her daughters do anything nice for the holiday? No, said Gladys. She would go to church on Saturday, because she was a Seventh Day Adventist, and if there wasn't a funeral to go to on Sunday she would just have a quiet day at home.

Gladys said that I had helped her a lot and that she had used her wages to buy a two burner stove, a bath tub, a new ironing board, some clothes and something to do with a tap which I didn't understand.

The weather turned into a southern hemisphere winter and it did become quite cold sometimes although the days were usually still sunny and bright. After the sun went down, the wind had a real bite to it and the apartment became cold. It was July now. Gladys told me that it was too cold in her house to stay up and that everyone went to bed at eight o'clock to stay warm.

Mhairi had fancy new slippers that we bought in Australia but when we were there I had just borrowed a pair from my mother-in-law because I had left my good slippers at home in Sweden. I was regretting this now as the wind blew through our beautiful but jerry-built apartment, rattling the thin windows which had let in a flood of rain in March. I figured that Gladys must be cold too as she took her boots off when she came into the house and put them back on before going home. I saw that the supermarket was selling

cheap slippers and I decided to act so one day I said to Gladys what size feet do you have because it's cold and I am going to get us some slippers. She laughed and said size five so Mhairi and I got dressed up to go outside in the cold wind. We walked up to the supermarket on a mission to buy slippers. I got a pink pair for Gladys and a purple pair for myself and I explained what we were doing to Mhairi. Thereafter, whenever she put her slippers on she would say 'just like Gladys'. Oh, I was so much happier with those slippers on.

One evening as we walked along the beach front with Mhairi's football the homeless lady who lived, sporadically, in the bus shelter beside the car park at the beach approached us. She made a fuss of Skye and Mhairi and told me that she had four daughters, two who are married and two who are not. I wanted to ask her why she had to live on the streets if there were four daughters who could help her but, of course, I didn't. She was painfully thin and walked with effort. Her face was sunken in from lack of teeth and flesh. That night her head was covered by a scarf and she was clutching a dirty cream coloured plastic bag. It looked as if it held some plastic plates. She said to me, 'Ma'am does live near here?' and I said yes and I felt my chest tighten because I was sure she was about to ask me for money and I didn't want to have to deal with that because I would have to say no. I never carried much money when I went to the beach with the children and I certainly never let anyone see where I kept it.

'Nex' time ma'am come here, can bring some food or some warm clothes? We sleeping here by the beach you see.'

I felt ashamed of what I had thought and I told her I would do what I could but the next night I was too busy getting the girls out the door and I forgot to grab any food for her. When I saw her I felt even more guilty. I broke my own rules and raked around in the backpack to find nine rand in change and a muesli bar which Mhairi saw me hand over and made a fuss about wanting. They have yoghurt on the top and she thinks they are chocolate bars. It was a poor kind of help. The following night I made a proper ham sandwich and packed it into a plastic bag with an apple. We walked south along the beachfront that night to watch the surfers who were out chasing big waves close to the shore. They moved in shifts between the water and their bakkies and Citi Golfs, the old men with long grey hair and paunches, the young men with short hair and muscles.

I analyse things too much. I found myself thinking that the apple was probably no use for her because of her teeth. I wondered if I should be helping one person instead of supporting some charity like the City Mission which would help many others. I had put a donation in the shopping trolley which was being used as a collection point at the entrance to the Pick'n'Pay supermarket, next to the collecting tin statue of the little girl with cerebral palsy (terrible palsy) which Mhairi loved to cuddle. She couldn't leave the supermarket without putting some coins in it.

For three more nights I took a sandwich and a piece of fruit in a plastic bag to the beach and twice I gave them to the homeless woman but on the third night she was not there. We walked our usual route and I was sure she would be at the bus shelter but she wasn't. I put the bag in the fridge when we got home and tried again the next night but

still no sign of her. I threw the sandwich out and put twenty rand in my pocket the next night but she wasn't there again so I gave up. Three days later we flew home to Sweden and I wondered if she was looking for us. I wondered where she had gone. When we got back from Sweden I half expected to see her again but we didn't. Instead I had a more typical encounter with a thin man called Joe who said he was from Durban and had no money because he had been robbed. I really didn't have anything I could give him that night. Mhairi was blowing bubbles into the wind beside the beach as I apologized but said I could not help him. He appealed to me as a Christian woman but I had to say firmly no, I'm sorry I can't help you. I really don't have anything I can give you.

My American friend Erin had told me about a volunteering opportunity in Central PE at a shelter for victims of domestic violence. I called the lady in charge and made plans to start once I got back from Sweden. I was going to teach the women who were on their way back into the world and the workforce how to use a computer. I planned it around Mhairi's daycare and Gladys coming to watch Skye and it felt good to be doing something responsible, something like work.

I had never driven in Central PE before but with the map and some meaningless directions about a hotel I didn't know, but was apparently supposed to know, I made it there on time. There was one student waiting and four others arrived over the next half hour. They were of differing levels of ability and one of them could probably have done the teaching herself if she had had the confidence but she seemed to be happy to go over things again. It turned out that I was only required for two weeks but I explained that I could do more and I felt, but didn't say, that more than two weeks was really needed. It is hard teaching something that comes as second nature to you because you forget all the little steps along the way and assume a lot of knowledge that does not exist. It was also difficult to build a sample spreadsheet to practice on. We were making up shopping lists and guessing rough prices and planning a party and organizing imaginary trucks leaving a factory. This all took up a lot of time.

The second week was less successful because it felt as though everyone's attention was somewhere else for some reason. The third class worked better and it seemed as though we had made real progress. One lady was late for class and apologized, explaining that they had found a woman's body in the alley behind her apartment block and the police wouldn't let any of the residents out that morning until they had spoken to them. I said oh dear and she added that she had asked a young man who lived on the bottom floor if he knew what had happened and he had said that the Nigerians had thrown her out of a window. I clearly didn't do a good job of keeping a poker face because she reassured me that she didn't believe everything he said.

On the fourth of October I went to Motherwell Township for the first time. I had promised Erin that I would follow up on the doors and other gifts that she gave the women who helped her research project and that I would take photos of the finished work and of the women themselves. Xoliswe the researcher organized this for me and Gladys was my guide into the township. We set off in my husband's silver VW Passat with Skye in her car seat (not happy about that) at nine o'clock after I had taken Mhairi to daycare. It

took us about half an hour to get to Gladys' house where I met her daughter, granddaughter and nephew. Little Lisa is two months younger than Skye and has benefited from the clothes that Skye has outgrown. She was wearing the pink and green stripy jacket with matching pink trousers that I had given her and also the pink stripy moccasin socks that Mhairi wore in Stockholm. They were too small for Skye when we got back to Stockholm so I brought them for Lisa. Actually, it looked like they were getting too small for Lisa too.

Gladys' house was a typical grey brick RDP hut with a corrugated iron roof. She had some trees in her yard but also an old taxi bus and a badly trashed car, the one that her brother was injured in. Her nephew is her sister's son and he is helping her brother by driving his taxi while he recovers from the accident. From what I understood of Gladys' description his car was hit in the rear while he was filling it up with petrol and he was badly injured in his arm and shoulder. There is a main room with kitchen and sitting area and then two small bedrooms at the side. Gladys had cracked linoleum on the floor, held together with tape, but most of the houses we visited had bare concrete floors or scattered bits of rug and carpet. Not all of the houses had the internal walls completed, some did not go right up to the roof and some just had pieces of fabric as room dividers. The toilets are outside but they are proper toilets, linked to the sewage system.

We left Gladys' house and drove to the church to meet Xoliswe. The church was a bit of a shock. It was the least established of all the buildings we visited. The entire thing was made out of corrugated iron and a flimsy wooden skeleton of struts and beams. It's a Seventh Day Adventist church so they meet on a Saturday and during the week it is a crèche for the area. There must have been forty or so children there with two adults looking after them all. The floor was covered with bits of carpet and all the furniture had been made out of crates and boxes. The piece of plywood which served as a door said GM Brasil in blue letters.

The children looked well dressed for the cool day and there was a jumbled mountain of bags and back packs in the corner. While I was taking the photos a smartly dressed lady in a uniform for the SPAR supermarket chain dropped off a sobbing girl of about four years of age. The little girl was wearing a pretty orange jumper and had bunches in her hair. Xoliswe tried to comfort her and we used the photo taking as a distraction. It seemed to work. A little boy, about eighteen months old, had gone to sleep with his bottle still in his hand on a filthy piece of foam on the floor. One of the things that Erin had organized for the crèche was a pile of plastic coated mattresses. I took a picture of them and of the blankets too. The ladies were preserving the mattresses by keeping them in their original plastic bags from the shop. You could tell that they were being used because the price and bar code stickers were dirty from the floor.

We drove around from house to house down the good roads and then onto the bad ones. It had rained and there were deep puddles and rivers in the small roads. It was rough going, avoiding rocks and shagging dogs. I had wondered what happened about mail in the township and then I saw what looked like it had once been a post office box cabin. It had small blue boxes which could be opened by keys and the door showed that

inside there was room for a post office worker to put the mail into everyone's boxes but now it was trashed with garbage piled up and bits ripped off.

At each house we were welcomed and thanked and I took only the pictures I was meant to take and did not just snap away like some press photographer or tourist because it would have been wrong and rude. Everyone enjoyed seeing the picture immediately afterwards on my digital camera and I promised to get them all copies. It was often quite dark inside the houses so when I got home I asked Wade to adjust the pictures on the computer.

Visiting Motherwell was quite an experience. One woman had a deaf and dumb son, a baby boy and a daughter who had just given birth to twin boys. They were all living in perhaps the poorest of the houses we visited. Erin had given them cement to render the house and keep the wind and rain out and a new door, one which would actually close. But they did not yet have the money to buy the sand that they needed to finish the job.

Gladys told me that the government only paid for the outside walls. Even her house doesn't have the second partition, only the one that splits it into two rooms, not three. She said she was hoping to have the money for the bricks by Christmas. She found it hard to sleep when it was raining because of the noise on the zinc roof. People are living in garages and they are among the lucky ones.

My volunteer job at the shelter for victims of domestic violence, or battered women as we used to say at home, was having mixed results. I enjoyed it but there were times when it was difficult. People didn't turn up or came late or didn't understand basic arithmetic which was a problem when we were supposed to be learning about spreadsheets. However one woman, Patricia, picked it up quite quickly. If she had had a PC at home and a chance to practise she would have done very well. She certainly had a focus for her interest as she was working at a fish-processing factory beside the docks and had just got a new job administering the wages. This was all being done by hand on a piece of A4 at the moment, some fifty employees split over the factory and the packing areas, some paid by the hour and some on piece work at a rate of 55 Rand cents per five kilo box. One lady in the example she brought me had packed 300 five-kilo boxes and 100 one-kilo boxes in a shift. The one-kilo boxes paid 28 Rand cents. The boss had promised to buy Patricia a computer to make it easier if she completed her training and despite the obvious lack of professional standards, competencies, assessments or anything else that I would have expected in Australia or the UK, the certificate being issued here would do.

Our time in Port Elizabeth was coming to an end. I had spoken to a kindly American man at the amusement park in the casino one night, just in passing, and he had commented that he found South Africans to be unfailingly polite and civilized so long as you never got onto the subject of race. I had settled in to a pleasant rhythm of life and adjusted to or accepted some of the fear and alienation I had initially felt. I was more comfortable than I had been. One day I went to the shopping centre on my own to buy some groceries and send some emails. I treated myself to a coffee and a scone at the café, which was busy, and an elderly lady who I had seen around the shops asked if she

could share my table. I had no idea why but she suddenly leaned over the table and said that she could not understand why so many people adopted black children. Weren't there enough of their own people to do it? I felt like I had been slapped and didn't know how to respond. I said well, it was surely better that the children had a family than stay in orphanages. This was, apparently, not the correct response so I looked away from her and saw the white woman with the little black girl in a pram and I realized what had happened. My table mate must have seen them coming.

Beauty the tea lady at Wade's work was retiring, forcibly, I think, at the end of September. She was seventy years old and when the HR lady asked her what she would like as a farewell gift she said food. Obviously, without her job, she was worried about how she would feed herself. People were invited to bring in tins and non-perishables or to donate money. Wade put 500 rand in an envelope and passed it to the HR girl who came round to his desk later to thank him.

Beauty was a tea lady who mostly made coffee and she brought it to you at your desk then cleared away the cups and made the place look nice. As nice as possible in a series of containers and temporary offices in a huge car park. She used to wash Wade's plate and fork on the days that I sent him to work with leftovers, curry or stir fry in a plastic box, as a change from sandwiches.

There was a big presentation on Friday at lunchtime. The office had managed to collect five archive filing boxes full of food for Beauty and they had bought her a little stove with four rings and a small oven. Beauty had only ever cooked with a paraffin stove before. They gave her some pre-paid electricity vouchers too. She wept. Her granddaughter, who had a car, had come to collect her and her presents and take her home. The new tea lady was a young girl who had supposedly been in training for a week but there was no coffee that afternoon and on Monday the site manager had to go looking for her.

One weekend after we returned to Australia I found seventy rand in notes in one of Wade's pockets. I had not lived in Port Elizabeth for the best part of a year but I looked at those notes in my hand and it all came back to me. I wondered what to do with them. They sat on the kitchen bench top for a week. I looked at the Australia Post website and learned about the use of Registered Post services. I wondered if a registered post letter would make it to Motherwell Township. No valuables they said, very firmly. I bought such an envelope from the post office. I did not reveal my plans but even so the post lady gave me a stern warning about only using these envelopes for documents. I muttered something about photos and she grunted.

I decided to take a chance and post the money anyway. If it gets to Gladys then that will be great. If it doesn't, then I am sure the person who steals it must need it.

Contributors

Dr Charlotte Beyer is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Gloucestershire, and holds an MA and PhD in Women's Studies. A contemporary literature specialist, her teaching areas include recent British fiction and poetry; North American literature from the 19th Century to the present day; black British and postcolonial writing; and crime fiction. She has published a number of articles on Margaret Atwood's fiction and poetry in relation to postcolonial and feminist perspectives, and an article and a book chapter on Willa Cather's journalism. She has recently published articles on Dorothy Pilkington's *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and her use of feminist and postcolonial theoretical perspectives in teaching and learning, and on Jackie Kay and Isha Mckenzie-Mavinga and black British women's writing and maternal identities. She has also published on crime fiction. Dr Beyer writes reviews for, as well as serving as a peer reviewer on, several academic journals. She is also a published poet, and her poetry has appeared in the poetry journal *The Dawntreader*, and in the anthologies *Crab Lines off the Pier* (2010), *Visible Breath* (2010), and *EMERGENCY VERSE: Poetry in Defence of the Welfare State* (2010).

Dr Sandra Courtman is Programme Director for Literature with Creative Writing in the Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of Sheffield. Her work on women writers of the Windrush generation led to a 1969 Jamaican autobiography: Joyce Gladwell's *Brown Face, Big Master*, being reprinted as a Macmillan Caribbean Classic in 2003. She edited *Beyond the Blood, the Beach and The Banana: New Perspectives in Caribbean Studies* (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2004). She has written about women writers and the black British canon and Caribbean connections with Birmingham's photographic collections. Recent publications include an essay on cross-cultural readings of the Caribbean short story and an essay on Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*.

Dr Alicia E. Ellis is Assistant Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Hampshire College in Amherst Massachusetts. She received her PhD in Germanic Languages and Literatures at Yale University where she also earned a Master's Degree in African-American Studies. Her teaching and research interests are located in German literature and intellectual history of the long nineteenth century; African-American and Caribbean literatures; the intersection of literature and historical thought; and adaptation as a theoretical method. She has written and lectured on E.T.A. Hoffmann, Franz Grillparzer, Ossip Mandelstam, Albert Camus, Ingeborg Bachmann, Christa Wolf and Edwidge Danticat.

Dr Rhona Hammond read Classics and English at Oxford before completing her PhD thesis, "Classical Influences on the Poetry of Derek Walcott," through the Open University in 2001. Since completing her thesis, Rhona has presented papers on Walcott, Ralph de Boissiere and Caribbean literary topics at various conferences in Australia and Europe and has published articles in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and *Kunapipi*. Originally from Scotland, Rhona has lived in Belgium, Sweden and South Africa but is now settled in Australia where she is currently joint President of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies.

Dr Wendy Knepper (guest editor) is a Lecturer in transnational modernism and postcolonial literature at Brunel University as well as co-founder of the Brunel Gender & Sexuality Research Centre (2011). She has published articles on Caribbean literature and theory, gender-related issues, and crime fiction in essay collections and peer-reviewed journals, including *PMLA* and *Small Axe*. She has recently published *Patrick Chamoiseau: A Critical Introduction* (2012), which presents an analytic account of the author's narrative strategies and oeuvre as a whole. Currently, she is working on the Palgrave Companion to Caribbean Literature as well as a book-length study of crime and reconstructions of justice in contemporary Caribbean writing.

Dr Ole Laursen holds a PhD from the Open University (2011), where his doctoral thesis focused on contemporary black and Asian British women's life writing. He has published on Lucinda Roy and is currently co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* on postcolonialism and new information technologies. He is also preparing a book project on labour and rights in contemporary postcolonial literature, and is working on black British orphan narratives. He was database assistant editor on the AHRC-funded project, 'Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad, 1870-1950' (2007-2010), and postgraduate representative of the European Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (2009-2011). He has presented papers throughout the UK, Ireland and Denmark, and taught at the ASNEL Summer School in Bern, Switzerland (2011).

Dr Maria Helena Lima is a Professor of English at SUNY-Geneseo whose research and teaching focus on the Caribbean, the African Diaspora, and black British Writing. Among her publications, "The Politics of Teaching Black and British," in *Black British Writing* (Palgrave 2004), "Pivoting the Center': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* (Hansib 2005), and entries on Andrea Levy, Dorothea Smartt, and Meera Syal in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 347 (2009). She translated and co-edited with Miriam Alves a bilingual anthology of fiction by Afro-Brazilian Women, *Women Righting/Mulheres Escre-vendo* (2005).

Dr Claudia Marquis is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the Department of English, University of Auckland, New Zealand. She teaches in the areas of Renaissance and Victorian literature, Children's Literature, and African and Caribbean Literatures. Her recent research has concentrated on Caribbean writing, including articles on Jamaica Kincaid, George Lamming, and Andrea Levy. She has also published on children's fiction, especially fiction for adolescents by South Pacific writers, such as Margaret Mahy, Mauricee Gee, and Ruth Park. She is currently working on a book-length study of the fantastic in 19th century children's literature.

Dr Ann Murphy is Professor in the English Literature at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her academic interests include the 19th century British novel, feminist and postcolonial theory and criticism, postcolonial women writers, Virginia Woolf, literature by American women of color, and the literature of war and peace and peacemaking in literature. She is the co-editor, with Deirdre Raftery, of a collection of letters from Emily Davies, 19th century British feminist. She is now working with a

colleague on a book exploring ideas of peacemaking and nonviolence in literature from times of war and conflict.

Dr Jo Pready was awarded her PhD from Nottingham in 2010. Her research focuses on the role of environment in novels from the late Victorian period through to contemporary fiction. This research involves the consideration of the interplay between space and character: how novels may be manipulated by the role of place and location and how the construction of environment may be informed by social and political theories. This research applies 'psychogeography' to an analysis of narratives. Generally, this work focuses on the idea of movement, which covers a broad and interdisciplinary research area, ranging from travel writing through to urban planning and regeneration, the use of suburbs and the movements from inner city developments to suburban areas, the growth of the railway and the underground, and so forth. Her recent focus has been on architecture and, in particular, the use of hotels in novels through a postmodern consideration of the power that this space has to shape events and character. Since gaining her PhD, Dr Pready has taught at the University of Westminster and Brunel University. She is currently working as a research officer at the University of Brighton.

Dr Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar is a writer and educator who has lived in Qatar since 2005. She completed her doctorate at University of Florida with a focus on gender and postcolonial theory. Her first book, *Haram in the Harem* (Peter Lang, 2009) is a literary analysis of the works of three Muslim women authors in India, Algeria, and Pakistan. She is the creator of the Qatar Narratives series, and co-editor of five books, as well as the *Qatari Voices* anthology, which features essays by Qataris on modern life in Doha (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2010). Her work has been published in *Brownbook*, *Variety Arabia*, *AudioFile Magazine*, *Explore Qatar*, *Woman Today*, *The Woman*, *Speak without Interruption*, *Writers and Artists Yearbook*, *QatarClick*, and *Qatar Explorer*. She has been a guest on Expat Radio, and was the host for two seasons of the Cover to Cover book show on Qatar Foundation Radio. She was the Associate Editor of *Vox*, a fashion and lifestyle magazine. Currently Mohana is working on a series of e-books, one of which is a novel based in Qatar.