To Be West Indian: Autobiography and West Indian Literature.

Margaret Kent Bass

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/4831

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
To be West Indian: Autobiography and West Indian literature

Bass, Margaret Kent, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1989

Copyright ©1990 by Bass, Margaret Kent. All rights reserved.
TO BE WEST INDIAN:
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND
WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Department of English

by
Margaret Kent Bass
B.A., Wilmington College, 1973
M.Ed., University of Mississippi, 1980
December 1989
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## A CASE FOR WEST INDIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1

## AUTOBIOGRAPHIES/AUTOBIOGRAPHERS

- The Precursors 29
- The Makers of West Indian Literature 64

## "IS WHO SEND WE UP IN THIS PLACE?"

Autobiographies and Stories About the Experience of Exile 101

## NEW VOICES FROM THE WEST INDIES:

- WOMEN WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES 131

## COMMENCEMENT: "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD..."

172
ABSTRACT

Although some critics claim that autobiography is not a West Indian literary mode, I maintain that autobiography, of a special West Indian variety, is necessarily present, for it provides a way of defining the self and bringing the parts of the self together into a unified and coherent whole. Autobiography is the genre that oppressed and colonized populations have traditionally used to write themselves into history and to proclaim their humanity to the world. The writing of autobiography is essential to the process of decolonization, for the colonized must define themselves and recreate themselves in their own images thereby resisting and rejecting images of themselves that have been put forth in English and other European literatures. Thus West Indian writers reject traditional European forms of autobiography in favor of a form that is creatively adapted to their own specific experiences. Most of the works which I examine are called novels, and they may be novels; however, they are also autobiographies which are distinctly and absolutely West Indian in form, content and style.
A CASE FOR WEST INDIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It never occurred to me that there might be something called West Indian literature until I heard Derek Walcott read his poetry a few years ago. After the reading, I felt somewhat as Columbus must have felt when he arrived in the West Indies and thought he had discovered something new. My keen interest in Walcott and the desire to come to know the West Indies led me to St. Lucia, and it was there, in a little bookshop on the corner of Chaussee Road and Victoria Street, that I entered the world of West Indian literature.

As I read the poetry and novels written by men and women from various islands in the Caribbean Sea, I realized that I did not know specifically which islands comprised the West Indies or to whom the term West Indian referred. I was curious about these people to whom I had some obvious historical connection. I wanted to know how they lived, how their experiences differed from mine, and how they defined themselves. Autobiography seemed to be an appropriate place to begin my exploration of the literature of the West Indies, which for the purposes of this study will be defined as the British islands in the Caribbean Sea and the South American mainland territory now known as Guyana" (Ramchand, Novel 3) and Belize. Autobiography has a special quality in that it "renders in a peculiarly direct and faithful way the experience and vision of a people, which is the same experience and the same vision
lying behind and informing all the literature of that people" (Olney, "Cultural Moment" 13). In addition to this, autobiography reveals the meaning of such concepts as identity, being and self in a particular culture. Since I wanted to know what it means to be West Indian, I began to look for the autobiographies of West Indian writers.

To my surprise, I discovered in the vast body of work produced by these writers only five autobiographies, or shall I say, only five deliberate autobiographies, those works in which the author's stated intent was to write his or her own life story: Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, Claude McKay's *A Long Way From Home* and *My Green Hills of Jamaica*, which was published posthumously, and Edgar Mittelholzer's *A Swarthy Boy*. Jean Rhys, the only woman in the group, began the writing of *Smile Please*, subtitled An "Unfinished Autobiography," a few years before her death in 1979.

I found this dearth of autobiography curious, for I believe that the desire or perhaps the compulsion to tell one's own story exists in all cultures. "Autobiography is a universal impulse, as universal as self-pity," Laurence Breiner claims ("Lyric" 3). If this is true, why had not more West Indian writers felt what Mark McWatt calls "some kind of inner pressure to confront the self as subject" (18) once they discovered that they were more than mere appendages to Britain? Poet, historian, and critic Edward
Brathwaite, in "Timehri," says that West Indian artists and intellectuals "start out in the world without a sense of 'wholeness'" because they have been born and educated within a fragmented culture (30). Colonialism was responsible for the fragmentation of West Indian culture and the subsequent feeling of cultural schizophrenia that existed among many West Indian writers. The colonial system of education had a more personal effect on the colonized people in that it fostered the fragmentation or division of the West Indian self or psyche, and this, as Helen Tiffin suggests, stifled "the possibility of a Caribbean autobiography" ("Rites" 42). The British education West Indian writers received taught them not to think of themselves or their countries at all. "Secondary school education had its own purpose: to foster a sense of belonging to Britain and to perpetuate that country's cultural traditions... (Saakana 12). In Beyond a Boundary, C.L.R. James remembers his school days in Trinidad and in remembering understands the way his education undermined his West Indian culture and his West Indian self:

It was only long years after that I understood the limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our master, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all
light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal—to attain it was, of course impossible (38–39).

West Indians were taught that all history and culture came from Britain and were encouraged to feel it a privilege to share in this great heritage. It was made clear to them, however, that they had contributed nothing to this culture, for West Indians were simply British subjects; yet they could not identify themselves as British:

It is not the instinct of the British to share their identity with the societies they either take over or invent. The British impose a degree of moderately efficient bureaucracy, instil some convictions about law, and leave it at that. They do not attempt to persuade the colonial that he has a place, that he has a significant membership within the metropolitan culture (Carr 82).

Who, then, were these people who inhabited these islands in the Caribbean Sea? West Indian literature has, especially in its autobiographical aspect, largely been an attempt to answer this question. Critic Michael Gilkes says that "the angst of identity" is "the most central and urgent theme of West Indian literature" (96). Since "the nature of self and identity is inevitably and crucially a
part of any subject matter in West Indian writing" (McWatt 19), I am suggesting that in spite of an apparent absence of autobiography in West Indian literature, autobiography is a necessary presence, for it provides a way of defining the self and bringing the parts of the self together into a unified and coherent whole.

Autobiography has traditionally been the genre used by oppressed and colonized populations to write themselves into history and proclaim their human existence to the world. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" discusses the importance of autobiography to the African in the New World. He says that Africans and their descendants have historically been viewed as people without history, mind, and memory because they had no writing (11). He writes:

Ironically, Anglo-African writing arose as a response to allegations of its absence. Black people responded to these profoundly serious allegations about their 'nature' as directly as they could: they wrote books, poetry, autobiographical narratives. Political and philosophical discourse were the predominant forms of writing. Among these, autobiographical 'deliverance' narratives were the most accomplished. Accused of lacking a formal and collective history, blacks published individual
histories which, taken together, were intended to narrate in segments the larger yet fragmented history of blacks in Africa, now dispersed throughout a cold New World. The narrated, descriptive 'eye' was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual 'I' of the black author as well as the collective 'I' of the race. Text created authors; and black authors, it was hoped, would create, or re-create, the image of the race in European discourse (11).

Helen Tiffin says that European autobiographical fictions wrote the history of the Caribbean ("Rites" 31). Those same fictional texts, as Gates points out, created the literary image of the West Indian, but it was inevitably a false image because it was rendered from an external and alien point of view. Autobiography, the writing of a life by the person who lived it, is a way of rejecting the images of West Indians created by European writers. Autobiography, as Tiffin argues, "offers a particularly appropriate site of post-colonial resistance, since it is involved with 'the self' and particularly the writing of that self" ("Rites" 30). Tiffin acknowledges that literary revolution "has been an essential part of the process of decolonization" (29), and I maintain that writing one's autobiography, one's own life story, is also essential to the process of decolonization. Otherwise, we
would only know the West Indian, his life and culture, from the perceptions of the colonizer. The process of decolonization cannot take place until the colonized defines himself and recreates himself by creating an autobiography, the written proof of his humanity and his autonomy. The self then is no longer colonial, for at the moment the colonial is moved to write his own life, he realizes his being is not dependent upon the imperial culture. The earliest West Indian writers discovered that independent self long before their islands became officially independent from Britain, and this discovery of the independent West Indian self was crucial to the later movement for the independence of the various countries. Ralph de Boissiere says that "colonialism, after the first world war, and even moreso after the second, was doomed" ("Novel" 10). The writers of de Boissiere's generation understood that and began to see themselves as a free people, as West Indians rather than British subjects. De Boissiere admits that the writers he and his peers read were English, and he remembers how different their lives were from those of the characters in the books written by English authors: "But our own life was entirely different. And we began writing about this different life" ("Novel" 1). And it is from this writing that a "genuinely West Indian autobiography" began to emerge (Tiffin, "Rites" 31).
Convinced now that more than four West Indian writers had indeed rewritten their histories and recreated their identities, I continued to read the novels with this in mind. Many of the novels did not read like fiction. Perhaps that is because, as Mark McWatt tells us, West Indian writers are creating "new categories or types of fiction" (16). He calls one of these new types of fiction "fictional autobiography." In his discussion of Naipaul's and Harris' "preoccupation with the autobiographical self as fictional subject or character," (16) McWatt goes on to say:

The question one might therefore ask is: why do these authors bother to cloud one's perception of their fiction--fiction the major features of which are already well established and accepted--with the notion of the autobiographical? (18).

It seemed reasonable for me to consider the question from the standpoint of autobiography rather than fiction. An equally feasible question one might ask would be why the authors bother to cloud one's perception of their autobiography with the notion of fiction? Tiffin suggests that the deliberate problematization of fiction and autobiography "is not simply an echo of European post-Modernist fashion for boundary challenging," for it constitutes an important strategy of resistance and forces a consideration of one through the other ("Rites" 31). She
continues, "it is possible to consider all post-colonial literatures not as branches of the English literary tree, but as sites of resistance to it and all that English and European texts represent" ("Rites" 29-30). If we look at West Indian literature as what Tiffin calls "literary revolution," then we can accept the idea that these writers have created a distinctly West Indian autobiography "in response to the peculiar nature of the Caribbean reality that informed them" (McWatt 16).

I understand why McWatt poses the question in the way that he does. Fiction, as he says, has features which are "already well established and accepted"; (18) autobiography does not. McWatt is quite right when he says that West Indian writers are doing something new, but by insisting that West Indian writers are creating new types of fiction instead of new types of autobiography, McWatt avoids the inevitable problem of having to make a distinction between autobiography and art, or more specifically, having to define autobiography. West Indian writers may well be creating new types of fiction, but they are also creating new types of autobiography, and that is the focus of this study.

Michael Anthony's *A Year in San Fernando*, Ralph de Boissiere's *Crown Jewel*, Wilson Harris' *The Infinite Rehearsal*, C.L.R. James' *Beyond A Boundary*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and *The Pleasures of*
Exile, Vidia Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas and The Enigma of Arrival, Jean Rhys' Voyage in the Dark, and Derek Walcott's Another Life are some of the autobiographies I shall consider. All of the books are called novels except James' Beyond a Boundary, which has been described as a book about cricket, Lamming's The Pleasures of Exile, which he defines as "a report on one man's way of seeing," (13) and Walcott's Another Life, a long poem which "moves toward a novel" (Baugh, "Poem" 227). In each of these works, however, the writer/former colonial takes his turn and describes his life from his own perspective.

If I heeded the warnings of Kenneth Ramchand, I would simply accept these works as novels and nothing more. He says:

An author is always present in his fictions and an author cannot help writing out of and about himself but while this can lead so far as to an identifying of author with character, it does not carry to the point of requiring the term autobiography....We cannot (sic) help making connections between the writer's life and his fiction. But to suspect an autobiographical fragment or to feel the quiver of an autobiographical impulse is not to get license to consider a novel autobiography or even to speak however guardedly of an autobiographical novel ("Arrivals" 4,6).
I agree with Ramchand in part. If we called every work in which we felt the "quiver of an autobiographical impulse" autobiography, then nearly every novel ever written would be an autobiography. The term most often used to define these works by West Indian authors is autobiographical novel, a term which suggests a merging of fact (life) into fiction (art).

In "Lyric and Autobiography in West Indian Literature," Laurence A. Breiner begins to make an excellent case for West Indian autobiography. He describes it thusly:

In West Indian autobiography selfish impulses are remarkably rare. In the Caribbean, writers emerge in societies that are small, recently independent, and conscious of standing in a complex relation to metropolitan cultural centers. In such circumstances, autobiography has taken on special characteristics. Typically it moves beyond mere self-assertion to produce representative texts, witness to a shared experience. Writers who might elsewhere be inclined to define their own individuality against their surroundings here tend to link their personal development with that of their society, in the face of common external enemies. Even writers most emphatic about their own alienation from the philistinism of the West Indies will at the same time assert intimate
connections between their own development and that of their society. There is a very strong impulse to write what might be called 'autobiography of the tribe' (3).

Breiner, after giving us this excellent definition of West Indian autobiography, concludes that West Indian autobiographies are "political rather than literary" and reduces those works which might be thought of as literary autobiographies to autobiographical novels.

Roy Pascal correctly makes a distinction between an autobiography and an autobiographical novel. Although Pascal's definitions of autobiography (and there are several) differ markedly from Ramchand's, he still believes, as do I, that the autobiography and the autobiographical novel are two distinct genres. Pascal says:

Autobiography offers a better instrument for inquiry into the truth of personality and personal relations than does imaginative literature, in particular the novel....The novel-hero is removed from the actual world, and we do not conceive of him as existing outside the pages of the novel. What happens in the novel should be self sufficient and completed, while the autobiographer must refer us continually outwards and onwards, to the author himself and to the outcome of all of these
experiences....the novel is complete in itself while the autobiography always reaches forward to the man writing (162-4).

Although a large number of West Indian novels are autobiographical novels, I am insisting that the works that I have selected are not autobiographical novels. If we consider the importance of autobiography in the formulation of a West Indian identity and consciousness and the writing of autobiography as a definitive move toward freedom, then we cannot reduce these works to mere works of "imaginative literature." The characters in these books are not removed from the actual world, and we know that they exist outside the work. To acknowledge otherwise would be to continue to perpetuate the myth of the West Indies that English and other European literatures have presented and to assume that England had been successful in its attempt to stifle a West Indian autobiography. In other words, to suggest that autobiography is an absence in West Indian literature is to suggest that the process of decolonization has never begun. These "novels" tended to take me "'beyond the novel', that is beyond the traditional shape or form of the novel, and beyond the expectations and the response that form traditionally aroused," (McWatt 16) and they have far more than the mere autobiographical impulse or fragment. We are always pushed forward, "outwards and onwards" to the author, and we know that a real life is being recounted and
remembered. Few West Indian novels are simply novels, and as Sandra Pouchet Paquet suggests in her discussion of *In the Castle of My Skin*, the West Indian autobiography is always more than autobiography (28). Or as James Olney has suggested more generally, "Autobiography always tends to be itself and something more" ("Anatomy" 61).

When questioned about the major themes in West Indian novels, A.J. Seymour responds:

They involve autobiography and the quest for personal identity and the urge to set one's story on record. They include the movement for national discovery, the account of the history of the nation, and the environment in which it seeks to develop (177).

What Seymour has defined is an autobiography of those who must, in the process of self-discovery, discover and recover their history and reclaim their land. Seymour has defined the autobiography of the oppressed and the colonized, which is very different from what Ramchand understands by the term "autobiography." Ramchand gives his sense of the term when he cites Edgar Mittelholzer's *A Swarthy Boy* as a work which conveniently illustrates autobiography:

This book contains documentation in the form of photographs of Mittelholzer at different ages, members of the family he came from, and various
landmarks in the environment which he grew up in. It provides specific details about people, places and events which are capable of verification. And it is written in the first person, specifically Mittelholzer's own person and voice, looking back from where he was at the time of writing. All autobiographies are written this way, and this is what we mean when we call a work an autobiography or when we refer to the form of autobiography ("Arrivals" 12).

And here Ramchand brings us to the aspect of autobiography which most confounds us, and that is the question of truth, authenticity, or what Phyllis Rose calls "biographical fidelity." Our notions about the relationship between autobiography and truth were undoubtedly formed by some of the earliest autobiographers, men like St. Augustine, John Bunyan and Rousseau who declared that their stories, written in first person and "confessed" were true. Truth, then, became synonymous with telling the truth or not lying about one's life. The autobiographer's task was to give the reader the facts about his life without alteration or artistic enhancement. It is from this rigid and very Western notion of autobiography that Ramchand formulates his definition. Ramchand defines for us what we might call autobiography in the classical sense or "the straightforward narrative of a life" (McWatt 18). But, as
McWatt correctly says, autobiography in the classical sense "is not what the West Indian writer is seeking to accomplish" (18). By unequivocally declaring what autobiography is, Ramchand negates the nontraditional ways in which West Indian writers have chosen to write about their lives and ignores the cultural context from which each author's shaping of experience comes. His definition of autobiography comes from a Western concept of the self, and Elaine Fido says that for persons in "traditional village preindustrial cultures, self is not a strongly developed psychic cornerstone, as it is in postindustrial culture" (1). While West Indians are, in some ways, undeniably a Western people, they are also, in other ways, undeniably non-Western. Attitudes and culture reflect strong ties to Africa and India and China, all non-Western cultures. "The whole question of the nature of autobiography surely cannot be tackled without reference to the cultural context of the notion of selfhood which informs each individual's perception of reality" (Fido 1), and the West Indian's developing notion of selfhood is from both East and West.

It is, ironically, the adherence to a classical definition of autobiography, itself a legacy of colonialism, which renders the deliberate autobiographies of McKay, Mittelholzer and Rhys "autobiography manqué" (Sinclair 2).
James Olney likens a successful autobiography to a successful novel:

Events from the past assume such significance when a pattern has been discerned, achieved, and imposed out of the author's own internal order, by himself, thus acting as artist. Mere chronology—'and then... and then... and then'—achieves no meaning.... when an autobiography succeeds, it does so, it seems to me, in much the same way as a successful novel; that is, by a significant ordering of recalled experience drawn from the writer's observation and awareness of himself, of his past, and of the entire social and spiritual context in which he has and has had his moral being (Africa 20-21).

And so we find the successful autobiographies of McKay and Rhys in other, more creative works— the works in which they ignore or perhaps reject and resist traditional definitions of autobiography.

After Kenneth Ramchand so carefully defines autobiography for us, he goes on to explain why V.S. Naipaul's novel, The Enigma of Arrival, is autobiography. This represents neither ambivalence nor insincerity on Ramchand's part. There is obviously something in Naipaul's novel which speaks to Ramchand in the particular and peculiar way that autobiography does. Despite "omissions of
significant dates, titles of books and other details, and in spite of a discourteous allusiveness we recognize that the work is factual, and we have no doubt that the person whose life is being unfolded is the author from Trinidad, Mr. V.S. Naipaul" ("Arrivals" 12).

In "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," Olney says that it is often "only by an act of faith that one can sustain the claim or the belief that autobiography is being held" (3-4). There is something in each of these selected works written by West Indian writers that assures me, as Naipaul does for Ramchand in Enigma, that it is indeed the remembered life of the writer. These life stories are true, often factual and verifiable, but even when not factual or verifiable, nevertheless always true, "the truthful narration of a life..." (Starobinski 74).

Fictional autobiography? Yes, if we mean that these authors have combined life and art, fact and fiction. But that is what autobiography is, is it not? It is unquestionably "a document about a life" which the historian can verify and a "work of art" which has "stylistic harmony and beautiful images" (Gusdorf 43).

Barrett J. Mandel says, "The autobiography (as a genre) embodies truth when the reader seeks confirmation of his or her own perceptions of reality in terms of those perceived by another mortal..." (Mandel 55). Call them what
you will, these autobiographies embody truth for me, and so they will for any reader who comes to them unbound by traditional literary definitions and categories and sufficiently flexible to understand the variety of ways that autobiographers can write their own stories.

It seems ironic that almost all West Indian autobiographies were written in England. Indeed, West Indian literature is said to be a literature born in London because the overwhelming majority of writers began their careers while in exile there. Claude McKay is one of a very few West Indian writers who emigrated to the United States.

The emergence of West Indian literature, and West Indian autobiography in particular, is linked to the experience of exile which led to the development of a West Indian sensibility and consciousness. For the early colonial writer, exile was a fact of life. Edward Brathwaite says:

The Emigrant has become a significant factor on the literary scene, and is, in fact, a product of our social and cultural circumstances. I want to submit that the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility: whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor ("Sir Galahad" 8).

The relationship between the colonial and the imperial
culture is a complex one. Why, we might ask, did Jonah reenter the belly of the whale to come to terms with himself, his culture, and his society? The most common reasons that West Indian writers offer are the alienation of the artist by society, the overall lack of appreciation for writing as a respectable profession, and the consequent absence of an audience for their work. Lamming says the common people are "too busy looking for bread...the people whose lives are the substance of the book do not have the opportunity to see that life returned to them in literary form..." ("Writing" 18). Walcott, who lived and worked in Trinidad for twenty-two years after he left St. Lucia, claims that migration is an economic necessity:

The longer one remains in the Caribbean, the more certain things become evident. One cannot make a living as an artist, yet one is aware of a vitality that comes from living in certain root areas. Since a man does not choose to reduce himself to poverty, the exile of the West Indian artist has become a reality ("Reflections" 300).

I think that any honest writer would have to admit that the flight from home and society also implies an acceptance of the myth that England and Europe are culturally superior to the rest of the world, and particularly the Third World. Lamming says that it is a myth which is "most difficult to dislodge," and this is the way he describes it:
This is what I mean by the myth. It has little to do with lack of intelligence. It has nothing to do with one's origins in class. It is deeper and more natural. It is akin to the nutritive function of milk which all sorts of men receive at birth. It is myth as the source of spiritual foods absorbed, and learnt for exercise in the future. This myth begins in the West Indian from the earliest stages of his education...It begins with the fact of England's supremacy in taste and judgement: a fact which can only have meaning and weight by a calculated cutting down to size of all non-England. The first to be cut down is the colonial himself (Pleasures 26-27).

Lamming suggests that the migration to England was a journey to an expectation. Writers went in search of the myth, and what they found when they arrived was far from what they expected to find. Further alienation and isolation awaited them in England. There were no welcoming smiles from the English. Many found during the fifties, frightened Britons laboring to enact tough immigration laws to curb the influx of black British subjects into the country. Cradled in the cold arms of the "Mother Country," thoughts turned to home and family and warmth. Most exiles began to appreciate and value the home that they left behind. For most, the island home became idealized in the
anonymity of the metropolis. All exiles gained perspective, and I think all would agree that exile is accompanied by a pain which is only relieved by making the journey home in memory and imagination. The autobiography is the result of such a journey.

There are generally two types of autobiography written by writers in exile. One is the autobiography of childhood and youth which comes out of what Frantz Fanon, in The Wretched of the Earth, calls the second phase of the native or colonial writer:

In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is...But since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism and a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies (222).

The other type of autobiography that we find I shall call the autobiography about the experience of exile. In these autobiographies, the myth of England is dispelled, the writer and his society are reconciled, and he begins to contemplate the actual experience of exile.

In his introduction to The Pleasures of Exile, George
Lamming says:

This book is based upon facts of experience, and it is intended as an introduction to a dialogue between you and me. I am the whole world of my accumulated experience, vast areas of which probably remain unexplored. You are the other, according to your way of seeing me in relation to yourself. There will be no chairman. Magic is permissible. Indeed, any method of presentation may be used. There is one exception. Don’t tell lies. From time to time, the truth may go into hiding; but don’t tell lies....My subject is the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero’s and his language (12-13).

The Pleasures of Exile is a pivotal work which reaches beyond the facts of Lamming’s personal experience as an exiled writer. He also gives, as he says, an account of human beings undergoing a common ordeal. But even that is not what is most important about Pleasures. Lamming’s way of seeing contributes greatly to our ability to see and understand the workings of a developing West Indian consciousness and sensibility. I want to stress the fact that, at the time Lamming was writing Pleasures, it is a developing consciousness. The experience of exile and the
accompanying alienation and isolation come directly to bear on the exile's vision of himself as West Indian:

No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St. Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. It was only when the Barbadian childhood corresponded with the Grenadian or the Guianese childhood in important details of folklore, that the wider identification was arrived at. In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England. The category West Indian, formerly understood as a geographical term, now assumes cultural significance...(214).

This birth of West Indian nationalism or nationhood solved a myriad of problems with regard to identity. Persons retained their loyalty to their particular islands, but they saw themselves as part of something bigger and felt a new found strength as result of this joining of forces. The experience of exile brought people from various islands together for the first time, to compare life and culture. They discovered, in addition to already well-known cultural differences, an overwhelming number of similarities and a common history. To be West Indian meant that one was part of a vast network of people. This, however, was only one of the many discoveries that West Indians were to make in England. They were not well-
received in England, and black West Indians got their first
taste of racism. Although they were quite aware of the
racial injustices suffered by blacks in the United States,
they were quite shocked to find themselves subjected to an
equally venomous, though more subtle, racism in England.
This exposure to racism quickened the West Indian's
awareness of his blackness, and this awareness brought the
West Indian into a still larger family. While West Indians
had always acknowledged their African heritage, few
recognized any relationship between themselves and black
Americans. Black Americans, because they are Americans,
seemed far removed from them. In Pleasures, Lamming offers
an important analysis of the crucial similarities and
equally crucial differences between West Indians and other
blacks in the diaspora:

What the West Indian shares with the African is a
common political predicament which we call
colonial; but the word colonial has a deeper
meaning for the West Indian than it has for the
African. The African, in spite of his modernity,
has never been wholly severed from the cradle of a
continuous culture and tradition (34).

The West Indian's relationship to black Americans is
hindered by misunderstanding and ignorance, as we shall see
Lamming sees the great difference between the black
American and the West Indian as what he calls a "highly oppressive sense of being Negro: The West Indian, however black and dispossessed, could never have felt the experience of being in a minority (33). The West Indian's experience of exile and racism in England begins to close that gap, promotes understanding, and strengthens the relationship between these American (in the broadest and truest sense of the word) blacks.

And so, the West Indian consciousness moves beyond the parameters of the island and even the Caribbean Sea. The exile sees himself as a part of the world and part of a people with an ancient history, and this is an idea that Wilson Harris puts forth over and over again in his work. Part of the crisis of West Indian identity is that West Indians accepted the myth that they had no history, and these connections with others like them partially helps to relieve that "angst of identity" that they express so fully in the literature.

The similarities among the West Indian's African and American counterparts are important, but the differences give the West Indian his distinctiveness. That is why we can resist the urge to compare West Indian autobiography to African or African-American autobiography, for to do so is to suggest that the West Indian is, in Lamming's words, "a peripheral man" (34). Because it is neither African nor African-American and both African and African-American,
West Indian autobiography is always absolutely itself.

If the African provides the West Indian with a sense of history and continuity, the black American becomes a reference point for the exile's racial awakening. This is particularly reflected in the autobiographies about the experience of exile. There is a growing awareness of racial differences. We sense the almost startling recognition that the English are not simply English, they are, for the most part, also white. Exiles began to see the racial implications of colonialism. They, like Trumper in *In the Castle of My Skin*, began to "'fin' race'" (111). This racial consciousness is one of the primary and most significant differences between the autobiography of childhood and youth and the autobiography about the experience of exile in West Indian literature. The autobiographies of childhood and youth are remarkably free of what Austin C. Clarke calls "racialistic vindictiveness. British West Indian literature must be divided into two classes: the literature written in the West Indies and the literature written while the writer is an immigrant of some metropolitan country" (168). Clarke considers works like *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *In the Castle of My Skin* as works written in the West Indies because the "mental sensibilities and the cultural reference point of each author were essentially West Indian...The separation from the West Indies, although definite and physical at this
point, was not as distinctly cultural as it later became" (193-94). Clarke goes on to say that the literature written in the West Indies is influenced by "a delusion of racial harmony and an unawareness of the presence of Africa as a literary motive for protest" which "robs the literature of any appreciably significant quality of racialistic vindictiveness" (169). In *In the Castle of My Skin*, Clarke notes that nowhere does one find "a glorification of the Black Barbadian peasant at the expense of a villainous characterization of the Englishman. The implication is there, however, but it is only an implication, a subtle one, a sophisticated one..." (172).

We shall see the middle-class West Indian’s growing nationalistic spirit and growing racial consciousness in most of the autobiographies of childhood and youth, but these attitudes present themselves more fully in the autobiographies about the experience of exile, and particularly those which focus on the experience of working class West Indians in England. This experience is best depicted in the autobiographical novels of Samuel Selvon, a Trinidadian writer of East Indian ancestry, who made the voyage to England with Lamming. But we shall begin at the beginning, with the precursors, those who wrote the first autobiographies and who first articulated what it means to be West Indian.
Jamaican born Claude McKay was one of the first West Indian writers who set out to write his autobiography. McKay actually wrote two deliberate autobiographies, *A Long Way From Home* and *My Green Hills of Jamaica*. *A Long Way From Home*, first published in 1937, covers the period of McKay’s life which began when he left Jamaica in 1912 for the United States. Although he writes extensively about his world-wide travels, his experiences in the United States provided the primary motivation for the writing of *A Long Way From Home*. Donald Sinclair is highly critical of this autobiography:

The work is smugly self-congratulatory. The author’s snigger and applause are like a propelling force in the creation. The agonising nostalgias, the ambivalences, the tormented longings and grudging spiritual triumphs that are elemental in much of his maturer poetry yield place to some monumentally trivial encounters in his
autobiography. In fact two entirely different sensibilities seem to be at work in his fiction and in his autobiography. The result is that the latter can be no more than self-serving, self-absolving reminiscences that look back on a life and on art and pronounce them to be good. Reminiscences do not in themselves an autobiography make. An autobiography is more than a life remembered. And the extent to which McKay uses reminiscences as a kind of benediction imbues that life reported with a high level of insincerity. McKay’s autobiography then becomes autobiography manqué (2).

Sinclair is correct, I think, in his assertion that A Long Way From Home is highly unsuccessful as autobiography. McKay’s experiences are "reported" in a journalistic style with almost no regard for the creative element which is essential to autobiography of the first order. Sinclair’s criticism of McKay’s intent, however, does not take into account the psychic condition of McKay during the period in which he wrote A Long Way From Home. McKay reveals his pain throughout the book, but nowhere does he articulate it better than in the chapter entitled "On Belonging to A Minority Group." He writes:

It is hell to belong to a suppressed minority and outcast group. For to most members of the powerful
majority, you are not a person; you are a problem. And every crusading crank imagines he knows how to solve your problem. I think I am a rebel mainly from psychological reasons, which have always been more important to me than economic. As a member of a weak minority, you are not supposed to criticize your friends of the strong majority. You will be damned mean and ungrateful (345).

In this passage McKay gives us by implication his reasons for writing *A Long Way From Home*. He is railing against being reduced to minority status in the United States and against the conditions which accompany that status. McKay feels that "highly oppressive sense of being Negro, and he is distressed and made uncomfortable by this new sensibility and consciousness. If *A Long Way From Home* is smug and self-congratulatory, it is a consequence of McKay's response to the racism to which he is exposed in the United States. McKay, angry and bitter, uses his book as a means of fighting back against the racism, isolation and alienation which he feels so acutely. McKay parades his achievements and associations with famous literary and political figures before the reader like a banner which proclaims that he is not only a person and a writer but a notable person and a good writer. Although he had heard of the way Negroes were treated in the United States before he left Jamaica (and was even warned by friend Tom Redcam
that he should not go), McKay simply could not imagine that the situation was as bad as it was purported to be. Wayne Cooper observes that nothing in McKay's "Jamaican experience" had prepared him for "the vicious realities of American race relations" (Passion 7). McKay probably would have been less grieved and outraged by the situation if he had found some solace in relationships with American blacks, but they shunned him and he consequently included them in his diatribe against the general society of the United States. The reactions of black Americans particularly disappointed him because McKay believed that a spirit of brotherhood should exist among all blacks. St. Clair Drake, in his introduction to A Long Way From Home says that McKay had a "Pan-African consciousness. McKay does not emphasize his West Indianness but rather his blackness, his solidarity with Afro-Americans. He was conscious of being a child of the diaspora...(xi).

Imagine the depth of McKay's disappointment when he found prejudice among what he considered to be his own people. And so, McKay withdrew and expressed his rage in A Long Way From Home which was "written expressly to clear up the many misapprehensions that existed among both blacks and whites, radical and conservative about his literary career and political beliefs" (Cooper, McKay 317).

It is not the element of protest which renders A Long Way From Home unsuccessful as autobiography. It is, as I
have said earlier, McKay's adherence to a classical definition of autobiography and to the idea that he must, above all, report the literal, verifiable facts to the reader that creates the problem. So determined is he to relate the facts in all of what Sinclair calls their "prosiac bareness," that he robs the narrative of all life. This is not difficult to understand when we consider McKay's educational orientation. Cooper says, in a discussion of McKay's poetry, that he was attached to "the lyrical traditions of England and to Western civilization itself. The direction of his schooling had ensured his identity with Western intellectual traditions" (37).

A.L. McLeod says "A Long Way From Home (1937), usually described as McKay's autobiography, is really a congeries of impressions of persons and places, covering the years from 1919 through 1934, enlivened by numerous anecdotes of the famous and occasional glimpses of unfamiliar aspects of life.... It contains no mention of Jamaica" (249-50). McLeod's final statement is the most revealing, for it captures the essential reason why A Long Way From Home fails as autobiography. McKay's concept of self was formed in Jamaica. He could be physically removed from Jamaica but never emotionally severed from the island. 'McKay could not write an autobiography without writing about Jamaica.

McKay's childhood and youth in Jamaica figure prominently in My Green Hills of Jamaica. The man who was
a long way from home finally returned, in memory and imagination, to Jamaica. We find in this narrative few examples of the bitterness and harshness that are in *A Long Way From Home*. *Green Hills* is a love song for Jamaica and an elegy for a life lost. McKay is freer in *Green Hills*, for his mental journey home gives him a renewed sense of self. Although he is still not at his narrative best, we get the sense that he is slowly beginning to recreate himself in his own image, and in that recreation there is also a recreation of Jamaica. McLeod criticizes McKay for painting an idyllic picture of the island and for not presenting the historical and political conditions there as they really were. He suggests that McKay could not physically return to Jamaica because the myths that he had created about the island would have been dispelled (253). McLeod, like Sinclair, also fails to consider the perspective from which McKay writes. He is a man near death, living in relative poverty, miles away from the only home that he has ever known. If McKay presents Jamaica as a "Garden of Eden," it is certainly not because he wants to propagate any myth. McKay is simply trying to portray his country as it came alive for him in memory. The political situation, and particularly the colonial experience, palls for him after having lived in the United States.

*My Green Hills of Jamaica* moves toward being autobiography.
Memories of Jamaica release the creative spirit in McKay and the result is something that resembles a work of art. The tone is more intimate, and we feel that McKay is telling his story rather than reporting it. Also present in Green Hills is the collective "I" about which Gates speaks. In fact, the most prominent pronoun in the book is not "I" but "we." McKay sees himself as part of the fabric of a community which loves, surrounds and grows with him. Green Hills still, however, does not reach its full potential as autobiography. "The whole has no obvious structure"...(McLeod 250), because McKay remains primarily concerned with giving the reader the facts. McKay's journey home has freed him from all but the notion that autobiography must be literal truth. For example, at the beginning of the chapter entitled "The Death of My Mother", McKay writes:

(I remember having an accident when I was two years old. My head was gashed open when I fell over a steep bank onto the macadamised road below. I have never been quite sure whether I really remember the incident myself or whether it was told to me. I think I do remember my brother Matthew carrying me on his shoulder to the mission to be treated while I bled on his brown drill coat-- but it is all mix-up in my memory!) (58).

McKay assures us that the memory, although possibly second-
hand, is factual, and this is an assurance that would be rendered wholly unnecessary if McKay had not such a fixed definition of autobiography in mind.

McKay's fullest and most complete autobiography can be found in collections of his earliest published poems, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*. Wayne Cooper, in acknowledging that these early poems "can be read today as autobiography," notes that the poems are written "with a naive and disarming candor" (McKay 36). The point is, I think, that McKay, as he presents himself in these poems, seems much more real, more human. The poems are disarming because of their intimacy and the depth of emotion which they express. McKay was perhaps more comfortable with writing poetry than prose, but I think the key to this successful writing of a life is McKay's linguistic fidelity. In other words, McKay's poems are more authentically autobiography because he wrote them in his own language.

The question of language is one that comes up time and time again in West Indian literature, and particularly West Indian autobiography. In which language can writers best express the West Indian consciousness and sensibility: Standard English, which is the language of the colonizer, or their own indigenous language? For McKay, the answer seems obvious. For others, like Derek Walcott, for example, the issue becomes more complex.
Claude McKay, like most West Indian writers of his generation, was taught that patois was not a language; that his native tongue was inferior and that the reading public would not accept or appreciate these poems which are his autobiography. McKay did not realize at the time that the mere writing of these poems in patois was a revolutionary act, an act of resistance, for as Cooper notes, "No black West Indian educated in the British imperial system tradition had ever before attempted to use a local island dialect as his primary poetic medium" (McKay 35).

In "The Heart of a Constab," McKay recounts a difficult period in his life. Because he was unable to find other employment, he joined the Jamaica Constabulary Force, which was then a representative of the colonial presence in Jamaica. Because of his position and his perceived allegiance to the colonial government, McKay was ostracized and alienated from his people whom he dearly loved. McKay was overcome by anguish, and he found that he could express this agony only in his indigenous language:

THE HEART OF A CONSTAB

'Tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within,
An I am so weary an' sad;
For all t'rough de tempest o' terrible strife
Dere's not'in' to make poor me glad.

Oh! where are de faces I loved in de past,
De frien's dat I used to hold dear?
Oh say, have dey all turned away from me now
Because de red seam I wear?

I foolishly wandered away from dem all
To dis life of anguish an' woe,
Where I must be hard on my own kith and kin,
And even to friends must prove foe.

Oh! what have I gained from my too rash act
Of joining a hard Constab Force,
Save quenching my thirst from a vinegar cup,
De vinegar cup o' remorse?

I thought of living of pure honest toil,
To keep up dis slow-ebbing breath;
But no, de life surely is bendin' me down,
Is bendin' me down to de death.
Tis grievous to think dat, while toilin' on here,
My people won't love me again,
My people, my people, me own black skin,—
De wretched t'ought gives me such pain.

But I'll leave it, my people and come back to you,
I'll flee from de grief an' turmoil;
I'll leave it, though flow'rs here should line my path yet,
And come back to you an' de soil.

For 'tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within,
And how can I live 'douten heart?
Then oh for de country, de love o' me soul,
From which I shall nevermore part! (Poetry 62-63).

In the preface to the Constab Ballads, McKay recounts the same experience in Standard English prose:

Let me confess it at once. I had not in me the stuff that goes to the making of a good constable; for I am so constituted that imagination outruns discretion, and it is my misfortune to have a most improper sympathy with wrongdoers. I therefore never 'made cases,' but turning, like Nelson, a blind eye to what it was my manifest duty to see, tried to make peace, which seemed to me better.

Moreover, I am, by temperament, unadaptive; by which I mean that it is not in me to conform
cheerfully to uncongenial usages. We blacks are all somewhat impatient of discipline, and to the natural impatience of my race there was added, in my particular case, a peculiar sensitiveness which made certain forms of discipline irksome, and a fierce hatred of injustice. Not that I ever openly rebelled; but the rebellion was in my heart, and it was fomented by the inevitable rubs of daily life—trifles to most of my comrades, but to me calamities and tragedies. To relieve my feelings, I wrote poems, and into them I poured my heart in its various moods. This volume consists of a selection from these poems.

The life was, as it happened, unsuited to me, and I to it; but I do not regret my experiences. If I had enemies whom I hated, I also had close friends whom I loved (7-8).

It seems clear to me that the true essence of McKay comes through, in all its intimacy and honesty, in the poems he wrote in patois. Although we understand from the prose that the experience as a member of the constabulary force was an unpleasant one, McKay does not and cannot capture the depth of emotion that he feels in Standard English. With this poem and others like it, Claude McKay becomes the model for all West Indian autobiographers, for he, in the writing of these poems, acknowledges the value
of being linguistically as well as culturally free.

Claude McKay was what Tiffin calls "a double outsider" during his time in the United States because he was both black and foreign. Jean Rhys, however, was a double outsider in her own country because she was white and female. The question of origin invariably arises with regard to the white West Indian. "She poses, for the West Indian writer, reader and critic, the common problem—or is it a pseudo-problem—of trying to define exactly who is a West Indian writer" (Caribbean Writers 176). The mere fact of skin color immediately associates the creole with the colonizer, the oppressor. In reality, the creole is neither more connected to nor more accepted by the English than the person of Afro-Caribbean descent. Cheryl M.L. Dash, in an essay on Jean Rhys, says:

The creolised whites in the West Indies were a minority group. Most of the plantation owners were absentee landlords and preferred to live in Britain where their children and families could enjoy untainted British culture and receive a British education. Very few whites chose to remain and live on the estates and those who did were consequently ostracised and felt to be not quite as good as the 'real British' were (203).

Helen Tiffin describes the white creole woman as:

"a double outsider, condemned to self-
consciousness, homelessness, a sense of inescapable difference and even deformity in the two societies by whose judgements she always condemns herself. 'White nigger' to the Europeans and 'white cockroach' to the Blacks, she sees herself as a gauche, immature distortion of the European on the one hand, and a pale and terrified 'deformed' reflection of her Black compatriots on the other ("Mirror" 328).

Kenneth Ramchand uses Franz Fanon's term "terrified consciousness" to describe the shock and disorientation that the white minority feels as the black majority becomes aware of its power (225). While I am certain that this "terrified consciousness" underlies all of Rhys' work, I think that the source of her terror stems from feeling misplaced, or perhaps displaced, because she is white, and to a lesser degree, because she is female. In Smile Please, Rhys articulates this feeling:

"I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong and failing" (124). Rhys does not belong because she is neither black nor "really" white, English nor "really" West Indian. Anna Morgan, in Voyage in the Dark, tells her English acquaintances over and over, "I'm a real West Indian, I'm the fifth generation on my mother's side" (33), for she wants to establish that she belongs not to England
but to the West Indies.

Edward Brathwaite questions the authenticity of the white West Indian's experience as West Indian:

White creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea (Omens 38).

While Rhys' experience as a white woman certainly has few parallels to Brathwaite's as a black man, the peculiar nature of her struggle and the root of her psychic pain are a result of her West Indian origin. Jean Rhys is a West Indian, and she makes no claim to being anything else. Her plight is genuine and her quest for identity is at least as complicated as the black West Indian's. These things give her a right to speak and be heard; these things render her voice as authentically West Indian as Brathwaite's.

Evelyn O'Callaghan offers a similar argument when she says:

Similarly, I want to claim that while it is true that the white creole writer (and protagonist)—especially the female of the species—represents the 'outsider's voice', yet this voice is an integral part of a Caribbean literary tradition.
The perspective on West Indian reality articulated by these 'outsiders', 'the other side,' cannot be provided by the expatriate European or the native Afro-Caribbean writer. And though this perspective, and the reality it presents, may be outmoded or even archaic, it is after all this reality, experience of and contact with this worldview, which gave impetus to the writing of much of early West Indian 'mainstream' literature ("Creole Women" 76).

At the center of all of Jean Rhys' writing is her struggle to find her place in the world, to determine who she is and where she belongs. The basis for this life-long quest is the fact that she was a creole, a white West Indian, and a woman who was born into an overwhelmingly black and male-oriented society. Jean Rhys is often hailed as a British writer, and perhaps she is. However, it is only the selective reader of Rhys who could possibly label her solely as a British writer. No one can read Wide Sargasso Sea and Voyage in the Dark and not recognize that these works come from a consciousness that is distinctly West Indian and at the same time that is distinctly female. Friend and collaborator David Plante once asked Jean Rhys about her nationality. He relates this conversation between them:

I said, 'Do you consider yourself a West Indian?'
She shrugged. 'It was such a long time ago when I left.'

'So you don't think of yourself as a West Indian writer?'

Again, she shrugged but said nothing.

'What about English? Do you consider yourself an English writer?'

'No! I'm not! I'm not! I'm not even English.' (44).

Rhys is unquestionably one of the first West Indian writers and the first woman writer who used her own life extensively as the subject matter of her novels and acknowledged that she did so. Much of the discussion of Rhys' work centers on the autobiographical nature of it. Critics caution the reader not to read her fiction too literally. Those holding to a classical definition of autobiography insist, as editor Diana Athill says, that "because her novels are so autobiographical, readers suppose them to be more so than they are" (9). To prove the biographical infidelity of Rhys' work, several critics point to a passage in *Quartet* where character Stephan Zelli, who was imprisoned for robbery, is often confused with Rhys' "real life" husband Jean Lenglet, who was jailed for currency violations and illegal entry into France. This discrepancy hardly gives credence to the calls for inauthenticity or the demand that we look at Rhys' *Quartet* as fiction.

*Voyage in the Dark* is cited as Rhys' most clearly
autobiographical novel. Rhys relied on the memories recorded in her diaries for the material for *Voyage*. Rhys herself says in *Smile Please* that the notebooks "were the foundation for *Voyage in the Dark*" (156). Teresa F. O'Connor says that *Voyage in the Dark* "explores in terms that mirror her [Rhys'] own life, the facts of Anna Morgan's youth, spent on an island which is clearly Dominica" (7). She later says, "The autobiographical tone is striking and the biographical 'truth' well documented' (140). It is for these reasons that I cannot understand why the book is not unconditionally accepted as the autobiography that it is. O'Connor, in attempting to explain why *Voyage* is not autobiography, says, "The main point of distance between Anna and her creator seems to be the level of her naivete, a naivete that the author of *Voyage in the Dark* does not have..."(139). I think that the loss of naivete is essential to the autobiographical act, for the result of the loss is a clearer, more truthful and mature perspective on the past life. Anna, because of her naivete and her involvement in her own immediate present, could not have written an autobiography but Jean Rhys, her creator and alter ego, can and does.

It is easier to explain why *Smile Please* is unsatisfactory as autobiography than to give innumerable reasons why *Voyage* is autobiography. At the age of eighty-six, three years before her death, Jean Rhys decided that
she wanted to write a proper autobiography. Editor Diana Athill apprizes us of Rhys' physical condition at the time: She had a heart condition which made her quickly exhausted by any kind of effort, so that she could work only for an hour or two at a time, with long intervals between sessions; and her hands were so crippled that it was almost impossible for her to use a pen. A tape-recorder seemed to her an actively hostile device, so there was nothing for it but dictating to a person—very difficult for someone as private as Jean Rhys (6).

Rhys chose novelist David Plante as the primary person to record her recollections. Aside from the obvious possibilities for alteration or misinterpretation of the facts that this arrangement allowed, "Plante has indicated that in many of their conversations, if not all, Rhys was often drunk...(O'Connor 33). Therefore, we must be wary not only of Rhys' ability to recall the facts of her life with accuracy but also of Plante's ability to record those facts exactly as Rhys wanted him to do. Plante recalls the difficulties that he had with Rhys, who was moody, often abusive and seemingly ambivalent about the task that she had undertaken. Obsessed as she was with the desire to give the facts of her life, Plante recalls that Rhys often had him "check to make sure a passage she thought of using in her autobiography hadn't already been used in one of her
novels or short stories" (51). It was a nearly impossible task. Rhys also wanted to put these facts in their proper sequential order. Plante says:

One grey day in late March, after she had dictated on previous visits a number of disconnected bits about her life, we tried to organize them chronologically. She found this very difficult, as she couldn’t recall the sequence of events of so many years before (32).

In this remembrance, Plante has described exactly what Smile Please is: a number of disconnected bits about Rhys’ life which have no order and little meaning. We learn far less about Rhys in Smile Please than we do about Rhys as Anna Morgan in Voyage in the Dark. The essential facts are given in Smile Please but the essence has been removed. There is, in both of the autobiographies, an account of an abortion which Jean Rhys had during her first years in England. The recounting of the experience in Smile Please reflects the limitations which a classical, Western, and essentially male definition of autobiography place upon the telling of an experience that is completely and utterly a woman’s experience. Rhys says in the chapter entitled "Christmas Day":

Years later, speaking to a Frenchman in Paris, I said, 'I can abstract myself from my body.' He looked so shocked that I asked if I was speaking
bad French. He said 'Oh non, mais... c'est horrible.' And yet for so long that was what I did.

After what was then called an illegal operation, I stayed in a flat in Langham Street. I didn't suffer from remorse or guilt. I didn't think like all women are supposed to think, my predominant feeling was one of intense relief, but I was very tired. I was not at all unhappy. It was like a pause in my life, a peaceful time. I didn't see him but he sent me a big rose plant in a pot and a very beautiful Persian kitten (118).

In this account, Rhys is reporting the experience in a detached, as opposed to distant, way. The abortion is an isolated experience, extracted from Rhys' past or future. In *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys relates the experience as it was in the doctor's office. Before she writes about the abortion, she remembers her childhood. She remembers black men and women at a Masquerade, men in masks and looking out of the window and knowing "why the masks were laughing" (113). She remembers dancing and being giddy. She remembers a man who tells her not to worry, feeling her feet in the saddle, groping for the stirrups, and being very, very sick from the horseback ride (114). After the memories, comes the reality of the doctor's office.

'I fell,' I said. I fell for a hell of a long time then!
'That's right,' Laurie said. 'When he comes tell him that.'

The bed had gone down to earth again.

'Tell him you had a fall,' she said. 'That's all you've got to say...'

'Oh, so you had a fall, did you?' the doctor said. His hands looked enormous in rubber gloves. He began to ask questions.

'Quinine, Quinine,' he said; 'what utter nonsense!'

"He moved about the room briskly, like a machine that was working smoothly.

'He said, 'you girls are too naive to live, aren't you?'

Laurie laughed. I listened to them both laughing and their voices going up and down.

'She'll be alright,' he said. 'Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt.'

When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again.... (114-15).

Arnold Davidson suggests that Smile Please is a creation of "still another version of her [Rhys'] twenty-year-old self." Rhys transposed "that forty-year-old
rendering [Voyage in the Dark] back to biography." Smile Please, says Davidson, does not clarify the "distinctions between the author's life and her biographically based stories and novels," it "only further confuses the fictional with the factual" (2).

No one really seems to know the facts of Jean Rhys' life. Jean D'Costa in an essay on the author points out that even among the seemingly definitive works on Rhys, discrepancies arise: "Was Rhys's first husband Jean Lenglet or Jean Langlet? Did her father die in 1908 or 1909...?" (391). These are all insignificant details which in no way alter the truth of Jean Rhys' life.

Phyllis Rose, in her review of Smile Please says:

In pursuit of fact, Rhys demonstrates how not to write an autobiography...She seems to assume that if she can remember something accurately, it is therefore significant, producing pathetic, unconnected, insignificant fragments of memory of the sort precious only to the memorialist....These scraps of memory, however charming some of them may be, make irritating reading overall unless one accepts that there is no structure or form to give them significance (599).

In her urge to give us the facts, Jean Rhys leaves out the life that gives meaning, order and shape to the facts. In an interview with Elizabeth Vreeland, Rhys says, "The things you remember have no form. When you write about
them, you have to give them a beginning, a middle, and an end. To give life shape—that is what a writer does" (225), and that is particularly what an autobiographer does.

Phyllis Rose is quite correct when she states that it really should not matter that Rhys has written a "bad autobiography. She wrote her life into existence in her fiction. Her autobiography has little to add" (602). Perhaps it is Rhys herself who gives the best evaluation of the work that was to be *Smile Please*. While reading excerpts of the autobiography to her, Plante recalls, "Jean stopped me. She said, 'Now tell me honestly, David. Is this worth doing? I don't think it is. It's no good. It's dull. It has no life in it" (58).

The events of Jean Rhys' life clearly show that she is not the colonizer. She is a "double outsider," as sure a victim of colonialism as her black compatriots. She begins, as others do, without that "sense of 'wholeness'." *Voyage in the Dark* is the beginning of Rhys' search for herself; it is her autobiography. Rhys resists the notion that she must renounce her West Indian heritage in order to gain acceptance and rejects the idea that she, as woman and white West Indian, has nothing of significance to say. Jean Rhys put her life fully into her fiction and began her own literary revolution.

Ralph de Boissiere is a man in the middle. In
Trinidadian society, he is neither black like Claude McKay, nor white creole, like Jean Rhys. Ralph de Boissiere is a "coloured man," and Crown Jewel tells his story. In addition to being de Boissiere's autobiography, Crown Jewel is an account of the activities of the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social association of Trinidad, the organization which spearheaded the 1937 uprisings in Trinidad's oilfields and the accompanying riots. The movement focused on the plight of the predominantly black underclass worker but had a massive impact on the entire country. Louis James says that Crown Jewel "charts de Boissiere's own developing awareness, for it was rewritten after he became increasingly involved in Trinidad politics, culminating in the strikes and riots of 1937 themselves. This lends great conviction to the book: de Boissiere does not strive to convince the readers, he describes it directly; he was there" (14).

Andre de Coudray represents de Boissiere in Crown Jewel. Born into a well to do French creole family who "had got themselves a slave ancestor..." (34), de Boissiere and Andre share, in addition to family background, a love of music and literature, particularly Tolstoy, and what F.M. Birbalsingh calls "an outraged social conscience" ("De Boissiere" 107). Intricately woven into the account of this tremendous social and political upheaval is the story of de Boissiere's own spiritual, intellectual and political
growth and awakening. We see in the character of Andre de Coudray, the problems encountered by those who are neither black nor white in Trinidadian and perhaps West Indian society in general. There is on the one hand a desire to join in the fight of the predominantly black masses, and on the other, a longing to remain part of the comfortable life that Andre as a "coloured man" knows. Consequently, he remains on the periphery of the movement, intellectually aligned with the masses but unable to physically fight with them. His minimal participation reflects de Boissiere's own limited role in the union's activities. De Boissiere recalls, "I was not active in the sense that I took part in the Union struggles, but I was constantly observing and I did link myself emotionally and intellectually with them ("Interview" 116). And it is the inability to move beyond the emotional and intellectual link which causes both Andre and de Boissiere great distress, for it symbolizes a refusal to relinquish a way of life which is a direct affront to the black masses.

De Boissiere purposefully keeps Andre in the background of the book because that describes, more fully than words, Andre's position in Trinidadian society at the time. Andre's family had money, but its social position was questionable because of the obvious racial mixture:

Like many another old and well-to-do French family this one revolved like a satellite about the
English sun. With one difference: that in the distant past the de Coudrays had got themselves a slave ancestor and their revolutions were as a result confined to an outer circle—they revolved in the moonlight rather than the sunlight, so to speak (CJ 34).

Andre's hesitance to become an active member of the movement indicates that it is better to revolve in the moonlight of Trinidadian society than not to revolve at all. Reinhard Sander expresses the complexity of Andre's and de Boissiere's dilemma:

Being neither Black nor white the coloured person was alienated from both sections of Trinidad society. Culturally and socially he hankered after European values only to discover that he was never fully accepted in the white community. The other alternative of identification with the Black masses, however, involved breaking through suspicions held by the Black population about the sincerity of his intentions. More drastic than this, it meant risking rejection by the rest of the coloured population and abandoning his class (5).

The focus of Crown Jewel is on the fight for independence. On one level, we have the independence of the masses which the imperial government battles hardly and mercilessly to squash. On the other, we have, in the
character of Andre, the fight for individual independence which is equally thwarted by imperial sentiments. We come to realize that Andre's battle is as painful as that of the masses, and Andre's battle is a solitary one. When his father discovers that Andre is participating in the movement, he becomes upset with his son, and Andre feels a "severance from the world in which he had been born and bred and had a place" (CJ 343).

Amon Saba Saakana says, "Andre de Coudray is Ralph de Boissiere" (86). A more appropriate observation would be to say that Andre de Coudray is de Boissiere remembered. No one can describe, with such detail, Andre's experience without, as Louis James suggests, having been there.

Early on in the book, Andre, articulating the sentiments of de Boissiere, says, "Independence of mind—that's what we need! Independence of spirit. The courage to think like West Indians, to be proud of being West Indians—" (104). De Boissiere achieved this independence of mind and spirit and was subsequently able to write Crown Jewel, the story of his "different life" as a "coloured" West Indian.

Ralph de Boissiere and C.L.R. James played a major role in the development and promotion of West Indian literature. They were members of the Beacon Group, a collective of young Trinidadian writers and intellectuals who met to share their own work and to discuss the arts and
literature. Alfred Mendes provides an apt description of the members of the Beacon Group: Although we were anti-Crown colony government, most of us—including C.L.R. James himself—came from middle-class families. There was this dichotomy. We were contradictions in terms. Our background was too deeply embedded in us to overcome the growth of our intellect from adolescence onwards, so that we still hankered after what was behind us.... Most of us in that group were intellectuals, and intellectuals are usually by-products of the bourgeoisie (76).

It seems particularly fitting, in view of the recent death of C.L.R. James, to write about his life. Beyond a Boundary, which has often been described as a book about cricket, is also James' autobiography, which traces his development as an intellectual, his love of Western culture, and his passion for cricket. James says, "When I wrote Beyond a Boundary, I told in the first part of my early life and how I grew up" ("Discovering" 79), and this is a clear statement that the book, or at least part of it, is an autobiography. In the preface to Beyond a Boundary, James contradicts himself. He says, "This book is neither cricket reminiscences nor autobiography. It poses the question What do they know of cricket who only cricket know? To answer involves ideas as well as facts."

Beyond a Boundary is a remarkable book. F.M. Birbalsingh says:
Beyond a Boundary is rich in cricket reminiscences and sketches of cricketers: a pure delight for the cricket aficionado. But the wider interest of the book lies in the author’s account of his early life and education, in his treatment of cricket as an intrinsic feature of West Indian culture, and in his display of learning drawn from every branch of knowledge that is relevant to his main theme ("James 117).

Birbalsingh describes what we would expect from one of the greatest minds that the world has ever produced. The question that James asks in the preface of his book only serves to show the deeply analytical and philosophical tenor of his thinking. Cricket is not simply a game; it is a metaphor for life. James holds that the game of cricket and the life of the West Indian are indistinguishable, for cricket shapes and forms the life of a West Indian in a way that nothing else does. James notes:

...E.W. Swanton has written in the Daily Telegraph that in the West Indies the cricket ethic has shaped not only the cricketers but social life as a whole. It is an understatement. There is a whole generation of us, and perhaps two generations, who have been formed by it not only in social attitudes but in our most intimate personal lives, in fact there more than anywhere else (49).
We find the dichotomy and contradictions about which Mendes speaks far more pronounced in James than any other West Indian writer. James describes with obvious pride his Puritan and middle-class upbringing. Although he is a colonial, he respects and appreciates his Western literary and intellectual heritage. He refers to himself as British and extols the virtues of the Western education which he fashioned for himself:

After Thackeray there was Dickens, George Eliot and the whole bunch of English novelists. Followed the poets in Matthew Arnold's selections, Shelley, Keats and Byron; Milton and Spenser. But in the public library in town there was everything, Fielding, Byron, with all of Don Juan. I discovered criticism: Hazlitt, Lamb and Coleridge, Saintsbury and Gosse...Burke led me to the speeches...(37).

James goes on to tell us how he devoted his entire early life to the "pursuit of cricket and the pursuit of literature," (42) and explains that his passion for cricket equalled his passion for literature. James did not merely play cricket, he studied cricket, and that is what distinguished him from his peers:

I was not a swan among geese. There were other boys who read hard, and with more discrimination than I did, for I read everything. But none
pursued criticism to any degree and not one read cricket literature except in the most casual way (42).

James compares himself to a boy in ancient Greece, and he says the important difference between him and the Greek lad is the societies in which they lived and grew. The Greek Boy "went out into a world for which his training had prepared him," but for James there was "no world for which I was fitted, least of all the one I was now to enter" (43). James describes his early life as "a war between English Puritanism, English literature and cricket and the realism of West Indian life" (30). He emerges from this battle remarkably unscathed for unlike many West Indian artists and intellectuals, James does not feel that lack of wholeness about which Brathwaite speaks. James seems to know absolutely who he is and where he does and does not belong:

A British intellectual long before I was ten, already an alien in my own environment, among my own people, even my own family. Somehow from around me I had selected and fastened on to the thing that made a whole (28).

One could assume, from a cursory but mistaken reading of Beyond a Boundary, that James is the content colonial who was oblivious to the evils of imperialism, and that he was, by some unfortunate accident, misplaced in a
provincial Caribbean wasteland that offered no intellectual stimulation. This would be a misperception, however, and James can more rightfully be called a discriminating colonial. He accepts that part of his Western heritage which allows him to grow and flourish, and rejects that which stunts and stifles. Although he says that he is British and holds some things British in great esteem, he neither accepts the colonial condition nor negates the West Indies. What James gains from his pursuit of cricket is what he calls "a mastery over my own character" (33), and this kind of independence, particularly for the colonial, is the ultimate. This fierce independence, much to the dismay of his family, took the form of rebelliousness or resistance to authority. James, as I said earlier, fashioned his own education. He tells us, in great detail, about his complete refusal to follow the school curriculum or to win scholarships and prizes even though he was intellectually capable of doing so:

I did not try. Without any difficulty I could keep up in school, but an exhibition winner was being paid for by Government money and had to maintain a certain standard. I fell below it. My distracted father lectured me, punished me, flogged me. I would make good resolutions, do well for one term and fall from grace again...There were family meetings, the whole family, to talk to me and make
me see the error of my ways...The James clan had a proud status in the teaching profession, my father was an acknowledged star in that firmament and here was I bringing public disgrace upon him and all of them....Two people lived in me: one, the rebel against all family and school discipline and order; the other, a Puritan who would have cut off a finger sooner than do anything contrary to the ethics of the game (36-7).

The educational system, as I have pointed out earlier, was the primary way in which colonials were coerced into accepting their condition as colonials. James only briefly participated in that process of colonization. He describes an early school experience:

I began to study Latin and French, then Greek, and much else. But particularly we learnt, I learnt and obeyed and taught a code, the English public-school code. Britain and her colonies and the colonial peoples. What do the British people know of what they have done there? Precious little. The colonial people, particularly West Indians, scarcely know themselves as yet (33). James devised his own curriculum at an early age and adhered rigidly to it despite parental and societal disapproval. That curriculum was based on the Greek system of education, the study of "poetry, gymnastics and music"
Although James describes himself as an alien in his culture, he significantly never states that he feels alienated from his culture, and cricket is largely responsible for that. It is the one thing that binds James to his community. On the playing field, he was simply another West Indian boy. James was a member of a team which went far beyond the boundary of the playing field. The team represented the larger society. Members of various racial groups and social classes all met together on the field:

The children of some white officials and white business men, middle-class blacks and mulattos, Chinese boys, some of whose parents still spoke broken English, Indian boys, some of whose parents could speak no English at all, and some poor black boys who had won exhibitions or whose parents had starved and toiled on plots of agricultural land and were spending their hard-earned money on giving the eldest boy an education. Yet rapidly we learned to obey the umpire's decision without question, however irrational it was. We learned to play with the team, which meant subordinating your personal inclinations, and even interests, to the good of the whole (34). It is in his discussion of cricket that James shifts from
the strongly individualistic autobiographical "I" to the "we" which is crucially important to all Afro-Caribbean autobiography. This change in pronoun indicates that James, in spite of the education and upbringing that make him an alien, is a part of the community. The moral code which is learned on the cricket field transcends racial and class differences between West Indians.

C.L.R. James' life represented the perfect combination of resistance and acceptance, selection and synthesis. *Beyond a Boundary* is a reflection of that life. It is a classic autobiography, but it is not autobiography in the classical sense. James, ever true to himself, shaped and wrote his story in his own way.
The Makers of West Indian Literature

With the precursors, there was a dawning of a national consciousness; the writers of this chapter were inheritors of that incipient and burgeoning consciousness. Michael Anthony, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Vidia Naipaul, and Derek Walcott, born between the years 1920 and 1933, experienced during childhood or early adulthood, what C.L.R. James calls the "tremendous upheaval" in the Caribbean during the late 1930s and 1940s. James says:

It was a new world of the Caribbean, entirely new, because the old feudalistic crown colony government was hit a tremendous blow. Maybe that wasn't always translated into literary forms, but it was hit a blow from Guyana right up to Jamaica, and it was in this atmosphere that you have this surprising body of novelists (KAS-KAS 24).

These writers, among others, are responsible for the proliferation of West Indian literature which began in the 1950s and continues to the present time—the culmination of what the "precursors" had begun.

George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin is a West Indian literary classic; Ian Munro states that Castle "is perhaps the most widely read West Indian novel" (128), and it is often cited as the West Indian Huckleberry Finn.
When *In the Castle of My Skin* was first published in 1953, it "was described not as a work of fiction but as an autobiography" (Larsen 90). Over the years, critics and reviewers have become uncertain about Castle's genre although the book is clearly autobiography. In a review of *In the Castle of My Skin*, an anonymous reviewer says:

The book is difficult to classify. Part of it is written as an autobiography in the first person, starting with the writer at the age of nine and ending with his departure for Trinidad ten years later. But other parts are written in the third person and go beyond the consciousness of the 'I' character and into the events of the village and island in which the writer grew up" (206).

The reviewer points out Lamming’s change of voice in the autobiography. He moves from the retrospective ‘I’ which narrates his individual life to the voice of the omniscient narrator who tells the story of the village. It is the interweaving of the personal story and the story of the village that causes difficulty for the reviewer. However, as we have noted, this collective I is common to autobiographies written by what Gates calls the African in the New World. In his introduction to *In the Castle of My Skin*, Lamming says:

The book is crowded with names and people, and although each character is accorded a most vivid
presence and force of personality, we are rarely concerned with the prolonged exploration of an individual consciousness. It is the collective human substance of the Village itself which commands our attention. The Village, you might say, is the central character (x).

I do not know how or why the book moved from autobiography to fiction, but I suspect that readers and reviewers became increasingly uncomfortable with the communal aspect of Castle, which did not fit into the existing definitions of autobiography. *In the Castle of My Skin* became a novel because its form and content did not meet the criteria for western, traditional autobiography. Jamaican scholar, poet, and critic Mervyn Morris obviously agrees with critics who say that *Castle* is not autobiography, although he says that Lamming gives some warrant for regarding the book as quite closely related to the facts of his boyhood (75). "The outline of Lamming's biography is of more than routine interest, for he is an author some of whose fiction has been unwarily described as autobiographical or—meaningless term—'semi-autobiographical' (74).

Morris goes on to examine a specific passage which supposedly substantiates his claim that *In the Castle of My Skin* is not autobiography. Pa, a major character in the novel who has lost everything as a result of Mr. Slime's swindle, sees G. for what was to be the last time:
'I know it in my heart o' hearts I won't set foot here again,' he said. He had rested a hand on my shoulder. Then he took it away and as quickly put it back. I had no idea what had happened but I wasn’t sure he would have liked me to talk about it. The Alms House wasn’t the kind of residence one admitted. I knew that. I wanted to find out what he thought about going, but it seemed silly to ask him. What could he feel? Moreover, I didn’t want to arouse any unbearable emotions. I didn’t know how long he lived in the village, but I was sure it was longer than any of the villagers I knew (302).

Morris says that Lamming quotes this passage from Castle in The Pleasures of Exile as one he would have liked to read back to Papa so the old man could hear his own dialogue, but Morris disagrees:

But from Lamming's own account this is not, in any simple sense, Papa's dialogue at all: essentially, maybe it is, but the narrator's cadences contribute as much to the moving quality as the words which Papa is made to say. Nor are the details of what happened to Lamming's godfather the same as what happened to Papa in the novel: in real life, according to Lamming, Papa was moved into a new village; in the novel he is to go to an
Alms House. Clearly, this is done to deepen our sorrow for the old man. The facts, whatever they were, are only the raw material of the novelist's art (74).

The most interesting aspect of Morris' analysis is that he relies on Lamming's memory to negate Lamming's memory. Both versions of the story are "according to Lamming." In Morris' judgement, when Lamming speaks his past he tells the truth, but when he writes his past he does not. Lamming says that the incident did not occur as he wrote it, but is his spoken remembrance any more true than the written one? The "shattering experience" in Lamming's life was "seeing old Papa Grandison, my godfather, forced to move his small house from the site which generations of children had learnt to speak of as "the corner where Papa who keep goats does live" (Pleasures 226). Does his decision to move Papa to an Alms House in the text to "deepen our sorrow for the old man" make the incident any less real or true to Lamming's real life experience?

The question we must address here is whether or not we can rely on the author's word to determine if a book is an autobiography. In an interview at the University of Texas at Austin, Lamming refers to Castle several times and suggests that G. is his remembered self. When asked about his beginnings as a writer, Lamming says, "I came from a poor home, but a home in which there was a tremendous
respect for education, as you can see in *In the Castle of My Skin* (KAS-KAS 5).

In *The Novels of George Lamming*, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, after giving a long list of correspondences between G.'s life and Lamming's early life, says:

The novel is unsatisfactory as autobiography because Lamming pays little attention to the conventions of this genre in his organization of the narrative. The finely executed balance between first person and omniscient narrative, between G.'s personal history and the description of village life, augments the novel's political concerns rather than its autobiographical character (14).

Paquet is quite correct when she says that the political concerns are essential and primary to the autobiography, but that is in keeping with the nature of West Indian autobiography. For most of these writers personal awareness and political awareness are indistinguishable and the personal narrative often moves into political expression. When asked about the riots in Barbados, Lamming says, "We lived it. For me that was the period of upheaval, you see. I was a little boy, as in the scenes of *In the Castle of My Skin*" (7).

As we have previously noted, Paquet ultimately determines that "*In the Castle of My Skin* is always more than autobiography," and she is quite right. *Castle*, like
all West Indian autobiographies, is autobiography and something more, but it is also always autobiography.

To sort out what *Castle* is generically one might usefully look to the work of another West Indian writer. Geoffrey Drayton has not achieved the stature of the other West Indian writers included in this study. Drayton is a white Barbadian and a contemporary of George Lamming, and *Christopher*, which is primarily Drayton's own story, allows us to make useful and illuminating comparisons between these two men who are natives of the same country but live and grow in two different worlds.

In his introduction to *Christopher*, Louis James notes, "...while Lamming's hero is one of the black peasant class, Christopher is of a white planter family. Each shows life on different sides of the plantation wall, and the two views provide interesting complements to each other" (5). *Christopher* does not approach *Castle* with regard to craftsmanship and style, but it does offer a radically different concept of autobiography which is an important basis for comparison.

One of the most striking aspects of Lamming's *Castle* is its total commitment to the telling of the story of the life of the village as opposed to focusing exclusively on the life of G. G. is always presented as part of a larger community where no person grows and exists in isolation from the group. Although there are many painful
experiences in G.'s early life, the narrative reflects the feeling of warmth and love that surrounded G. as he matured. This tendency for any single autobiography to be an "autobiography of the tribe," as we have noted, is a characteristic of West Indian life-writing. The total absence of community in Christopher makes it distinctly different from Castle and most of the other autobiographies written by West Indian writers. A.N. Forde says Drayton is "concerned with the development of a child's personality and he does not allow himself to be distracted from his purpose" (64). So concerned is Drayton with the characterization of Christopher and his interior life, that the other characters seem almost inconsequential to the narrative. Barrie Davies seems to think that this focus on the individual life to the exclusion of community and sociopolitical climate is positive:

To turn to Geoffrey Drayton's book Christopher is to experience a sense of relief and ease in reading because the novel is not cluttered by the extraneous impositions of the social context. Unlike Lamming's 'boy' in In the Castle of My Skin, for example, Christopher is a real boy with real problems and real human relationships. This is Drayton's concern and he permits nothing to interfere with it (119).

Davies, in his praise of Christopher, makes a particularly
interesting observation with regard to readers of West Indian autobiography as well as other Third World literatures. We find that these autobiographies tend to make us uncomfortable; that we are unable to "experience a sense of relief and ease in reading." Part of the reason for our discomfort is the reality represented in the autobiographies. We can no longer see the West Indian's life as we want it to be; we must see it as it is. The poverty, injustice and hardships recounted in the life stories of persons like Lamming should make us uneasy.

Perhaps the most startling aspect of West Indian autobiography is what it reveals to us about ourselves. In *Metaphors of Self* James Olney says, "It is the great virtue of autobiography as I see it to offer us understanding that is finally not of someone else but of ourselves" (x). How we can expect to understand more about ourselves is not always clear, however, particularly if the autobiographer is of a different race or gender and from a different culture. The First World has historically served as "teacher" to the majority of the world's population. First World citizens assumed that they had nothing to learn from "primitive" people of color save some exotic musical tune or dance step. The First World had, after all, shaped the destiny of those who inhabited the Third World; it had "civilized" them.

First World people have most often kept their lives
altogether separate from the inhabitants of the Third World even while inhabiting their land. Most have only satisfied their curiosity about the Third World through books and/or anthropological studies. One consequence of this willed separateness has been an anxiety about the effects of their "civilizing" influence, and this anxiety, because it can only be allayed through books, has led to an interest in Third World literature. This interest was not spawned by any real concern for Third World people but by an insatiable desire to know these mysterious and exotic people and to reinforce, in the minds of First World people, the superior nature of their own existence. The autobiographical narrative was the perfect way to experience the "Other's" life without actually participating in it. The colonizers expected to read, with relish, the most intimate details of the Other's life. They did not, however, expect to understand anything about themselves. The Other was not, after all, fully human. Prior to his literary encounter with the Third World, the European reader did not think of himself as oppressor. He was savior, Christianizer, anglicizer, and civilizer. Third World literatures promptly dispelled these notions, and the European, much to his surprise and dismay, was finally forced to see himself from the perspective of Third World people and to learn the facts about the results of his conquest, domination and presence in the Third World.
This personal understanding could only have come through autobiography, and that is only a small example of the "great virtue" of West Indian and other Third World autobiographies.

I do not mean to suggest that the often harsh realities of life in the Third World make for unpleasant reading for First World readers alone. There are also West Indians and other Third World writers who find reading these autobiographies equally disturbing and uncomfortable, and there are those who would simply like to believe, as Davies obviously does, that Lamming's portrayal is a fiction; that life was never that way for some West Indians. Drayton's Christopher serves to point out the tremendous gap between the lives of the white planter and the lives of the majority of the Afro-Caribbean population.

I want to turn now to the life of Christopher, "the real boy with real problems and real human relationships." Christopher is a child who leads a solitary life. The first sentence in the book gives an accurate description of Christopher's early life. The narrator says, "They played together under the trees, the solemn child and the lizards" (11). Christopher spends an unusual amount of time alone working in his garden. He has little contact with other children, does not play, never laughs, and is always worried about some problem that would generally be considered an adult concern. Because he leads so solitary
an existence, his imagination is vivid and he creates quite a fantasy world. He has a tense and strained relationship with his father, who, by white planter's standards, is financially strapped. Christopher's mother is reminiscent of the white planter's wife in the novels of the early American South. She is an ineffectual, fearful and rather frail woman who loves her son but doesn't seem to know the first thing about rearing him. When Christopher becomes ill, Mrs. Stevens doesn't quite know what to do. Gip, Christopher's black nanny, on the other hand, always knows what to do:

She [Mrs. Stevens] felt a trifle lost. The doctor had told her what to expect, what to do. But Gip did these things instinctively. She had always taken charge when Christopher was ill, ordering Mrs. Stevens around with an authority that no one thought presumptuous (43).

Gip fits every stereotype of the black mammy universally portrayed in literature written by whites. She is nurturing, wise, all-knowing with regard to domestic matters, jovial, harsh (but not really), and her primary concern is the welfare of her charge. Much of the narrative deals with the relationship between Christopher and Gip, but her only function in the book is to give us insight into his character alone. James says, "Even Gip does not have the solidity her importance in the novel
What strikes us in this book, particularly in view of the social and political climate of the time, is how totally removed from the life of the community Christopher is. He seems to live in a vacuum and remains untainted by the problems that exist outside the boundaries of his own home. He has not, however, been shielded from prejudice. Christopher is afraid of black people and has nightmares about them, but he also feels superior to them. For example, when a beggar suggests that Christopher’s wealthy maternal grandfather has black children, Christopher becomes depressed. When Christopher wants to know how animals are made, the farm hand, Best, tells him that he should ask one of the little black boys in the yard. Christopher, offended by the suggestion, "certainly had no intention of asking one of the yard boys. Such a question would evidence a greater degree of intimacy than he was willing to accord any of them" (135).

Christopher and to a lesser extent Rhys’ Voyage in the Dark point out an essential difference between the autobiographies of white creoles and the autobiographies of their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. The autobiographies by white creoles tend to focus more on the individual life than the collective life of the community in which they live. I think the reason for this, as Rhys and Drayton make clear in their autobiographies, is that the white creole belongs to no
community and leads an insular and solitary existence away from "the tribe." This does not suggest that the white creole has a better life, however. Although it seems clear that the white creole is generally financially and materially better off than persons of African descent, the lives of Afro-Caribbean writers seem to be significantly enhanced and enriched by the community in which they live and grow.

Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*, except for its focus on Anna Morgan's individual life, shares all other aspects of West Indian autobiography in that she uses a fictional persona to represent herself, incorporates political and social issues in the telling of her story, and asserts her identity as a West Indian white woman. Drayton's *Christopher*, as Davies states, has no elements of West Indian autobiography. Indeed, the only hint that the novel is set in the West Indies is the landscape and flora and fauna that Drayton describes.

We can rightfully say that Drayton holds a more Western concept of autobiography than other West Indian writers; *Christopher* has most of the elements of Pascal's definition of an autobiographical novel, for we cannot conceive of Christopher "existing outside the pages of the novel" and the story is "self-sufficient and completed" (162-4).

In spite of the marked differences between Drayton's autobiographical novel and the autobiographies of the other
West Indian writers, his experiences are as authentically West Indian as theirs. George Lamming says that a West Indian novel is a novel written by a West Indian about the West Indian reality (Pleasures 38). Drayton's Christopher certainly reflects that reality, but it also reflects the reality or perhaps the universality of experience of the white male who, because of his status in society, is often untouched by the chaos which surrounds him.

Throughout the work, we find that Christopher is being sheltered. When he goes to the beach with his parents, they tell him that he must not go near the water; that he must stay in the shade. Christopher is the story of a boy who has the luxury of staying in the shade, and it is a luxury that can be ill-afforded by the little boys, like G., and women like Anna Morgan, who live in the real world outside.

Paul Edwards and Kenneth Ramchand observe that Michael Anthony's The Year in San Fernando resembles Drayton's Christopher "in at least two respects: it works through the very particular consciousness of an isolated boy; and it does not have an explicit social or political message.... The Year in San Fernando's freedom from the obvious in plot or social message has made it appear to lack significance" (vi, viii). It is true that Michael Anthony's narrative seems conspicuously nonpolitical, but is it really? The issue of class in the West Indies is an
enormously political issue, and "as we view the world through Francis's eyes we build a detailed and authentic picture of Trinidadian social divisions, family patterns, economic conditions and cultural expectations..." (Griffiths 88). No upper or middle class child of twelve, for example, would be sent away from its family to live as a servant in the home of another as Francis was.

The Year in San Fernando is the story of one year in the life of Michael Anthony. Daryl Cumber Dance says that Anthony's portrayal of the Chandles family is so accurate that Anthony feared this family's reactions and avoided them upon his return to Trinidad (21). Although Kenneth Ramchand stops short of calling the work an autobiography, he tells us that "the experiences of Francis in the novel have their real-life analogue in a year Michael Anthony himself spent in San Fernando, from after Christmas 1943 to just before Christmas 1944 when he himself was twelve" (Novel 205). Anthony, through the voice of Francis, gives us a complete story of a young boy's transition from childhood to adolescence.

The story seems to be a relatively simple one. Francis leaves his family and rural home in Mayaro to travel to the city of San Fernando. He is to live with the elderly mother of Mr. Chandles, whom Francis describes thus:

We had heard only very little about Mr. Chandles. The little we had heard were whispers and we didn't
gather much, but we saw him sometimes leaning over the banister of the Forestry Office, and indeed he was as aristocratic as they said he was. He looked tidy and elegant and he always wore jacket and tie, unusual under the blazing sun. These things confirmed that he was well off, and his manner and bearing, and the condescending look he gave everything about him, made us feel that he had gained high honours in life....We could see the looks on Mr. Chandles' face as he gazed over into our yard and somehow we felt rather small (1,2).

We immediately understand, as does Francis, that he and his family do not have the same social standing as Mr. Chandles. There is a seemingly unbridgeable gap between Francis' life and that of Mr. Chandles, and between Mayaro and San Fernando, and that is why Francis is shocked and confused when he learns, without forewarning, that he is going to live at Mr. Chandles' house in San Fernando:

I was flabbergasted. I did not know what it was all about and then Ma began to explain. She started by saying that Mr. Chandles had plenty of money and a big house in San Fernando...Ma said I was the lucky one because Mr. Chandles could have got hundreds of little boys to go but he had asked for me, specially. She thanked God that I had come into such good fortune (3-4).
Although Francis leaves under the pretense of simply staying with Mr. Chandles' elderly mother who lives alone, it is revealed to us early on that Francis must earn his keep by doing the marketing, performing household chores, and even massaging Mrs. Chandles' aching legs. We believe that Francis, at the age of twelve, is sent away to be a servant. It is significant that Michael Anthony, even in adulthood, cannot say what his role was in Mr. Chandles' household. "I don't know how to describe what I was there, in the house where I was staying, but I was not really a servant. I was living with them, but I had servant status more or less" ("Growing Up" 82). One could speculate as to the reasons why Anthony is reluctant to say that he was a servant in the household, but there can be no speculation as to the reason why he was sent to San Fernando. Francis' mother was a poor widow and Chandles knew that. Although she certainly cared for her son, she welcomed the opportunity to have him clothed, fed, and educated at someone else's expense. Despite the harsh treatment that Francis often endures, we are able to see a growing relationship between Mrs. Chandles, Mr. Chandles and him. Part of the reason for this is Francis' own growing awareness that the differences between his family and Mr. Chandles' family go far beyond economics. Francis is surprised when he learns that Chandles and his mother argue violently, for Mr. Chandles has no respect for her. These
behaviors do not coincide with Francis' idea of the life of what he perceives to be the aristocracy, and he begins to realize that although his family is poor, it is much better off. We understand Francis' burning desire to return home. The city and the upper class no longer hold any mystique for him.

It is this continual reference to family and community which make The Year in San Fernando distinctly unlike Christopher. Although the autobiography is written in first person and seldom makes use of the collective I, Anthony always reminds us that Francis belongs to a community and a family, and he implicitly compares and contrasts the loving and impoverished family from which Francis comes to the unloving and financially secure Chandles family. Francis is neither alone nor solitary. His dilemma is that he has been uprooted and is essentially experiencing a kind of exile.

When Michael Anthony started writing The Year in San Fernando, his intention was to write an autobiography. In an interview with Anson Gonzalez, Anthony remembers:

Now, with The Year in San Fernando, things were rather different. I set out to tell the story—in fact, in the first version of this book I told the story of myself. In 1942, I think, I spent a year in San Fernando. So this was really autobiography at first. When I wrote it, I soon came to the
realization on re-reading it that... well, first of all I sent it out to some publishers, and publisher after publisher returned it. One of them told me he liked it but there was something that he couldn't put his finger on. Anyway he would like me to re-read it and rework it and send it to him. And so, after a few months then, I re-read The Year in San Fernando, and I felt as though I couldn't read it. I felt as if this mass of details that I had put in was not interesting, even to me. I felt at that stage that I knew exactly what was wrong with it. We feel that things that happened to us are important, but they are only important to us. To make this interesting to people I had to forget the fact that this was autobiography and to use it as fiction, and write it as fiction, taking out the things which might not interest anybody but myself (86).

Although Anthony completes this statement by telling Gonzalez that not everything in San Fernando is true, and therefore the book is fiction, he does not seem to realize that he has defined for us the process of writing a successful autobiography: to select from a mass of uninteresting details those experiences which can portray that life lived, to lose the compulsion to tell the factual "truth" that accompanies traditional notions of
autobiography and enhance the remembered life with artistic detail. At the end of an essay on his work, Michael Anthony criticizes his friends for taking the incidents in his books too literally. He says:

Some of my friends believe that because I write in the first person and because I write of real places—places that exist, like San Fernando and Mayaro—these things really happened. I don't think one should do this because I think that fiction really is not invention in every respect ("Growing Up" 82).

If only Anthony understood equally well that autobiography is not fact in every respect, he would acknowledge The Year in San Fernando as the autobiography that he initially intended it to be.

Derek Walcott, on the other hand, seems to fully understand the meaning of autobiography. In a discussion of Another Life he says that it is "a biography of an 'intelligence; a West Indian intelligence, using it in the Latin sense of spirit." He goes on to say that he has not brought his life "up to its own date" in Another Life, "but sort of re-essentialized it, given it more of an essence in fact, made it more focal. I had a professor friend come in here and point out to me many errors of chronology, of place, of names that he had researched. So, you can go on infinitely in that direction" ("Conversation" 411).
While some critics seem content to call Another Life an autobiographical poem or "an autobiographical sequence in twenty-three verse 'chapters'" (Breslin 178), Edward Baugh convincingly argues that Another Life is "a poem which is also an autobiography (which is distinct from 'an autobiographical poem')" ("Poem" 227). Baugh goes on to say that not only is Another Life unconventional in its form (at the time it was written it had only "The Prelude" as a precedent) but it is also unconventional in the way in which it fuses poetry and prose. Another Life "moves towards the novel while remaining without question a poem. It is a poem which is an autobiography which is a novel" ("Poem" 227).

I do not wish to elaborate on Baugh's already well-argued case for autobiography. I wish to focus, rather, on an issue which I raised in my discussion of McKay, and that is the question of language. Walcott has often been criticized for the kind of language he uses in his poetry.

Paul Breslin's review of Another Life begins with a continuation of Baugh's comparison of the autobiography with The Prelude. Breslin further compares the two by discussing the use of language in each poem. Another Life, according to Breslin, "lacks any hierarchy of intensity; reading Another Life is rather like listening to an organist who leaves the diapason stop on for the whole
"recital" (178). He mentions the fact that Wordsworth uses different languages for different descriptions and experiences. He then quotes a short passage from Another Life and says, "However dazzling such passages may be in isolation, they leave Walcott with nowhere to go when he wants to intensify his language to meet a special intensity in his experience." The moments of crisis in the poem do not stand out because, Breslin continues, they are "all but lost in the general furor of Walcott's language" (179). Breslin concludes that Another Life ultimately fails because of its language.

Walcott, a "coloured" West Indian from St. Lucia's middle class, has often been criticized for his use of highly lyrical, metaphorical, and literary language in his poetry. He has been accused, by West Indian nationalists and others, of being too imitative and Eurocentric. "Walcott, some say, is not West Indian enough. He is too much concerned with world literature and international sophistication... The central content of Walcott's verse is not much examined" (Morris "Walcott" 11).

In "A Far Cry From Africa," written during a recollection of the Mau-Mau rebellion, Walcott expresses his linguistic and personal dilemma:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the British tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool? How can I turn from Africa and live? (Green Night 18),

Determining what this division within himself means comes directly to bear on Walcott’s ability to define himself and to fuse that divided self into a whole being, recognizing and appreciating all parts of himself and utilizing all of his cultural inheritances. For Walcott, finding a way to articulate the self in a language that reflects the true nature of the self is extremely important.

In an interview with Walcott, Sharon L. Ciccarelli asked if he thought black writers should write in the language of their ex-colonizers instead of their traditional native languages. The underlying assumption in this question, and others like it, is that the English language is the possession solely of the English. R.B. LePage goes so far as to suggest that "one cannot really write like an Englishman without in some sense becoming an Englishman" ("Reflections" 2). Even C.L.R. James, himself a lover of the English language, says the English poetic language dominates Walcott’s feeling for "'the language of the tribe'. Poetry is the language of the tribe, and it is very hard to get the language of the tribe when you begin with the language of the British tribe, which has so much weight" (KAS-KAS 31). But Walcott does not write like an Englishman. His poetic language is his own; it is a result of the duality that the colonial situation imposed upon his
life. C.G.O. King agrees that Walcott's language is his own. It is "compact, precise, devoid of unconscious imitation...." (30). Walcott simply does not choose to deny that part of him which is English and participate in what he perceives to be a hypocritical spirit of nationalism. Walcott describes his linguistic situation as "like having two hands; one hand knows the language of the master, the other the language of dialect, and a fusion of both limbs takes place in the expression that you write down" ("Reflections" 307). Out of this fusion comes a language that is completely his, one in which he can define himself and his society, and one that is completely West Indian. James and other West Indian critics fail to realize that they and other Third World writers have decolonized the English language, and it is no longer solely the language of the English.

Let us turn back now to Breslin and his criticism of what he calls Walcott's intensity, his long and apparently never ending crescendo, and his drive at the sublime. Metaphors, according to Walcott, are extremely important tropes in West Indian speech, and particularly for those who speak only patois, the native language. Walcott uses as an example the "extravagant care that the West Indian takes in cursing someone else, in looking for new metaphors" ("Interview" 286). He compares the West Indian way of cursing to the short, casual expletives used by New
Yorkers, telling us that in the West Indies, the "care required to curse a man thoroughly is a poetic form of expression" ("Interview" 286). (This is a most perfect example, for I have often noted that the West Indian way of cursing is an art form.) Walcott goes on to explain that during his youth, he heard his people actually renaming ordinary objects:

The metaphors that one heard from peasants describing a tree, a flower, an insect, anything, were not like the Latin names for those things... Let's say you're looking up at a bird in the sky over St. Lucia and somebody says 'ciseau la mer.' Now 'ciseau la mer' means 'scissor of the sea,' and that's much more startling, much more exciting than saying 'martin' or 'tern.' The metaphor is almost calligraphic: when it is pronounced you can almost see it. It is a little extravagant naming. Throughout my whole youth that was happening. It was the experience of a whole race renaming something that had been named by someone else and giving that object its own metaphoric power ("Interview" 287).

When Walcott reached the point at which he had to face the "inevitable necessity to confront the notion of self..." as subject (McWatt 18), he also realized that he had to confront history and participate in what he calls
the "Adamic" task of renaming things, making himself and
his society new. To complete this task, he uses his
language, the highly metaphorical language of his people
fused with the English tongue he loves. In Another Life,
he describes his task thus:

iii

For not one had yet written of this landscape
that it was possible, though there were sounds
given to its varieties of wood;

the bois-canot responded to its echo,
when the axe spoke, weeds ran up to the knee
like bastard children, hiding in their names,

whole generations died, unchristened,
growths hidden in green darkness, forests
of history thickening with amnesia,

so that a man's branched, naked trunk,
its roots crusted with dirt,
swayed where it stopped, remembering another name;

breaking a lime leaf,
cracking an acrid ginger-root,
a smell of tribal medicine stained the mind,

stronger than ocean's rags,
than the reek of the maingot forbidden pregnant women,
than the smell of the horizon's rusting rim,

here was a life older than geography,
as the leaves of edible root opened their pages
at the child's last lesson, Africa, heart-shaped,

and the lost Arawak hieroglyphs and signs
were razed from slates by sponges of the rain,
their symbols mixed with lichen,

the archipelago like a broken root,
divided among tribes, while trees and men
laboured assiduously, silently to become

whatever their given sounds resembled,
ironwood, logwood-heart, golden apples, cedars,
and were nearly
ironwood, logwood-heart, golden apples, cedars, men... (51-52).

Walcott's drive for the sublime in language reflects the nature of the task that he has set for himself. Throughout the autobiography, we see Walcott groping to come to terms with his divided self, his art, his love-hate relationship with his society and people, and his relationships with Gregorias, Harry, and Anna. At the end of the poem, there is a resolution. Walcott steps outside of his role as autobiographer and pushes us forward, onward to the present and the death of Harry. Baugh says that Walcott makes:

a sufficient statement of the world-view, the Caribbean world-view of the poet who has been recounting his story. As such, it enhances our understanding of how the "'other life'" which he has been remembering has determined the person he has become, and sharpens the perspective through which we look back with him at that other life (DW 72).

At the end we see Walcott in all of his wholeness. He is no longer divided:

I was eighteen then, now I am forty-one,
I have had a serpent for companion,
I was a hart full of knives,
but, my son, my sun,

holy is Rampanalgas and its high-circling hawks,
holy are the rusted, tortured, rust-caked, blind almond trees,
your great-grandfather's, and your father's torturing limbs,
holy the small, almond-leaf-shadowed bridge
by the small red shop, where everything smells of salt, and holiest the break of the blue sea below the trees, and the rock that takes blows on its back and is more rock, and the tireless hoarse anger of the waters by which I can walk calm, a renewed, exhausted man, balanced at its edge by the weight of two dear daughters (140).

These lines do not suggest that Walcott has attained a kind of smug self-satisfaction with the man that he has become. I think, rather, that Walcott breathes a peaceful sigh of relief and expresses the awesomeness of the experience of, to use his term, re-essentialization. Walcott, in achieving wholeness, has also achieved at-oneness with his island and its people. Walcott meets history again and for the first time, it "recognize" him.

All of Wilson Harris' work has been a constant engagement with history. Harris always places the history of the West Indies within the context of the history of the world. He forces us to look at West Indians not as a people from an isolated and separate group of islands in the Caribbean Sea but as co-makers of the modern world. In Tradition the Writer and Society Harris posits:

There is no race of men or group of nations which has not undergone major and heroic sacrifices at one stage or another to make the modern world what it is in all of its dangerous paradox and potentiality. The sacrifice remains universal though the understanding of it is far from plain and self-evident (27).
We have been taught that only white men from First World cultures were responsible for the making of the modern world, and that Third World people, women, people of color have only been recipients. This idea that disenfranchised groups are co-makers of this world is indeed a revolutionary one. Harris continually stresses the interrelatedness of all people and all history. "In Harris' sense, if the West Indies is without history, then so is man" (A. Drayton 591). And so, every major historical event from Columbus to the Ayatollah to Chernobyl is used to clarify the meaning of the life of Wilson Harris in The Infinite Rehearsal.

Harris has criticized his contemporaries for their conventional approach to literature. Though they may conceive of themselves in the most radical light, Harris believes that "political radicalism is merely a fashionable attitude unless it is accompanied by profound insights into the experimental nature of the arts and literature" (Tradition 45-46).

Harris' work is radically experimental and, like his other works, The Infinite Rehearsal is deliberately obscure. Harris always wants his writing to reflect the incomprehensibility of life; that part of ourselves and the nature of being that we shall never fully grasp. Harris places his life within the context of the past/present/future which embraces all life and time. Life
is chaotic, like a maze, and we do not find Wilson Harris easily in *The Infinite Rehearsal*.

Harris begins his autobiography by challenging all conventional definitions of autobiography. According to character Robin Redbreast Glass, the human (real?) author has apparently not written this fictional autobiography of a fictional character. He says:

> W.H. has stolen a march on me and put his name to my fictional autobiography. So be it. I do not intend to sue him for my drowned rights. Call it character licence on his part. He and I are adversaries, as my book will show, but we share one thing in common, namely, an approach to the ruling concepts of civilization from the other side, from the ruled or apparently eclipsed side in humanity (vii).

Robin Redbreast Glass is the subject of this autobiography only in that we are able to see the other characters through him. Harris believes that things are always themselves and their opposites. Paule Marshall calls it the "fundamental dualism in life; the idea that a thing is at the same time its opposite, and that these opposites, these contradictions make up the whole" ("Poets" 28). So, Glass and W.H. are adversaries, each seeing self through the other and through the other characters in the autobiography.
The adversary (or opposite) is essential to Harris' concept of the autobiographical act, for the adversary is an enabler or illuminator. Ghost suggests that the self must be an adversary to the self in order to uncover the truths in the fiction, the infinitely rehearsed play that is life. Ghost says to Robin:

You live and write your fictional autobiography from the other side of W.H.'s blind/seeing mind, Robin Glass. He is a character in your book. You are no invention of his. You are no pawn of his. You validate and contest his discoveries. They are your discoveries as much as his (47).

We must remember, however, that if Robin, the fictional author, writes his fictional autobiography "from the other side of W.H.'s blind/seeing mind," then the converse must also be true. W.H. writes, or perhaps uncovers or discovers, his autobiography through Glass, the fictional author. "Memory's building blocks under the sea (or upon a wave of land)," writes Robin, "are composed of reversible glass senses reflecting patterns of intimate sensation--no, patterns of temptation--to which one succumbs" (26).

When W.H. first addresses Robin in the book, he angers him by giving him the "facts" of a crucial incident in Robin's life: the death of his mother, Alice, and friends, Peter and Emma. Robin is unable to understand why his mother, an excellent swimmer, has drowned, and he attempts
to relive the day. Robin remembers that he was in bed with the flu on the day of the tragedy, but W.H. explains that it was he, not Robin, who lay in bed with the flu. Robin died with his mother on that day. W.H. thinks he remembers hearing a voice call to him from the ocean before Robin’s mother drowned:

Remember me as I remember you. Become a character in my book. Fiction is real when authors become unreal. Fiction reveals its truths, its genuine truths that bear on the reality of persons, the reality of the world, when fiction fictionalizes authors and characters alike (48).

This, I think, is Harris’ definition of autobiography which he expresses over and over again in the way he has written The Infinite Rehearsal.

Harris defines the personality of the author as "a mysterious essence, clearly the author is one—one person, but he has this mystery that he is one person, yet he seems to be involved in several existences" (KAS-KAS 52-53). These existences or alter-egos—Robin, Ghost, W.H., the mask of Shadow and Substance, only remain adversaries for as long as they attempt to come to know the self. They join forces, however, as members of the ruled or eclipsed side in humanity, to resist "the concepts of civilization from the other side."

Frog is the only character in the autobiography who
stands alone, who has no alter-ego. He is an immigration officer, an obvious representation of power and authority. Frog is looking for Ghost, an illegal alien who is in hiding at Robin Glass' house. Although Frog is certain that Robin knows where Ghost is, Robin refuses to divulge Ghost's whereabouts. Frog, feeling the resistance to his authority, becomes outraged and says:

I don't like you, Glass. You tangle me up in myself, in my own wildness, my own reflection in you. It's dangerous to see myself reflected in you, intimately black, intimately white. It's as if I have found the Beast of heavenly and hellish adventure in a subtle redbreast creature like you and do not know it. It's as if I'm in your dream. I may sentence you, I may judge you, but I'm an inferior at last. Poetic justice! You know me—you fleck of scum from the sea—much better, more deeply, irreverently, terrifyingly, than I ever knew you (9-10).

And it is at this autobiographical moment, that the process of decolonization is begun. For all West Indian autobiographies create and establish the author's identity as a West Indian even if the author, like V.S. Naipaul, claims to have only contempt for his culture and his community.

Naipaul has been called a colonial Anglophile. He,
unlike other West Indian writers, apparently does not look back longingly and lovingly at his island home. Naipaul, like Jean Rhys, felt himself to be an outsider in his native Trinidad partially because he is of East Indian ancestry. During his childhood, described in A House for Mr. Biswas, Naipaul's life was quite separate from his Afro-Caribbean compatriots.

A House for Mr. Biswas gives us insight into the sources of Naipaul's apparent contempt for his country. Mr. Biswas is the story of Naipaul's childhood in Trinidad, but it is also a biographical account of the life of Naipaul's father, Seepersad Naipaul. Satendra Nandan calls the book a "fictive biography" which "follows the factual one very closely indeed" (350). Andrew Gurr outlines the facts which make the book so true to the elder Naipaul's life:

The very precision with which Naipaul reproduces the details of his father's life--the Lion House as Hanuman House, Verdant Vale as Green Vale, Chase Village as The Chase, the daughters Savi and Kamla (the names of Naipaul's own sisters), the work as signwriter, shopkeeper, overseer, and social worker, the stories about the Neediest Cases in the Trinidad Sentinel [Guardian], as much as the descriptions of houses, streets and landscapes... (80).
Although V. S. Naipaul says that the book "does not tell a literal truth" (4), he, years later, writes "Prologue to an Autobiography" in Finding the Center, and we find out how literally true much of Mr. Biswas is. Naipaul confirms what we already know, and that is that Mohun Biswas is Seepersad Naipaul remembered, complete with the passion for "the Epictetus" and "the Marcus Aurelius," the depressions, and the stomach trouble (FC 28).

Mohun Biswas' story is not a pleasant one. He is a man who never seems to find his place in the general community or in his wife's overbearing and tyrannical family. He is a comically tragic figure, a man beaten by life and as Naipaul would have it, totally out of place in the philistine culture of Trinidad.

Biswas' son Anand is most powerfully affected and influenced by the dismal life of his father and his family. He is a joyless boy who, like his family, finds few pleasures in life. The relationship between Anand and his father is central to the narrative, so the story is also Anand's story.

A House for Mr. Biswas is divided into two parts. Gurr observes that "Anand's growth in the second half of the book, to the point where his perspective dominates the ending, is one of the devices which shapes it most powerfully. Naipaul never makes the connection between Anand and himself explicit, but the narrative gradually
shifts...until the implication is inescapable" (79). I would not agree that Anand’s perspective dominates the ending because the perspective throughout the book is always that of the narrator, an older Naipaul, but I do agree that Anand increasingly becomes the focus of the narrator. Nandan says that Anand’s growth into Naipaul is "obvious to a reader who knows the writer’s background" (350). We become as least as involved in the personal story of Anand as we are in the story of his father. And this is when Mr. Biswas becomes an autobiography. The book begins as a tribute to the father whom Naipaul got to know at edge six (but did not really know until many years after that) and ends with the death of the father and the beginning of Naipaul’s personal odyssey as a colonial in Britain and as a writer in exile. And here is where we shall begin to examine the curious relationship between the colonial and England, West Indian autobiography and exile.
"'IS WHO SEND WE UP IN THIS PLACE?'"

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND STORIES ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF EXILE

Many years have come between V.S. Naipaul's autobiography of childhood, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and his autobiography about the experience of exile, *The Enigma of Arrival*. Like Ramchand, Derek Walcott acknowledges that although *Enigma* "calls itself a novel," it is an autobiography:

But unless we are meant to take the novel to be the enigma of all autobiography—that everything recorded by the act of memory is inevitably a fiction, that in life there is no such thing as a hero because a hero presumes a plot—the book is negligible as a novel and crucial as autobiography. Or vice versa, if you like transparent puzzles ("Garden Path" 28).

We cannot discuss Naipaul's arrival unless we discuss the issue of how he got there, how he achieved his peculiar status among West Indian writers. Saakana explains:

V.S. Naipaul is undoubtedly the most famous Caribbean-born writer in the west. This is primarily so because of the role he has played for white western societies in satirising, ridiculing, and condemning both the Caribbean and Africa as
Edward Said offers a similar criticism of Naipaul when he facetiously says that he is one "who can be cited as an exemplary figure from the Third World who can be relied upon to tell the truth about it" (523). Said, however, tempers his criticism by acknowledging that Naipaul is a gifted writer, a writer whom we cannot ignore.

Naipaul and his work have not always elicited such negative criticism. A House for Mr. Biswas and other early works were praised by West Indian and European critics alike, but it was The Middle Passage which earned Naipaul the condemnation of many critics and scholars from the Third World. Arthur Drayton, for example, says that Naipaul's earlier works show love and attachment to his native land, but The Middle Passage "savages" the Caribbean and brings Naipaul close to "complete dissociation" from Trinidad. After The Middle Passage, Drayton was certain that Naipaul "could no longer draw on his traditional material for fiction; I thought a complete psychological block had been erected" (589-90). But Naipaul has not dissociated himself from his native land; even he admits that "no writer, however individual his vision, could be separated from his society" (Barracoon 25). Nowhere is this more evident than in The Enigma of Arrival.

As the autobiography opens, we meet him in the apparent peace and tranquillity of "Jack's Garden," where Naipaul
has seemingly found his place away from the "philistinism" of Trinidad and away from the unwelcoming spirit of London, the metropolis. Here is where Naipaul's idea of England has finally been realized. He soon learns, however, that he has found no utopia, no wholeness, and only a temporary coming together of man and writer. Naipaul's peace is a temporary peace—a fleeting moment of serenity. Jack dies, and the English countryside, "the 'heartland' of English literature as it reached the colonies," (Tiffin, "Rites" 40) and that which captures Naipaul's idea of England, dies with him. Naipaul reluctantly realizes that he has no home in that countryside. He is not eager to leave, for he has no place to go. When faced with the prospect of homelessness, he thinks of another life:

My own time here was coming to an end, my time in the manor cottage and in that particular part of the valley, my second childhood of seeing and learning, my second life, so far away from my first....I should have made a clean break, gone elsewhere. But having cut myself off from my first life, and having had, unexpectedly, and twenty years after that earlier casting off, the good fortune to have found a second life, I was unwilling to move too far. I wanted to stay with what I had found. I wanted to re-create, so far as it was possible, what I had found in the manor
cottage (82, 84).

In the midst of Naipaul's lament for the loss of his "second life," he relives the journey from Trinidad to England, and remembers that his idea of England has been unravelling itself since the day he arrived. Naipaul remembers his impressions of London during his early "tourist excursions":

So I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past; that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which (like a typical provincial, from a far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy....My tramps about London were ignorant and joyless. I had expected the great city to leap out at me and possess me; I had longed so much to be in it. And soon, within a week or less, I was very lonely....I had come to London as to a place I knew very well. I found a city that was strange and unknown...(120, 121, 122)

Naipaul's disillusionment with London does not lead to fond feelings for Trinidad. There are echoes of what Walcott calls "the phantoms of the old Naipauline trauma--the genteel abhorrence of Negroes, the hatred of Trinidad, the idealization of History and Order...("Garden Path" 29). Although Naipaul speaks of Trinidad and all things Caribbean with contempt, he never renounces Trinidad. I
am not certain that Naipaul really hates his country. It seems significant to me that Naipaul always returns to Trinidad, refers to it as home, "my island," terms which connote far more than just the place where one was born.

Why has Naipaul held on so tenaciously to his idea of England? Why, after twenty years, is there still this stubborn refusal to accept the reality of England as he thinks he has accepted the reality of Trinidad and the Caribbean? Unlike other West Indian writers, Naipaul's idea of England is inextricably linked to his idea of himself. Naipaul spent his early life longing to be in England, to be a part of the English landscape and the English life that he found in books. Naipaul wanted to be a writer and he believed the great writers were English. Naipaul went to England and became a great writer, but he did not become a great English writer. He became instead what Said calls "a gifted native informer." Walcott says that "the myth of Naipaul as a phenomenon, as a singular, contradictory genius who survived the cane fields and the bush at great cost, has long been a farce...("Garden Path" 30). It is as farcical as Naipaul's myth of England, but it seems as though Naipaul's very survival depends on the perpetuation of that myth. Part of Naipaul's appeal in England is tied to the fact that he is West Indian. The English have always claimed that the Caribbean is a cultural wasteland. Naipaul simply rewrites those English
fictions about the Caribbean, but it is his West Indian origin that gives his fictions the ring of authenticity. Ironically, each time he writes about the West Indies, he confirms, perhaps even affirms in some convoluted way, his West Indianness.

The manor cottage only provided temporary shelter from the reality that awaited him just outside the garden gate, and that reality is that Naipaul, like Jack, "had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent" (87). Naipaul has found no home in England, and after his long sojourn, he is weary:

And many months before finishing this book I thought I would put an end to my time in England; shed weariness, not only the weariness of the writing, but also the weariness of being in England, the rawness of my nerves as a foreigner, the weariness of my insecurity, social, racial, financial; put an end to the distortion of my personality that had begun on the very day I had left home; put an end to that journey which—in spite of the returns and other journeys in the interim—had remained the fracturing one that had begun that day when the Pan American plane, taking me up a few thousand feet above the island where I had lived all my life, had shown me a pattern of fields and colours I had never seen before (144).
Naipaul returned to Trinidad "to see the island where I had been living in a new way in my imagination for the last two years, the island I had restored, as it were, to the globe and for which now I felt a deep romance," (145) but places and peoples are not ideas, and Naipaul leaves Trinidad with a deep sense of disappointment and a deeper feeling of homelessness.

The final chapter of *Enigma* is called "A Ceremony of Farewell." Naipaul has returned to Trinidad to bid farewell to a sister who has died. During this period of mourning, Naipaul's thoughts turn to his own death, for he has experienced the loss of a second life and seems to have few possibilities for a new life:

Now, in my early fifties, after my illness, after I had left the manor cottage and put an end to that section of my life, I began to be awakened by thoughts of death, the end of things; and sometimes not even by thoughts so specific, not even by fear rational or fantastic, but by a great melancholy (309).

It is in the midst of this period of loss, of melancholia and endings, that Naipaul understands and begins to feel the reality of England in a way that significantly unites him to other West Indians in exile. In each of the other autobiographies about the experience of exile, one of the first sensations that the author recounts, upon arriving in
England, is the feeling of being cold. On the first page of *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul makes a point of telling us that the English winters were never as cold as he imagined them to be, and that makes him different from the others in a seemingly insignificant way. Nineteen years after his arrival, Naipaul finally feels cold:

For the first time in England, after nineteen years, I felt cold, imperfectly clad. Until this time I had had the same kind of clothes summer and winter and had not felt the need for a pullover or for warm underclothes or even an overcoat. I had longed for frosty weather, short days, electric lights in the early afternoon. Now with this need for warm clothes, a need that seemed to grow and grow, I felt the winter as winter, darkness (152).

Naipaul has relinquished the myth. He may never live in Trinidad again or thank Trinidad for its gifts, but he understands, perhaps more fully than he ever has, that England will never be his home.

When Jean Rhys arrived in England, "Quite suddenly it seemed, it began to grow cold. The sky was grey, not blue. The sea was sometimes rough....It was a very grey day when we reached Southampton and when I looked out the porthole my heart sank" (SP 97). Although Rhys was white and had Welsh and Scottish ancestors, we have already pointed out that she felt no more connected to Britain than
the Afro or Indo-Caribbean writers. Rhys, like Naipaul, had also formulated an idea of England which had come primarily from the books that she had read:

I thought a great deal about England, not factually but what I had read about it. I pictured it in the winter, a country covered with snow and ice but also with millions upon millions of fires. Books, especially Dickens's, talked of hunger, starvation and poverty but rarely of cold. So I concluded that either the English didn't feel the cold, which surely wasn't possible, or that everybody had a fire....Cold: I couldn't imagine being cold but hated the word... (SP 63).

Rhys describes a relatively unhappy childhood, but she has some pleasant memories of her early life in Dominica:

As I grew up, life didn't seem monotonous or dull to me. Even apart from books, life was often exciting. It was not, of course, anything like as wonderful as England would be, but it did to be going on with. For instance, there were horses....What is it about horses that makes you happy?...Coming in from these rides I always felt that life was glorious and would certainly become more so later on (England, England!) (SP 63-65).

For Rhys, the idea of England offered more than the reality of Dominica. Unlike other West Indian writers, Rhys
migrated to England at an early age because her aunt insisted that she go. Anna Morgan, Jean Rhys' counterpart in *Voyage in the Dark*, is sent to England because her aunt feels that she is "growing up more like a nigger every day" (38). Rhys did not know that she would be a writer when she left Dominica. She discovered her talent long after she arrived in England, and I am convinced that the pain of exile was partially responsible for Rhys' introspection and subsequent urge to write her life.

Like all West Indian exiles, Rhys met disappointment upon her arrival in England. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna describes her feelings:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feelings things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold (3).

In this passage, Anna/Rhys is linked to other West Indians in her acute sense that all things English were very different from what she had previously known. However, Rhys had expectations that her black counterparts could not
have had. Because she was white, England offered possibilities for Jean Rhys that did not exist for them. It offered the prospect of friendship, acceptance, and the ability to blend into society and give up the discomfort of always being conspicuous. Rhys thought that England offered identity, for in England she would no longer be in the minority. She was white and England was white, and she expected many of her problems with regard to identity to be solved. What she found were more problems and a troubled transition from adolescence to adulthood. Anna and Jean remain aliens, sources of amusement for their English acquaintances. In Smile Please Rhys laments: "I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing. Always something would go wrong. I am a stranger and I always will be...(124).

Lost in the anonymity and coldness of England, Anna Morgan closes her eyes and thinks of Dominica. She does not yearn or long for home, but she is always, ever making comparisons between the life she has known in Dominica and the life she has discovered in England. Anna's life is shrouded in sadness, instability and insecurity. She seeks identity, love and security in relationships with various men and moves from one destructive relationship to the next. Unhappiness becomes her constant companion, and Anna begins to loathe England. She tells an astounded
acquaintance, "I don't like London. It's an awful place; it looks horrible sometimes. I wish I'd never come over here at all" (Voyage 28). Of Dominica Anna says, "It was a lovely place" (33).

Anna's hatred of London and its people makes her want to distinguish herself from them. She finds that everything in England is the same. "Everything was always so exactly alike—that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike" (111). Anna suddenly realizes that she does not wish to blend into this sameness. She remembers who and what she is and tells her English acquaintances over and over again that she is a West Indian, "a real West Indian...the fifth generation on my mother's side" (33). Anna finds some solace and pride in the knowledge that she is different from the English. With this assertion, Anna recaptures her identity and gives herself a history.

So disillusioned by England's failure to live up to the idea of it she had created, Rhys lost her love for books. She says, "In England my love and longing for books completely left me. I never felt the least desire to read anything, not even a newspaper, and I think this indifference lasted a long time" (SP 111). Perhaps that loss transformed itself into a desire to write her life and in so doing, she uncovered the truth about England and
discovered the truth about Dominica.

In the autobiographies that we have previously discussed, the authors, in spite of their beginnings, move into the middle class. In George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, Higgins says, "People who were educated were at home wherever they went" (71). That is, to a great extent, true. Those who are educated seem better able to survive in England. A number of people who emigrated to England were not educated and had no chance of becoming part of the English middle-class. These people, who overwhelmingly make up the majority of the population in the West Indies, do not often have the time to tell their stories. Their interests lie elsewhere with basic considerations like finding enough food to feed their families or providing shelter and clothing for themselves and their children. The stories of "the folk," those in the peasant class, have been written for them because West Indian writers realized that the folk are the West Indies and their lives tell, in a supremely important way, what it really means to be West Indian.

Samuel Selvon has often been hailed as the writer who best depicts the lives of those in the West Indian peasant class. His autobiographical novels offer a view of exile from the lives of those whose experience differs markedly from the experience of the middle-class intellectual. Selvon and to a lesser degree, Lamming, recognized that the
majority of the emigrants were members of the working class and their stories needed to be told since they had neither the time nor the inclination to write about their own experience of exile. These stories are written from inside the group rather than from the point of view of the objective observer. We see the lives and hear the voices of Lamming and Selvon in these works, but we know that these are not their stories. For the folk, basic survival is the goal, and there are few "pleasures of exile."

In *The Emigrants*, the narrator tells the story of the voyage that a group of working class men make from their islands to England. For many of the men, it is their first trip away from home and the first time they meet West Indians from other islands. The men are initially very wary of each other, for they have brought with them long-standing rivalries and misunderstandings. The conditions of the voyage and the fact that they spend most of their time in one big common area, encourages conversation and fosters camaraderie.

The living quarters for the working class aboard ship remind us of a slave ship:

Across the ceiling the bulbs stuck like yellow splotches of flame. The light over the bunks spread weakly so that the passages between the bunks were dark alleys crossing in all directions along the floor. The ship drifted in an even sway,
making the minor luggage on the floor jolt against the partitions. The glass within the port hole was shut tight and no sound came up but an occasional rumble of the engine (36).

Lilian, Tornado's girlfriend who spends a lot of time in the men's quarters, confirms that she and the other emigrants are living under inhumane conditions when she tells the men, "'an after all w'at you expect to get for las' class? If you travellin' las' class you take w'at you get. You's just a bit o' cargo they puttin' from one place to a next'" (46).

When they recognize that they are in the "las' class," the men are able to overcome their initial wariness of one another and enjoy a spiritual closeness that their physical closeness encouraged. Dreams and aspirations, apprehensions and fears are expressed on the voyage to England. Differences among men are minimized and similarities become apparent as they journey away from home and toward what they hope will be a better life.

These men did not leave their islands in search of the freedom to write or because they found their island homes oppressive. They went in search of jobs, money, and a higher standard of living than they had in their countries.

The friendships began with the recognition that they had all left their homes for the same purpose, a purpose which Higgins articulates for the group:
’Tis why we all here on this boat. In search of some way to make the future better. To make a man o’ yuhself, be somebody in the place you livin’, keep yuh family clean, an’ lead a decent clean life till the Almighty ready to give you leave. You want to give yuh life some purpose so dat in yuh ol’ age if you reach up there you can look back an’ see how you spen’ yuh time, an’ not be ashamed o’ yuhself or yuh. ’cause you know you achieve somethin’ however little (62).

The desire to achieve was not the only thing that the emigrants had in common. As they shared bits and pieces about their present and past lives, they learned how much alike they were. As the story progresses, we see developing among the lower classes the West Indian consciousness about which Lamming speaks in Pleasures. This is the point at which all exiles come together. All West Indian exiles came to know themselves as West Indians in England. The harsh realities of life away from home began with the voyage for the lower classes, and they were often able to make the discovery sooner. In this situation where they only knew fear and helplessness, they recovered a feeling of strength in their newly found identity.

Of what practical use is this West Indian consciousness to the folk who are in exile? We turn to Samuel Selvon’s trilogy for the answer to that question. The stories of
The Lonely Londoners and The Emigrants are identical, but Selvon, because of his background and closeness to "the folk," tells the story better.

If Samuel Selvon's trilogy is not a trilogy with regard to characterization, as Ramchand and Langen argue, it most certainly provides continuity in its look at the exile over a period of time. It does not matter if Moses or Galahad, who happen to be the major characters in each of the autobiographical novels, are the same characters. They provide for us a look at the various stages of the lives of working class West Indian immigrants in England.

The first novel in the trilogy is The Lonely Londoners.

Of Londoners, Sandra Paquet says, "In London, Selvon first stayed at the Balmoral Hotel along with many other West Indians from other islands, as well as Africans and Indians" ("Selvon" 440). His life at Balmoral inspired characters and situations in numerous short stories as well as The Lonely Londoners. Roger Langen says, "It may reasonably be assumed that all of the characters in Londoners have a basis in real persons with whom Selvon was in one way or another intimate" (3).

At the beginning of Londoners, we find Moses, who is from Trinidad, going to meet yet another unknown Trinidadian who is coming to make his fortune in England. Although Moses complains about always being relied upon to help his usually penniless countrymen get on their feet, we
realize that he feels a sense of responsibility for those who come to England from Trinidad. This theme of responsibility runs throughout the novel. The West Indian arriving from the islands becomes almost immediately a part of a community. G.R. Coulthard says, "To Selvon the most prominent feature of the immigrant problem is cohesion of the group" (37). Selvon sees this cohesion as a necessity, as a shelter from the brutality of immigrant life in England for nonwhite West Indians. Selvon continually stresses that the working class West Indian is never assimilated into English society because he is from the peasant class. Moses, the character who has lived in England the longest, says:

Looking at things in general life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you have friends all about. In the beginning you would think that is a good thing that nobody minding your business, but after a while you want to get in company, you want to go to somebody house and eat a meal, you want to go on excursion to the sea, you want to go and play football and cricket. Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat
or sit down and talk (130).

After a series of disappointments and dreams that do not materialize, the immigrants contemplate their situations. They are financially no better off than they were at home. They work at the most menial tasks for low wages and live at the subsistence level. In conversations in cold, dark, basement apartments, the immigrants try to figure out why they have been unable to "make it" in England, the Mother Country. They seem startled by the overt incidents of racial prejudice. They are forced to acquire a new language, one which includes making racial distinctions. After an incident with a young white mother who obviously does not want Galahad to talk to her small child, he thinks about how he has changed, become inured to racial prejudice in the short time that he has been in England. But more important than that is Galahad's rejection of his blackness because he thinks it is the source of all his problems:

Though it used to have times when he lay down there on the bed in the basement room in the Water, and all the experiences like that come to him, and he say, 'Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and them find it so hard to give? A little work, a little food, a little place to sleep. We not asking for the sun, or the moon. We
only want to get by, we don't even want to get on.' And Galahad would take his hand from under the blanket, as he lay there studying how the night before he was in the lavatory and two white fellars come in and say how these black bastards have the lavatory dirty, and they didn't know that he was there, and when he come out they say hello mate have a cigarette. And Galahad watch the colour of his hand, and talk to it, saying, 'Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world (88).

The Lonely Londoners and The Emigrants are introduced to a new kind of suffering in England where they expected to find an alleviation of their suffering. Of all of the pain that the immigrants endured, I think that racial prejudice and isolation were the most painful of their new experiences. It is not because, as I noted earlier, that they were not aware that racial prejudice existed. Almost all West Indians had heard about the racial situation in the United States, but America was somewhere out there,
removed from the West Indian’s life and culture. England was not that kind of place, and the English had, after all, willingly made them a part of the British Empire. And as Lamming notes, few West Indians had any first hand experience with racism.

I think that Austin Clarke’s criticism of the West Indian novels written in the West Indies, some of which are autobiographies of childhood and youth, is not justified. He speaks from long years of exile and a North American vantage point, and that makes all the difference. These first stories about the experience of exile focus on the agony of racial awakening for the immigrants and in so doing, they comment on the previous absence of racial awareness or vindictiveness, as Clarke calls it, in their lives. In The Emigrants, Tornado, who has spent several unhappy years in England, explains that he cannot hate the English even though he hates England, "if they’d just show one sign of friendship, just a little sign of appreciation for people like me an’ you who from the time we born, in school an’ after school, we wus hearin’ about them...then all the hate you talk ‘bout would disappear’" (186). The Jamaican further clarifies the disappointment and disillusionment that the emigrants feel when they realize that racial prejudice exists among the English:

"'Tis almost like w’at children might feel for parents who never treat them right,'...W’at you say
'bout the hate disappearin' only if there wus a sign of friendship.'....'Seems to me,' he said, 'the people here see these things from their side. They know that England got colonies an' all that, an' they hear 'bout the people in these far away places as though it wus all a story in a book, but they never seem to understan' that these people in these places got affection for them that is greater than that of any allies in war-time...An' that's why, if ever there's any fightin' in our parts o' de world, we'd be nastier to the English than to any one, because we'd be remembering that for generations an' generations we'd been offerin' them a love they never even try to return (186). The theme of racial awareness continues in Moses Ascending as the story centers on the Black Power movement and the illegal entry of Asians into England. Kenneth Ramchand notes: Lonely Londoners is built around an exiled body that is still very much West Indian; by the time we come to Moses Ascending we look with the only partly comprehending eyes of an older immigrant at the confused struggle and potential violence of a generation that insists on being black, partly because it is no longer West Indian, and partly because it will not be English either by liberal
favour or according to definitions of "English"...(Song 646).

There is in this autobiographical novel, a preoccupation with the racial discrimination that is on the rise in Britain. While Selvon shows us the horrors of racism in Britain, he also shows us what has happened to the members of the West Indian community. Gone is the cohesiveness and concern, the longing for home that once brought them together. With the disintegration of the community, we have the emergence of the individual. The narrative focuses on Moses, the character who tries most vigorously to assert his individuality. The Moses of Moses Ascending remains barely conscious of his West Indian roots. Although he generally disagrees with the young people in the Black Power movement, he recognizes, and points out to the reader, the inferior position which the black man holds in British society. As a way of proving and bettering himself, Moses buys a house which is "due for LCC demolition," (1) moves into the "penthouse," acquires Bob, a white "man Friday," and sets out to find an occupation that befits a man of his station. Moses decides to become a writer, and he gives us his "Memoirs" in Moses Ascending.

In the characterization of Moses, Selvon, as Michel Fabre suggests, subverts and negates the 'great tradition' of English literature. Selvon chooses Defoe, writer of
fictional autobiographies, as his particular target. Mervyn Morris notes that Selvon "inverts the Crusoe-Friday model; black Moses has a white 'man Friday'. Selvon toys with the notion that the 'man-Friday' is an 'immigrant' from 'the Black Country', the English Midlands. The Selvon parody is not merely general; there are moments when he seems to have in mind specific passages in Robinson Crusoe" (Introduction xiv). Morris goes on to identify passages in Robinson Crusoe that have corresponding passages in Moses Ascending.

It is clear to me that Moses also attempts to follow the English tradition with regard to definition, language and style when writing his "Memoirs." The memoirs are written in first person, and addressed to "Dear R." Moses tells us early on, "I smoothed the pages of my Memoirs, and am giving it to you sic, as I intend to do as long as I can--how much faithful can I be? You have it straight from the horse's mouth (13-14). Later on Moses says, "None of this narrative is fiction: if I lie I die" (80).

Moses initially thinks that writing is a solitary task. He is not interested in the goings-on of the outside world, for great writers of memoirs do not concern themselves with worldly matters:

Memoirs are personal and intimate, I say. They don't have to be topical nor deal with any social problems....Let me remind you that literary
masterpieces have been written in garrets by candlelight, by men who shut themselves away from the distractions of the world (42).

Mervyn Morris points out that it is Galahad who convinces Moses that "a real writer needs to be in the thick of things" (Introduction xi). Galahad holds up as models of good writers, Andrew Salkey and George Lamming, contemporaries of Selvon's. Moses admits that he has heard of neither, but he "knows of Accles and Pollock" (43). Moses, berated for his ignorance of "a Black Literature...what making the whole world realize our existence and our struggle," (43) stubbornly clings to his idea that great literature is English literature but makes a small concession by agreeing to write about the world that exists just outside the door of his penthouse, namely the illegal Asian immigrants that he is harboring and the meetings of the Black Power advocates who have their headquarters in his basement.

Moses, much to his chagrin, becomes involved in the movement and consequently neglects his own writing. He becomes annoyed by the distraction:

my work was suffering, and it didn't look as if I was writing my Memoirs so much as prognostications and a diary of current events. I longed to get back to my philosophizing and my analysing and my rhapsodizing, decorating, decorating my thoughts
with little grace notes and showing white people that we, too, could write book (100-101).

We can see from this passage Moses' obvious concern with the use of proper literary language. His speech, a combination of what he believes to be highly literate language and his own Trinidadian English, is, for him, a source of pride. During an argument with Brenda, the leader of the Black Power group, he tells her that he is not interested in writing the "cheap journalese" she has asked him to write. "I am not that sort of writer, who is only after sensations and scandals. I am writing Literature'" (103). Brenda later tells Moses that she has read a copy of his manuscript, and she ridicules him:

Your conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax, and your figures of speech only fall between 10 and 20. Where you have punctuation you should have allegory and predicates, so that the pronouns appear in the correct context. In other words, you should stick to oral communication and leave the written word to them what knows their business (104-105).

Of all the criticisms that could be made of his work, this one is the worst, for Moses knows that his mastery of the English language is the real test of his achievement of moving to the middle class. Moses pores over his manuscript looking for the errors that Brenda has talked
about. He says, "I start to take a closer look at my phraseology and my spelling, and if I could find any grammatical errors or incorrect punctuations, but I didn't see any, it look just as good as anything Shakespeare or Billy Wordsworth ever write..." (111).

At the end of the novel, Moses, who has an affair with Bob's wife, moves back to the basement to placate him. We leave Bob, the former "man Friday," living in the "penthouse" and engaged in the study of languages.

In Moses Migrating, sequel to Moses Ascending, Moses, fed up with living in his London basement, decides to return to Trinidad. Moses Migrating is the story of a man who has become a foreigner in his own country. Two things have happened to Moses during his twenty or more years in England: he has failed in his attempt to become an Englishman, and he has severed all ties with his home country. Moses has achieved what Arthur Drayton calls "complete dissociation" from Trinidad. Although Selvon uses a comic tone to tell the story of Moses' journey home, the story is really a tragedy. When Moses arrives in Trinidad for Carnival, after travelling in the "bowels of the ship," he lives in the Hilton, refuses to speak to an acquaintance who remembers him from years back, and promotes Britain and British culture whenever he can. Moses remains ever the loyal subject in a free Trinidad.

We feel a glimmer of hope that Moses will be reconciled
to Trinidad when he falls in love with Doris. His feelings for Doris seem to be the only honest and real emotions that Moses has felt for another person in a long time. We dare to hope that he will rediscover himself, his West Indian self, and stop living life as a charade. We find, however, that Moses is spiritually dead, that he has become hopelessly addicted to the promise that he still believes that Britain holds for him.

The working class immigrant, as portrayed by Lamming and Selvon is a tragic figure. He lives a lonely existence on the periphery of English society, becomes swallowed up by the system, gets into trouble with the law, or, like Moses, forfeits his culture and heritage for a hollow existence. There are, unfortunately, few survivors. For most, the nationalistic spirit and West Indian consciousness erodes with the passage of time and the struggle to survive. For those who survive, thoughts of the warmth of home are the force which nurtures and sustains them and shelters them from the coldness in the mother country.

All of these West Indian writers went to England in search of freedom—freedom from what they believed to be the social, intellectual and cultural philistinism of their island homes, freedom from economic hardship, freedom to write. These freedoms are, as Lamming would put it, the particular pleasures of exile, but these freedoms are not
free. West Indians, regardless of race, gender or social class were exposed to the cold, racism and xenophobia in England. They were alienated and isolated and most found comfort, solace and community among other West Indian exiles. West Indians from various islands met and mingled on England’s foreign soil to share stories of home and growing up in a colonial culture. Out of pain, a longing for home, and an exchange of experiences came the realization that the West Indies were something more than individual islands in the Caribbean Sea, The West Indies was a nation to which they all belonged, a nation which signified their common history and common heritage. And so, West Indians were born out of the negativity of the experience of exile.

In "Growing Up in Writing," Michael Anthony evaluates his experience as an exile and says, "I have certainly become a West Indian since I have been in England. When I was in Trinidad the West Indies were just Trinidad. In England your world becomes larger, you have broader horizons (84). The autobiographies and stories about the experience of exile chronicle the development of this West Indian identity and consciousness and reveal what it means to be West Indian and in exile. The Jamaican in The Emigrants seems to best articulate what it means to be West Indian when he says:

Me say to myself the two o’ you come from different
island but him talk the way you talk an' it ain't make no difference at all. De wahter seperatin' you from him ain't do nothin' to put distance between de view you got on dis life or de next. Different man, different land, but de same outlook. Dat's de meanin' o' West Indies. De wahter between dem islands doan' separate dem. Many o' man in Jamaica would expound de same view, an' dere's a worl' o' sea between me an' you (63).
NEW VOICES FROM THE WEST INDIES:
WOMEN WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES

Crick Crack, Monkey/ Merle Hodge
Annie John/ Jamaica Kincaid
Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home/ Erna Brodber
Brown Girl, Brownstones/ Paule Marshall
Lionheart Gals/ Sistren

So the black womb is a maw. Disinfect its fruits with fine sterilised white lint if you can...The black womb sucks grief and anger and shame but it does not spit. It absorbs them into its body. Take an antidote. Silence it. Best pretend it doesn't exist. Give it a cap of darkness, take a pill (Brodber 143).

Critic David Williams notes that in the "West Indian literary consciousness, indeed, the idea of the Author, and more particularly the idea of the author of an autobiography, continue to be associated largely with the male imagination, despite the presence of novels by women that employ the autobiographical mode...(3). With the exception of those by Jean Rhys, all the autobiographies that we have discussed thus far were written by men. It is, I think, fair to say that from its beginnings, West Indian literature has primarily been a literature written by men about men. Although West Indian women have been writing for at least as long as men, their writing has long gone unrecognized. In the great upsurge of West Indian prose writers of the 1950's, all of the writers were men. Even Jean Rhys, who had by then been appropriated by the British, went largely unnoticed until the sixties. Among West Indian women writers, poets have
traditionally dominated and continue to dominate the literary scene; however, since the eighties, the number of prose writers has steadily increased.

Most of the early novels by West Indian women were written by white creoles like Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey. The voice of the Afro-West Indian women was silent until 1970, with the publication of Merle Hodge’s autobiography, *Crick Crack, Monkey*. Since the eighties and the movement toward defining a West Indian feminism, writing by women of African descent has flourished. West Indian women have found their voices and are demanding to be heard.

At the heart of literature written by men is the myth of the matriarchy. In men’s autobiographies, women have generally been placed in the roles of sexual object or good, often long suffering, single mothers who sacrifice all for their male children. Leota S. Lawrence points out that the women in literature written by men "always seem to exist vis-a-vis a man (be he lover or husband) and, of course, children" (2).

Honor Ford Smith explains the "two opposing images of the black woman, which co-exist in the psyche of Caribbean women: the image of the warrior woman as typified by Ni (Nanny), the Maroon leader of the eighteenth century, and the image of nanny, the domesticated servant woman":

Ni, the warrior priestess, led the eastern Maroons
in their fight against slavery. Maroon stories tell us that she was far more militant than Kojo, [her male counterpart] who led the western Maroons...Ni was not merely an exceptional woman. Her power was underpinned by several factors—material and cultural. It drew on the tradition of the Ohemaa (the Ashanti Queen-Mother); on the control which African woman had over agriculture in Maroon society; on the specific needs of the war effort as well as the circumstances of sexuality which existed in the rebel communites of the time (xiv).

Smith continues by telling us that the second image of the Caribbean woman came into being as the centuries progressed:

"She was the proverbial black mammy, nanny of the Great House, instinctively maternal, perpetually self-effacing, kind-hearted and loving, the complacent servant who loved her oppressor" (xiv). Caribbean women have been taught to believe that these are opposite images which implies that they should themselves fit into one mold or the other, but Smith says:

...the two images of women may not, in fact, be as opposite as we have been taught to believe. Behind the familiar image of the domesticated nanny lurks the eternal Ni. To recognise her it may be
necessary to readjust one's sense of the rules of resistance and the limits of power. It may be necessary to seek her out over the years in odd places—beside the stove, sweeping the yard or crouched over a pan of clothes. It may mean coming to terms with ways in which ordinary women have determined their own struggles for themselves and the ways in which they have assessed their own victories and defeats (xiv-xv).

We want to take a look now at how women write about women in West Indian literature, and more specifically how women write about themselves and the dominant women in their own lives during childhood. How do their autobiographies differ from those written by men? And how are these autobiographies both distinctly female and distinctly West Indian?

The life stories of West Indian women share in common with autobiographies written by other women the preoccupation with growing up female and being a woman in a patriarchal society. West Indian women's stories seem to be far more individualistic than those of the men until we realize that being oppressed because one is female is a fairly universal and collective experience. In a very real sense, every woman's experience is the experience of all women regardless of race, class, and ethnic origin. West Indian women suffer a double oppression in that they are
both female and colonial, but the oppression and discrimination that most affects the lives of women, that which they initially feel, does not come from any other country. They are oppressed by men and by the very structure of the societies in which they live. Although the oppression often manifests itself in different ways for members of different social classes, all of the women suffer loneliness and alienation and are constrained by the limitations that society places upon them. The alienation that women feel within their own societies is akin to the male experience of exile. Women are so marginalized by the male oriented and male dominated society until they often feel like strangers in their own countries. Women have been taught that to be silent and long-suffering is somehow ladylike, so they have traditionally not shared their painful experiences. In the texts, we will see over and over again mothers and daughters, sisters, women and their friends refusing, or perhaps refraining, from sharing their stories. Women, consequently, have not gotten to know themselves. Sistren’s Lionheart Gal provides a perfect example of the liberation that comes from women simply telling their stories. The Lionheart Gals, as we shall later see, created themselves in the drawing, telling, writing and sharing of their life stories. In other words, these women moved from object to subject, and that is exactly what
happens in women's autobiography: women, who have traditionally been objectified in the autobiographies written by men, become the subject of their own autobiographies.

Estelle C. Jelinek suggests that autobiographies written by women are less concerned with the general political atmosphere, that they "rarely mirror the establishment history of their times" (7). West Indian women, however, are very concerned with the political atmosphere of their countries, for they suffer the additional burden of being colonials. The issues of race, class, and colonialism are still addressed in these autobiographies, but we look at them from the eyes of those for whom the oppression associated with being female is the one that they know best. There is a most powerful social protest on the part of women in the mere writing of their own lives and experiences.

Most of these women, like their male counterparts, reject and resent the colonial system under which they were born, and that is quite apparent in their narratives. For example, in Annie John, there is an English girl in Annie's class for whom she feels great pity because her "ancestors had been the master, while ours had been the slaves. She had such a lot to be ashamed of, and by being with us everyday she was always being reminded" (78). Annie later remembers disliking Christopher Columbus and delighting to
find that he was once "fettered in chains" and sent back to Spain. She takes great pleasure in defacing Columbus' picture in her textbook and feels no remorse when her teacher accuses her of blasphemy.

In Beka Lamb Gran Ivy and Beka's father, Bill, are unanimous in their hatred of British colonialism although they have differing ideas as to how the independence of Belize should be achieved. Gran Ivy provides an excellent example for Beka in that she is a bit of a political rebel and refuses to change her ideas about nationalism in spite of incurring her son's displeasure.

Nellie Richmond in Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home and Selina Boyce in Brown Girl, Brownstones turn our attention from the West Indian male's experience in England to the West Indian woman's experience in the United States. For them, the problems revolve around the issues of community insularity and the threat of assimilation. There is, for Selina, a crucial racial awakening. Nellie, in contrast, discovers a strong sense of community among all blacks in the United States. "It is a brand new nigger war," she says, "and I must find the language of abuse with which to reach them....Children greet me, brothers carry my parcels because I am their people" (32,33). Although Selina Boyce's awakening is a long time coming, we see that an overt racial assault brings her to an awareness of what it means to be black in America.
We have said that West Indians are both undeniably a Western people and undeniably a non-Western people. We see that West Indian women are participating in their own liberation, recreating themselves and their images first as women and then as West Indians. There is definitely an emerging feminist movement in the West Indies, but it differs markedly from the feminist movement in the United States or Europe in at least two significant ways: West Indian women have traditionally been members of the work force and have played a major role in the West Indian economy. The market woman, who may also be a farmer, feeds the majority of the population in the West Indies, and the vendor or higgler is responsible for the importation and sale of common necessities from notebook paper to clothing. The masses of people depend on the basic necessities these women provide. Few West Indian communities could operate efficiently without the services of these women. I think that I am not overstating the case when I say that marriage and/or children is still considered the norm for most West Indian women. Family is extremely important and women still accept the care and nurturing of children as a primary function for them. These are traditional roles which peacefully co-exist with the feminist movement.

Louis James notes that women like Merle Hodge, Zee Edgell, Jamaica Kincaid, and Erna Brodber have extended the strand of writing begun by men in the fifties. While James
stops short of calling these works "actual autobiographies," he says the books written by these women, like those written by Walcott, Lamming and Anthony, recognizably "draw on the life of their author, and use growing up and initiation to explore both personal and national identities" ("Reflections" 1).

Merle Hodge discovers her personal identity through the persona of Tee in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, which has at its center the issue of social class. Tee spends her childhood with Tantie, who has strong maternal ties to Tee, her brother Toddan and their "Uncle Mikey." But Tantie, obviously a member of the lower class, is a warrior of the first degree. She roars, rails and curses her way through each day. Tantie is brutally honest and fiercely proud. Despite her apparent harshness and her lack of social graces, she loves her children passionately and unconditionally and would unquestionably die protecting them. Tantie is neither complacent nor self-effacing, and she enjoys life in all its fullness.

Tee describes a perfectly happy childhood with Tantie and remembers with great fondness long holiday times spent with her grandmother, Ma, the other dominant woman in her life:

Our grandmother was a strong, bony woman who did not smile unnecessarily, her lower jaw set forward at an angle that did not brook opposition or
argument. She did not use up too many words at a
time either....all that Ma could not crush or
confound with a barked word or surmount with her
lioness strength, she reacted to with a cheups,
more or less loud, more or less long (13,16).

Aunt Beatrice, Tee's mother's sister, is an educated,
middle-class woman who is full of pretensions and
superficiality. She has three daughters who are like her
in personality and with whom she has unfulfilling
relationships. Everything in Auntie Beatrice's life seems
in direct contrast to what Tee has known with Tantie.
Beatrice has material wealth, spiritual poverty, and only
superficial relationships with other people.

Tee moves into Auntie Beatrice's home when she wins a
scholarship to school. Tee is miserable in Auntie
Beatrice's household and believes that she is not accepted
by her cousins because she has not been properly trained.
Although laden with guilt about her disloyalty, Tee begins
to resent Tantie for bringing her up in an unsuitable
environment, one of "ordinaryness and niggeryness":

At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not
having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the
first place and bring us up properly. What
Auntie Beatrice said so often was true: how
could a woman with no sense of right and
wrong take it upon herself to bring up
children (97). Tee, because she never gains acceptance among her cousins and rejects Tantie's environment, remains between two worlds. She is, however, always aspiring to be part of the middle-class. It is an aspiration which will apparently be fulfilled when she and brother Toddan leave for England to join their father.

Hodge's autobiography is similar to those we have previously discussed except that the protagonist is female. There is a noticeable absence of issues that are particularly female. Hodge subtly protests the colonial system which, through its educational system, divides families and makes people misfits in their own environments. There is a less subtle denunciation of the middle-class for its hypocrisy and facades. Most interesting is Hodge's portrayal of the middle-class woman who has the maternal instinct but is totally inept when it comes to motherhood and mothering. Beatrice, for example, is burdened with ungrateful, unloving daughters whom she has made in her own image. The two-parent family, often held up to the lower-classes as the ideal, is presented as being devoid of warmth or love. The father figure, a pronounced absence in the previous autobiographies, is a present absence in this autobiography. Norman is an ineffectual man who is pushed into non-existence by a domineering wife and selfish daughters.
It is significant, I think, that Tee has no nurturing or loving relationship with a woman as she grows into womanhood. Once she passes early childhood, the women in her life become adversaries. She seeks not to emulate them but to be something more than they. We see a similar relationship between Annie John and her mother in Jamaica Kincaid's autobiography which differs markedly from Hodge's in that it is specifically about growing up female.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* begins during Annie's tenth year. She remembers her early years before the "summer of the year I turned twelve" (25). Annie describes a father who dotes on her and a mother whom she idolizes and adores. Theirs is a near perfect relationship. Annie remembers feeling special because she is a girl. Being a girl means not having to bathe in cold water each morning like her father: "If I had been a boy, I would have gotten the same treatment, but since I was a girl, and on top of that went to school only with other girls, my mother would always add some hot water to my bathwater to take off the chill" (14). There were long walks with her father and big kisses and warm embraces from her mother. Annie describes her early life as a "paradise." And then came that fateful summer:

I could see that I had grown taller; most of my clothes no longer fit. When I could get a dress over my head, the waist then came up to just below
my chest. My legs had become more spindlelike, the hair on my head even more unruly than usual, small tufts of hair had appeared under my arms, and when I perspired the smell was strange, as if I had turned into a strange animal...Up to then my mother and I had many dresses made out of the same cloth, though hers had a different, more grownup style...One day, my mother and I had gone to get some material for new dresses...when I came upon a piece of cloth...I immediately said how much I loved this piece of cloth and how nice I thought it would look on us both, but my mother replied, 'Oh, no. You are getting too old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me.' To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far" (25-26).

From this point on Annie recounts a series of similar devastations which move her further and further away from her mother who has been the center of her world. Annie attributes the puzzling change in her mother's attitude towards her to the physical changes that are taking place in her body. She believes that she is ugly. Her mother further distances herself by referring to Annie as a young lady and sending her away "to learn one thing or another" (27).
The remainder of the autobiography chronicles Annie John's increasing alienation from her mother. Unable to cope with the pain that estrangement has caused her, Annie begins to hate her mother. The two who had formerly been the best of friends now become, in Annie's mind, enemies, adversaries. Annie, feeling acutely the loss of closeness with her mother, the essential closeness or bonding which women can only find in other women, finds that intimacy in others. The account of Annie's relationship with Gwen is impressively frank in its details of the sharing between two girls approaching adolescence.

The friendship that exists between Annie and Gwen is maternal, sisterly, sexual and enormously satisfying for both of them but particularly for Annie who feels so ugly and unloved. Annie describes the friendship this way:

Gwen and I were soon inseparable. If you saw one, you saw the other. For me, each day began as I waited for Gwen to come by and fetch me for school. My heart beat fast as I stood waiting to see Gwen as she rounded the end in our street....We'd set off for school side by side, our feet in step, not touching but feeling as if we were joined at the shoulder, hip, and ankle, not to mention heart. As we walked together, we told each other things we had judged most private and secret: things we had overheard our parents say, dreams we had had the
night before, the things we were really afraid of; but especially we told of our love for each other....My own special happiness was, of course, with Gwen...I would then laugh at her and kiss her on the neck, sending her into a fit of shivers, as if someone had exposed her to a cold draft when she had a fever. Sometimes when she spoke to me so overcome with feeling would I be that I was no longer able to hear what she said....I could not wait for us to grow up so that we could live in a house of our own (46, 48, 50-51).

It is certainly no coincidence that Annie begins to view her formerly "much-hated body" as an asset. Her life at school changes; she becomes popular among the girls at school and a good athlete. Annie is able to love herself because she feels unconditionally loved again.

I found it interesting to note that a friend of mine, one who would properly call herself a feminist, said that Kincaid's relation of such intimacy was almost embarrassing. Annie John herself, years later, when recalling her "former friend Gwen," feels her "heart nearly split in two with embarrassment at the feelings I used to have for her and things I had shared with her" (137). I think I can justifiably say that neither my friend nor Annie John would have felt a similar embarrassment if Annie's relationship had been with a male. Kincaid forces
women to look at themselves as the primary nurturers of other women, to acknowledge as essential an intimacy among women. This is a radical shift from the usual focus on male\female relationships in the autobiographies written by West Indian men. Kincaid decentralizes the importance of male\female relationships with regard to the developing female and makes essential relationships between females.

Males are conspicuously absent from this narrative. Annie's doting father is not a central figure. Annie's relationship to her father also changes when she is rejected by her mother. Both Annie and her mother play a game for Mr. John. They pretend that there is no rift between them. Although he obviously senses that something is wrong, he never attempts to intervene or discover the cause of the problem. Toward the end of the book, Annie's father, who is thirty-five years older than her mother, becomes feeble, and Annie, as she watches him become increasingly dependent upon her mother, becomes more determined in her resolve never to marry.

We always hope for a reconciliation between Annie and her mother. We wish Annie's mother were able to talk to her daughter about becoming an adult, lead her gently into adulthood rather than shoving her away and equating independence with rejection and withdrawal of overt affection. We understand that Annie's mother also feels a great loss, but she realizes that because Annie is female,
life will hold particular cruelties for her.

At the age of fifteen, in what seemingly becomes the final preparation for adulthood, Annie retreats. She becomes ill for three and a half months, and she is unable to communicate with the outside world or care for herself. Annie becomes a baby again, dependent on her mother for her every need. Always at work during this time is her memory, and she, in her state of semi-consciousness, relives the first fifteen years of her life. It is significant that her maternal grandmother, along with an obeah woman from Dominica, her mother's childhood home, come to nurse Annie back to health. It is as if she needs all the gentle maternal nurturing to make up for the lack, to heal the void within her. Annie comes out of her illness reborn; she discovers that she is like a new person. She walks and talks differently and is able to command respect from her classmates just by raising an eyebrow. Annie realizes that she must leave her parents and continue her new life, the life for which she has so painfully been prepared, in another place.

In the last chapter of the autobiography, Annie leaves Antigua for nursing school in England. It is a move and a career in which she has no interest. However, it is a way out. On the morning of her departure, Annie surveys her life and the room she has possessed for seventeen years. Annie decides that it is she who has changed and not her
parents. She thinks, "All the things I used to be and all
the things I used to feel are as false as the teeth in my
father's head." She describes her mother as a "hypocrite"
and wonders why she didn't discover earlier that her mother
really didn't love her and could well live without her (133).
And even with the recognition of her mother's
hypocrisy, Annie realizes that she has, in many ways,
become her mother, for she believes she is a hypocrite too.
We realize that neither Annie nor her mother are hypocrites
and that later on, at another time and, as Fanon says,
under different skies, Annie will understand.

The theme of loss, subsequent retreat or death to the
self, and rebirth is one that is played out over and over
again in the autobiographies of West Indian women. In an
essay on Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home, Joyce Walker-
Johnson explains why the book, which is called a novel, is
also an autobiography. Walker-Johnson says that
autobiography may refer to

- the personal life or to the communal life and to
- works belonging to another genre which make
- indirect reference to the details of the author's
- life. Moreover, the writer can, simply by choice
- of theme, indicate an autobiographical
- preoccupation without adhering to the facts related
- in any one person's history. Facts may also be
distorted to accomodate the design of a work and to
highlight thematic propositions. These observations are true of *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, which makes its claim to being an autobiography not on the basis of a faithful representation of its author's life but rather because of its thematic concerns and its use of the central character (47). Brodber's autobiography is the most experimental of the women's autobiographies. The narrative does not follow a chronological progression of time, but the thematic cycle that appears in the other autobiographies is clearly present in this one. Nellie is the central character and Brodber's obvious fictional counterpart. Her sense of wholeness, as individual and female, is dependent upon a putting together of her family's (both nuclear and communal) history, and this, I think is a characteristic of the autobiographies of West Indian women. Essential to their development as women and West Indians is this awareness of history. It is as if woman and island (always referred to as feminine) are connected, and the history of both must be revealed, uncovered, told. This liberation is of particular importance to West Indian women who, because they are women, suffer additional spiritual, emotional and physical bondage. Walker-Johnson notes that "the Caribbean woman's behaviour, as Brodber describes it, has been formed very much in the same way as that of the slaves, to avoid conflict and to promote survival. Women, therefore, become
accomplices in their own oppression" (48). This behavior, as revealed in all of the autobiographies comes, in large part, through an acceptance of the myths surrounding womanhood passed down to the young girl by the women in her family. Women's knowledge of themselves is as fragmented as the West Indian's knowledge of her history and what it means to be West Indian. Each aspect of the woman's identity as woman and West Indian is shrouded in mystery and must be uncovered bit by bit until wholeness is achieved. Evelyn O'Callaghan suggests that the message that comes from Jane and Louisa is that "acknowledgement of all one's ancestors is essential for complete liberation of the individual and the group" (77). This is a very African notion and a fine example of the non-Western aspect of West Indian autobiography.

Uncovering these identities and achieving wholeness usually involves some traumatic experience. This most often takes the form of loss. Girls "lose" their mothers—figuratively in Annie's case, or literally in Tee's case. Death figures prominently in the autobiographies of these women. Edgell's Beka Lamb loses Greatgran Straker and Toycie. Early in Brown Girl, Brownstones, we find Selina studying a family photograph in which she is absent. There is a boy in the picture who would have been her brother had he lived. The memory of this boy and his death is a cloud that always looms over the lives of Selina and her family.
Her old friend Miss Mary dies, and there is, of course, the death of her father, Deighton, which permanently changes Selina's life. Tee's story begins with the death of her mother and an unborn child, and the struggle for custody which ensues between Tantie and Beatrice centers around whether the maternal or paternal aunt has a right to rear Tee and brother Toddan. "A Working Woman" in Lionheart Gal remembers the grief that she feels when her child, whom she has had to give to her parents, becomes ill and "him dead and buried" before she is ever notified. Nellie's story opens with the death of Miss Ann's son and eight year old Dotty, and the entire first chapter of Annie John is about Annie's growing awareness of and subsequent fascination with death. Death, it seems, is a catalyst; it provides an awakening to life, an awareness of the meaning of life. Perhaps it is a foreshadowing of the coming death of childhood and innocence, death of the spirit, death of things as the young girls have previously known them. There seems to be a tacit agreement among women that any realistic portrayal of life must include a contemplation of death and what it means for the living.

In each autobiography the young girl experiences a death of the spirit following the traumatic and painful loss in her life. It is a death that mirrors women's lives in that it offers few options. The young women either remain spiritually dead like Marshall's Silla Boyce and
Brodber's Aunt Becca, or they are resurrected, reborn, renewed, ready to face life squarely as whole women. This spiritual death takes many forms. Kincaid's Annie becomes ill, Edgell's Beka Lamb retreats "inside herself" and becomes detached from her loving and supportive family. Nellie and the women in her family "go eena kumbla," a phrase which aptly describes the process of retreat and the beginning of spiritual death:

A kumbla is like a beach ball. It bounces with the sea but never goes down. It is indomitable. Moreso than the beach buoy...A kumbla has three properties. It bounces anywhere. Unlike the buoy, it is not tethered...It makes no demands of you, it cares not one whit for you. But the kumbla is not a beach ball. The kumbla is an egg shell, not a chicken's egg or a bird's egg. It is the shell of the August worm. It does not crack if it is hit. It is as pliable as sail cloth. Your kumbla will not open unless you rip its seams open. It is a round seamless calabash that protects you without caring. Your kumbla is a parachute. You, only you, pull the cord to rip its seams. From the inside. For you. Your kumbla is a helicopter, a transparent umbrella, a glassy marble, a comic strip space ship. You can see both in and out. You can touch them. But they cannot handle you.
And inside is soft carpeted foam, like the womb and with an oxygen tent. Safe, protective time capsule. Fed simply by breathing! They usually come in white (123).

Beka Lamb's mother offers her daughter the two possibilities that adult life holds for young Belizean girls: They can be "flat-rate Belize creoles" or persons with "high mind" (1). We meet Beka Lamb after her "change" has come, and Beka has finally, much to the joy and relief of her family, opted to become "a person with high mind". Beka thinks that her change began "the day she decided to stop lying" (17). For her family the additional evidence of Beka's change is the remarkable improvement in her schoolwork and the prize-winning essay she has written. Beka wins first prize in an essay contest which her Grandmother Ivy swore could only be won by "bakras, panias or expatriates" (1). The narrator gives us the story of the painful and traumatic events that provided, in a few short months, the impetus for Beka's transformation from carefree childhood to responsible young adulthood.

It is Beka's best friend Toyce's "change" which, coupled with the death of Greatgran Straker, precipitate the "change" in Beka. Toyce, who is an excellent student and a "good girl," gets pregnant and seems to accept society's prediction that she can no longer be a person of high mind. Toyce is unable to see that she can be a
respected and respectable woman who happens to be a single mother. She could have known, however, if Beka's Gran Ivy had told her, as she later told Beka, that "Toycie's first trouble caught me too, and I turned to rocking the cradle" (170). But Gran Ivy kept silent as she had been conditioned to do. Because she is unable to face disgrace, Toycie retreats and begins to decline physically and mentally. She never comes out of her kumbla and has a tragic end. As Toycie declines, Beka retreats:

Inside herself she was beginning to feel detached from the family concerns and activities, finding consolation for the death of Great Grandmother Straker, and for Toycie's absence, by working at something beyond her natural capacity. Instead of finding the work irksome, as she once would have done, she found she enjoyed it; there was satisfaction in the challenge and she was growing less dependent on the family's praise to make her feel whole (151).

But Beka, discovering her potential and worth, emerges from her kumbla with an understanding of Toycie's life and needless death and an understanding of herself and what it means to be a person, a woman with high mind.

Like Annie, Nellie enjoys a relatively happy life until she reaches the age of eleven and her mother, in a voice which she has never heard before, tells her that "something
strange" will happen to her. Nellie knows that the something is something that she should be ashamed of because her mother will not look at her. She tells Nellie that she must go to her aunt when it happens. Shortly after her mother's warning, Nellie begins to notice that things are happening to her body. She compares her chest to a rotten banana root that has two suckers growing out of it.

"I am rotting," she says, "I needed cleansing" (119). Nellie's fears are confirmed when she goes to her father and he will not touch her. She is female. She does this "hidey-hidey thing" that makes people whisper. The thing has "corrupting powers," for it makes people change. When Nellie's old friend and companion, Mass Stanley refuses to see her anymore and suggests that she will only want to play with boys now, she feels terribly hurt and betrayed. When Nellie plays with her young male friends people begin to watch them suspiciously. Even the boys change toward her. They look at her strangely, and none of them wants to play the old games with her anymore. "It" has made Nellie dirty and untouchable and guilty, unfit to remain at home with her family. She is sent to Aunt Becca.

The onset of menstruation, the sign of the ability to reproduce, is a turning point in the lives of Nellie, Annie, and all young women. "The fear of premature pregnancy, with its shameful confirmation of overt, adult
knowledge is a constant threat," (Cooper 142) and this fear is what often causes the initial rift between mothers and their daughters in the autobiographies. Mothers seemingly cannot accept their daughters' emerging womanhood because of their own guilt and ambivalence about their sexuality and their overwhelming fear of pregnancy and disgrace, so they retreat into silence or make their daughters feel guilty about natural bodily functions and feelings by talking about these things in negative terms.

There can be no platonic relationships between girls and boys once a girl begins to menstruate. Every encounter with a male will lead to a sexual relationship. Sex is never presented as a participatory or pleasurable act. Sex is something that is done to the woman. Because sex is something bad, something that "spoil you and drag you down," young women begin to associate sex with pain. They do not understand the sexual act for it has never been explained to them, but it is always discussed in negative and sinister terms. It is no wonder that young women often use the sexual act as a weapon, or as a means of hurting the women who have hurt them. Paule Marshall's Selina Boyce provides a good example for us. Selina has a sexual relationship with Clive on the first night they meet, and she uses that continuing relationship to defy and repay her mother for "killing" her father and not caring enough.

Like Annie John, Selina Boyce is involved in a war with
her mother throughout her entire adolescence. Selina initially sees her mother as a joyless woman who is obsessed with owning a home and becoming respectable. It is Silla's apparently ruthless pursuit of her dream that, in Selina's mind, precipitates Deighton's descent into madness and eventual death. The dream that Silla pursues so relentlessly is what Selina perceives to be the "American Dream," and Selina wants no part of America.

Paule Marshall, born in the United States, is one of the "Brooklyn-born Bajans," ("Poets" 26) and Brown Girl, Brownstones is her autobiography. Although Brown Girl, Brownstones is set in New York, it is as West Indian as the life stories of Hodge or Kincaid or Brodber. Brown Girl, Brownstones is Marshall’s special gift to us, for she offers a glimpse of the United States that has heretofore remained unseen. From Marshall we learn what it’s like to be West Indian and female in the United States--to be in the United States but not of it.

In The Pleasures of Exile, as we have noted earlier, Lamming suggests that America did not exist for the West Indian. I think that is to a great extent true for the West Indian intellectual. Claude McKay, for example, is the only writer we have discussed who took up residence in the United States. I do not think, however, that Lamming’s statement necessarily holds truth for West Indians from the working class. Many such persons went to the United States
in search of the American Dream. *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is the story of one family's pursuit of that dream. But it is also Selina's story—a story about a young girl who feels what Marshall calls an "absolute powerlessness" and a "triple invisibility" because she is female, black and foreign in a paternalistic and racist society that merely claims to be a "melting pot."

The insularity of the Barbadian community is one focus of this autobiography. The Barbadian community in Brooklyn is portrayed as an enclosed society. Bajans live in their own communities and rarely venture out except to work. They seem to have no desire to become a part of the larger American community that exists outside their neighborhood. We are given the impression that the Bajans want it that way. For example, when Claremont Sealy suggests that the Barbadian Association change its name to Negro Association and include "every colored person that qualify," (222) the other members of the association are outraged and even accuse Claremont of being a communist who wants them to let in "the Sammy-cow-and-Duppy for them to take over" (223). The Barbadian homeowners rent primarily to black Americans and believe themselves to be superior, more ambitious and hard-working than they. Miss Thompson, Selina's black American friend, echoes the sentiments of the Barbadians when she says, "West Indian peoples are sure peculiar, but you got to hand it to them, they knows how to get ahead"
What seems obvious to the reader is that neither group knows the other and so a common aura of misunderstanding clouds the vision of both native born and newly arrived Afro-Americans. There are instances when the Bajans recognize that some remote relationship exists between these two groups. Iris Hurley, with a pang of guilt, says that she feels sorry "'enough for them sometime, y'know...Even though they ain Bajans they's still our color..." (223). The relationship between blacks born in the United States and blacks born outside the United States reflects Paule Marshall's feeling that the "white man has succeeded in dividing our house" ("Shaping" 103).

The alienation and isolation of the community is reflected in Selina Boyce. Although she was born in the United States, she refers only to Barbados as home in spite of the fact that she has never been there. Selina's attitude comes from the community in which she lives. To them, Barbados is always home, and the United States is simply where they live. There is, however, no expressed desire to return to their island home. The Bajans' collective aspiration is to own a home in the United States. Deighton Boyce, Selina's father, is the one exception, and this is the root of the conflict that divides Deighton and Silla Boyce. It is a conflict caused by their different experience of life in Barbados. While
Deighton remembers carefree days and a good life, Silla's memories and those of the other Bajan women are quite different. Silla's voice is the "collective voice of all the Bajan women, the vehicle through which their former suffering found utterance" (45). When Selina tells her mother that she wants to follow her father's dream and go to Barbados to live, her mother lashes out at her:

'What you know 'bout Bimshire?...Nice? Bimshire nice? Lemme tell you how nice it is. You know what I was doing when I was your age?...Yes, you might call it school, but it ain the kind you thinking of, soul. The Third Class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in his heaven till it set. With some woman called a Driver to wash yuh tail in licks if yuh dare look up. Yes, working harder than a man at the age of ten....And when it was hard times...I would put a basket of mangoes 'pon my head and go selling early early 'pon a morning. Frighten bad enough for duppy and thing 'cause I was still only a child...(45-46).

It takes a long time for Selina to understand how much she and her mother share simply because they are women and how much she and her one black American friend, Miss Thompson, share because they are black women in the United States. At the end of the book, there is an incident
which joins Selina and her mother, Selina and Miss Thompson, Miss Suggie and the other Bajan women from the working class. Selina, invited to the home of a white friend, is interrogated and humiliated by the girl's racist mother. After telling Selina about the delightful West Indian maid who was just like one of the family and including every conceivable racial stereotype, the girl's mother tells Selina that she is not like the others; she does not "act colored. I mean, you speak so well and have such poise...Your race needs more smart young people like you" (288). After running away, Selina remembers Miss Thompson's story about the white man who permanently injured her by stabbing her with a rusty shovel, and she remembers her mother and all of her mother's friends who must suffer the indignities that they suffer daily as they toil in the homes of white women in order to provide for their families and attain their dreams. "Selina truly saw—with a sharp and shattering clarity—the full meaning of her black skin," (289) but more important than that is that Selina finally understands what causes her mother's joylessness and knows that she, too, will be joyless if she retreats into long suffering and does not actively try to discover who she is and what it means to be female and black and West Indian in the society in which she lives.

One of the common characteristics that women have shared is silence, the refusal to articulate how it feels
to be a woman and how it feels to be oppressed. Women have traditionally suffered in silence, somehow thinking that there was a certain nobility in doing so. These silences have cost them their lives and in many cases, the lives of their daughters. They did not die; they simply never reached their full potential as human beings. Women from the lower classes have kept silent longer than women from the middle class. Much of their silence was out of necessity. As primary wage-earners for their families, they had no time for telling stories. As women who viewed their lives as insignificant, they believed that they had no story to tell. As women who were often illiterate, they were unable to tell their stories. The Lionheart Gals have found their voices, and one of them says, "When yuh succumb to certain tings in silence yuh build up the power of di oppressor to exploit a next person. Me starts boots meself fi talk up (103).

Sistren's Lionheart Gal, appropriately subtitled "Life Stories of Jamaican Women," is autobiography in its most revolutionary form. So unconventional is this work that critics like Evelyn O'Callaghan suggest that the stories in Lionheart Gal are not authentic, for she says they are as 'fictionalized,' as a recently published collection of short stories and "stand somewhere between fiction and research data" because they have been "so shaped by selection, editing, rewriting and publication" ("LG" 93). These
comments stem from the careful editing done by Honor Ford Smith, who served as amanuensis for the women.

But David Williams and Carolyn Cooper believe in the authenticity of the stories in *Lionheart Gal* and recognize its revolutionary form. Cooper calls the work "impeccably subversive" because it "engenders an oral, Creole subversion of the authority of the English literary canon" (1). Williams agrees that it is subversive, but he gives different reasons:

*Lionheart Gal* is subversive because it disrupts the expected link between autobiography and the single author...it is a collection of autobiographical fragments that coalesce into a text that challenges basic assumptions about the primacy of the conventional autobiographical 'I'...As a feminist text, moreover, *Lionheart Gal* specifically questions the paternal and patriarchal intimations that lie behind the concept of the Author (2,3).

In addition to this, *Lionheart Gal* questions the relationship between authorship and social class. The women who form The Sistren Theatre Collective were recruited from an emergency employment program developed by the government of Jamaica. Most of the women involved in Sistren are from the working-class, and their autobiographies differ markedly from their sisters in the
middle-class. For example, Williams notes that there is an "absence in these life stories of the self-conscious balance of retrospection and re-enactment that characterizes much of the autobiographical writing done so far in the Caribbean":

No woman in *Lionheart Gal* casts herself as the protagonist in a drama of conflict between opposing forces, or as the tormented spirit which breaks through into the morning after the dark night of the soul, roles which the self in conventional autobiography falls into with great ease. No woman here, in other words, conceives of herself as a hero—a posture that many autobiographies find impossible to resist (6).

Sistren's first project was a play which, as the women suggested, was "'about how we suffer as women. We want to do plays about how men treat us bad'" (Smith xxii). In an attempt to document the work of the theatre collective, Smith collected "testimonies" from the women, and these testimonies were to become *Lionheart Gal*. Once the sistren found their voices, they were not to be silenced again.

Smith met with the women collectively at first, and they actually drew their stories on paper. After the initial sessions, Smith met with each woman individually and asked the following questions, which were obviously inspired by the women's initial voicing of the bad
treatment they received: "How did you first become aware of the fact that you were oppressed as a woman? How did that experience affect your life? How have you tried to change it?" (Smith xxvii). Lionheart Gal provides the answers to these questions.

Perhaps the most pronounced difference between the lives of the women in Sistren and those of middle-class women is the kind of oppression which they suffer. Working-class women suffer far more physical abuse than their middle-class counterparts. Sistren tells horror stories of incredible abuse by fathers, lovers, mothers, siblings and employers. In "Rebel Pickney," the author says, "All my life me live in fear....My fadda no believe inna no discipline at all, but muderation. Just pure beating. When him beat, him beat deadly" (5). Some of the abuse is related to an unwanted pregnancy, an almost universal experience among working-class women which, after drinking "pure eyewater for tea, lunch and dinner," (117) they inevitably accept as a fact of life. Many of the women give accounts of being literally thrown out of their homes when their mothers discovered their pregnancies, and many were subjected to public humiliation and ridicule. The irony of the situation is that almost every woman cites ignorance as the reason for the first and often subsequent pregnancies. Although sex and pregnancy are presented to the adolescent girl as taboos, no one establishes for them
the relationship between sex, menstruation and pregnancy. The writer of "Rock Stone a River Bottom No Know Sun Hot" expresses a common sentiment when she recalls:

Me know seh people must have sex fi have baby, but me never know in terms a how. Me never start fi have me period yet and me never know notten bout me body....Me nah tink notten bout no baby, like seh someting would a happen. Me not even tink seh it would a hard fi me have di baby, dat me would a haffi go a hospital...A no because a wants mek me get pregnant. Me no know wah mek me go get pregnant...(48,55).

Conditions at home, single-parenthood, and lack of education are just a few of the reasons why these women are forced into menial jobs. Exploitation, both financially and sexually, is an integral part of their lives. Most of the women have worked as domestic workers or "helpers," as they are commonly known in Jamaica. The writer of "A Working Woman" describes a typical day:

Ah was di washer and do di cleaning and tidying of di house....A bell connect from fi-dem room to fi-we room. Every morning at five o'clock dat lady ring dat bell...Ah had to get up and go in di kitchen and get di breakfast. As di breakfast finish and him go tru do gate, me start tidy di house and mek up di bed...Me mek up di bed and
sweep out di house...By eight o'clock, ah finish tidy out di house. Ah had to wash and iron every day for di man change a white shirt every morning and every evening. Every week yuh have fourteen shirt fi wash fi him, fourteen underpant, fourteen marina, fourteen pair a socks. When him go a him bed, him tek off dat and put on him pyjama. In di morning, him wake up and put on one clean suit fi go a work, so ah have dat amount of clothes to look after fi di man plus her clothes and di madda's. By twelve o'clock yuh have to put di clothes on di line...At two, yuh start pick up di clothes to iron dem...Yuh iron till four thirty...Six o'clock is dem dinner time....When yuh see everybody close dem knife and fork yuh know dem finish eat and yuh can clear di table...Den when dey finish and everybody get up from di table yuh go in and tidy di kitchen..Yuh sweep di kitchen. At eight thirty yuh finish work fi di night-dat is if dey don't have visitors (75,76).

In each story, the woman always moves toward providing a better life for herself and her children. Women often experience intolerable conditions moving from job to job and man to man to earn money and provide the basic necessities, for the women declare that they do not want to live out their lives as their mothers did. Almost all cite
Sistren as a lifesaver, the means through which they have attained not only a modicum of financial security but a formerly unknown self-respect. They are women who have believed their lives were insignificant and now have something to give to the society in which they live.

These women, perhaps more than any of the other autobiographers show us the power of the autobiographical act, for they have previously led invisible lives. Unlike middle class women, the Lionheart Gals have had little value placed upon their lives. Annie and Selina and Tee begin life thinking that they are important, that they matter. And yes, things change as they reach puberty, but even in their care-givers’ inept attempts to protect them from "de dungle heap," these women can look back from present to past and know that their lives had value to someone. This is not always true for the Lionheart Gals, who often begin life on "de dungle heap" and have to make their lives mean something. The writing of these life stories is for these women not an act of re-creation but an act of creation. We are forced to know and acknowledge them, and after reading their stories, we shall never forget them. The author of "Ole Massa and Me" begins her story by telling a story that is typical among lower class women. She attaches herself to various men because she believes that she is unable to take care of herself:

Sometime when yuh no have notten and yuh have di
pickney dem and dem a look to yuh fi food and fi shelter, yuh haffi do sometings weh yuh no really waan fi do, just fi survive. Sometimes a better yuh cyaan do, mek yuh tek certain man. Sometime yuh really in need. A man might use dat fi ketch yuh. Yuh might know a so it go, but yuh in need. Yuh want it, so yuh haffi tek it (201).

She continues her story by telling us about a series of relationships with men by whom, through ignorance or rape, she becomes pregnant. Although she moves in and out of these relationships in order to survive, she always finds herself alone with her children and no better off after the relationships are over. She eventually meets Ole Massa, whom she initially does not like, but he takes care of her. Ole Massa, of course, treats her as the other men in her life have treated her. She is the object which cooks, cleans, bears children, and provides sexual pleasure. No consideration is ever given to her needs or desires, for she is there to serve. And then she becomes involved in the theater collective and discovers a self that she never knew:

Ah play plenty lead parts. Each one bring out a different strength in me. Each one is a challenge and ah always try fi mek it better dan de last. Me acting work make me proud a meself, proud a we as a people. Ah tink it mek Old Massa proud of me too.
Dat first bring in di changes between me and him
(216).

And she completes her story by telling us how, after she
found her "different strength," love between Ole Massa and
herself developed and grew.

All of the women whose stories we have discussed are
Lionheart Gals, women who had the courage to write
themselves into being and into history. Their stories have
similar endings, for they are the stories of newly created
lives. It is through these previously silenced women that
we fully understand the power of the word, for the
transformation, the "change" began with the articulation
of a common condition of suffering. The first of many
steps toward healing was talking and listening, sharing
their inner selves themselves with other women and
expressing the pain that was life for them.

**Lionheart Gal** is a revolutionary form of autobiography.
It challenges our notion of the authority of "the author"
in that it is composed by women who are not writers, and, who, until the act of creative life-writing, were not
thought to have authority over even their lives, much less the stories of those lives. **Lionheart Gal** further subverts
our idea of literariness in that it uses an oral language
to create a distinctly Jamaican autobiography, one that is
linguistically and experientially Jamaican. Finally, **Lionheart Gal** is unmatched in its sheer creative power. It
is for these things that I offer kudos to the Lionheart Gals! Respect due everytime!
I met History once, but he ain't recognize me, a parchment Creole, with warts like an old sea bottle, crawling like a crab through the holes of shadow cast by the net of a grille balcony; cream linen, cream hat. I confront him and shout, 'Sir, is Shabine! They say I'se your grandson. You remember Grandma, your black cook, at all?' The bitch hawk and spat. A spit like that worth any number of words. But that's all them bastards have left us: words (Walcott, CP 350).

In this study, I have tried to make a case for West Indian autobiography and to explain why the autobiographical act is crucial to the development of an individual and collective West Indian self and West Indian consciousness. My discussion has focused primarily on beginnings: the emergence of West Indian literature, the formation of newly independent nations, and the creation, through the revolutionary act of life-writing, of an autonomous West Indian individual and collective self.

West Indians were left, as Walcott says, only with words, a language. The colonizers believed this to be a simple legacy, a gift left to improve the natives--make them more civilized. But Prospero never expected Caliban to master his language, to be intelligent enough to use it as a means of fighting against his oppression. The transformation of Prospero's words into a language that
articulated a West Indian history and created a West Indian self represents a victory for the West Indian people. Using only words as their weapons, they have won the battle against dehumanization and colonization.

For colonized people, indeed all oppressed people, writing is an expression of the desire for freedom, and the desire for freedom, as Selwyn Cudjoe says, is "essentially a political act in a colonial situation--an act of resistance--writing then becomes a political act fraught with all the urgency and necessity within the context of the Caribbean" (68). Cudjoe continues:

In a colonial society emerging from political dependence, struggling for national liberation and searching for national identity, the fusion of both processes (political and literature) is not only indistinguishable, it literally becomes indissoluble. In the extreme or critical stages of national liberation, one becomes almost analogous to the other... (68).

West Indian autobiography is the most political genre within the already highly political body of West Indian literature, for it assumes a West Indian self which refutes and contradicts the image of the West Indian portrayed in the literature of England. The consciousness of the reality of the West Indian self as separate from England and the subsequent assertion and expression of that self in
literature was the first major step toward the decolonization of West Indian people.

We cannot underestimate the crucial role that autobiography played in the movement toward independence, particularly when we consider how the colonizers attempted to thwart all possibilities of this phenomenon. Helen Tiffin notes:

Absentee landlords, absentee planters, are literally and metaphorically at the centre of the worst atrocities of Caribbean slave history...But in a more general sense, the England which wrote itself into and onto the Caribbean, stifling the possibility of a Caribbean autobiography, was also an absence—an absence and yet at the same time a pervasive presence ("Rites" 42).

The colonizers, fully aware of the power of their words, exerted their power and presence primarily through the imposition of a literary tradition. Time and time again West Indian writers discuss the influence that the English educational system and English literature have had on their lives. Whatever they learned about themselves, they learned by reading English books. Though they realized that the landscapes in these books were not their own landscapes, the culture described in these books was not their own, and the people described in these books were not like them, the word was so powerful that they somehow
accepted as fact that by means of discovery, conquest, and primarily language, they had become the property of the British.

There are many persons in Caribbean history who refused to be objectified: Toussaint L'Ouverture and Dessalines of Haiti, Samuel Sharpe, Nanny, and Cudjoe of Jamaica, and innumerable others who fought against the physical enslavement of Caribbean people. Although individuals reached their goal, the enslavement continued, and eventually it became not physical bondage but the more powerful capture of the mind through indoctrination and education. Autobiography, the rewriting and re-creation of the West Indian's life written in his own words and his own form, was essential to release West Indians from the mental captivity imposed on them by the colonizers.

David Williams, in a discussion of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, Walcott's *Another Life*, and James' *Beyond a Boundary* talks about the relationship between the West Indian's acquisition of language and the creation of the autobiographical self. He says that these autobiographies:

make common cause, beyond their obvious differences of emphasis, as narratives that celebrate the presence of that unique and coherent self whose triumph is precisely that it is present at all. For the ex-colonial West Indian, indeed, the
autobiographical self demonstrates the acquisition of a language that Caliban was thought incapable of understanding, much less learning (1).

The language that West Indians learned, however, may not necessarily be the same language that they use to write their life stories and to express the realities of West Indian life and culture. Kenneth Ramchand points out that West Indians, like other colonized people, have been accused of speaking "bad English" because their indigenous languages fall below the standard set by the English (Novel 85). Consequently, writers like Claude McKay felt that their native tongues were inferior. Patois was, after all, not even a literate language, so how could it be a literary language? Samuel Selvon was one of the first to demonstrate how his language could be literary. He wrote about the folk and put the language he spoke and heard on the roads and in the markets and rumshops of Trinidad in the mouths of his characters. Selvon understood early on that the English language is not the property of the English anymore. West Indian writers have taken the English language and reshaped it as a language adequate and sufficient to their own experience. There is now a West Indian Standard English. The language, like the people, has been decolonized.

The power of this language takes on added significance for women, who suffer a double oppression in that they are
oppressed by the overall system of colonialism and further oppressed by their patriarchal societies. Although they achieved their freedom as West Indians, they were still held captive by men. After long years of silence, the West Indian woman has discovered the power of the word, has written herself into being and has given new meaning to the term Caribbean woman.

We can find no better example of the radical and revolutionary form of West Indian autobiography than Lionheart Gal, a collection of many stories told in patois as one story. Lionheart Gal represents a coming together of women who raise their voices in unison to tell the world that they exist. Other autobiographies merge fact with fiction to increase the sense of their fully creative character. The use of third person, a name that is not the author's real name, is perhaps the most interesting and the most troubling aspect of West Indian autobiography, but the subject of West Indian autobiography is a third person, a newly created person. The subject of autobiography is neither the person of the past nor the person of the present. The subject of autobiography is a third person who represents a meeting of past and present somewhere in time.

We have noted that the experience of exile gave West Indian writers a new language— one that expressed the responses to the previously unknown attitudes of racism and
xenophobia. The emergence of West Indian literature, and West Indian autobiography in particular, is linked to the experience of exile which led to the development of a West Indian sensibility and consciousness. Laurence Breiner notes that London's displacement as the "capital" of the West Indies has lessened contact among West Indian writers, and they are now "rarely in the same place at the same time" (140). He suggests that London's role as "central clearinghouse" for West Indian writers was crucial and neither the University of the West Indies nor numerous literary conferences and gatherings has replaced it. Breiner wonders if there is still something that can rightfully be called West Indian literature.

If the writers' exodus from the West Indies to England was central to the emergence of West Indian literature, the return of West Indian writers to the West Indies was essential to its perpetuation and provides the best refutation of the notion that a continued relationship with Britain is necessary. According to the writers themselves, a prolonged stay in England was the primary threat to the existence of West Indian literature. Although their time in England provided emotional motivation, audience, and often some degree of notoriety and economic security, we must remember that writers were always writing about the West Indies. It is the West Indies which provided the inspiration and the material for their work. As they
continued to remain in England, however, many writers realized that they were beginning to lose touch with their creative sources. It is at this point that each writer had to consciously choose to remain an authentically West Indian writer, or risk, as did Jean Rhys and Claude McKay, being absorbed by the adopted country. Arthur Drayton says that the freshness of the West Indian writer wanes with the continuing sojourn abroad. An occasional visit back home cannot restore the writer's "native sustenance," and the West Indian writer is dependent on this sustenance. All exiled West Indian writers, continues Drayton, had they remained abroad, would have ceased to be West Indian (586-88).

The writers themselves seem to agree with Drayton. Michael Anthony, for example, says, "I really think that the place of the West Indian writer is in the West Indies" ("Growing" 84). Anthony in "Growing Up in Writing" discusses the need to return to his home. He wonders if he can continue to depend on recollection for the material for his books. Anthony acknowledges that he and Trinidad have changed, and he feels as though he is beginning to falsify some things about his country. He insists that a writer needs to hear the dialogue that he is writing. Anthony, while admitting that he loves England, says, "I can't write about England because to me I have not made emotional contact with it" (86). He concludes by saying that he must
leave England if he is to continue to write (87).

While not all West Indian writers believe that they must live in the West Indies, all seem to feel that it is absolutely necessary to return to the West Indies for sustenance. Samuel Selvon, for example, is the one writer whom Arthur Drayton cites as being in no danger of losing his West Indianness by residing in England— but only because he has proved capable of switching to writing about West Indian exiles while himself in exile:

Selvon's genius needs to be fed by the actuality of life before him. While in Trinidad Selvon wrote stories about Trinidad, once he moved to England, the West Indian in England became his special province. Moreover, for a time his writing in exile gained added poignancy by compelling a comparison between his image of the West Indian in London and the image in his earlier work of the West Indian at home (587).

But even Selvon, who wrote almost exclusively about the experience of the exile while in England, found it necessary to return to Trinidad. In "Roots," Edward Brathwaite cites an article in The Trinidad Guardian in which Selvon is quoted as saying, "'I do not think I could have written another book set in the West Indies without coming back to live among my people again'" (12).

There seems to be a similar urge among all West Indian
writers, even those, like Naipaul, who supposedly have few ties with the Caribbean world and who display at times something like contempt for the West Indies. All return, even if only briefly, to reacquaint themselves with the land and the people. Many writers, Brathwaite, Brodber, Hearne, Lamming, Morris and Goodison, to name a few, permanently reside in the West Indies. Although several writers live on islands other than their native islands, there seem to be, as Breiner notes, no problems with identity. Writers comfortably move from island to island and still manage to feel at home in a way that they could not or did not in England or other metropolitan countries. While most West Indians have strong nationalistic feelings for their particular island home, they also see the West Indies as an even larger nation to which all the islands belong. West Indians seem to have equally strong feelings of nationalism and pride in being West Indians. Consequently, they can speak with pride about Jamaican or Trinidadian literature as well as the total body of West Indian literature. The body of West Indian literature is enhanced by its diversity. Each island makes its particular cultural contribution, but the term West Indian literature recognizes and acknowledges a shared history and common heritage. Yes, as Breiner acknowledges, the formal political federation of the West Indies failed, but the intellectual and emotional federation among writers,
artists, scholars and many West Indian people was an overwhelming success.

If there is any threat to the use of the term West Indian literature as Ramchand and others define it, it is the West Indian's inclusiveness. As far back as the 1960's, George Lamming was writing, "...I find that I refrain from saying that I am from the West Indies, for it implies a British colonial limitation. I say rather, I am from the Caribbean, hoping the picture of French and Spanish West Indies will soon be taken for granted" (Pleasures 215). This is a feeling shared by many West Indians. At the recent installation of Sir Shridath Ramphal as Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, he urged the university to move toward a single Caribbean system with links "'with the universities of the wider Caribbean--Spanish, French and Dutch'" (3). And so what we are witnessing is the emergence of the Caribbean person and a Caribbean literature which embraces and acknowledges the contributions of all Caribbean people. This movement leads to a new independence for Caribbean people and goes a long way toward restoring a deliberately divided house.

The battle for autonomy in the Third World is not over because nations suffer a continuing economic deprivation. West Indians always face the possibility of conquest, the possibility of being ruled by some super power for accepting too much money and too many favors, but West
Indian identity and consciousness can never be bought or stolen.

I have been concerned here not with the authors' intentions when writing these works but with what Helen Tiffin calls their "performative function," and that is "the unmasking of the literary and cultural authority represented by England to the end of reconciliation of the self...("Rites" 38). The commencement of West Indian autobiography is the beginning of the bringing together of the fragments of the West Indian self, the beginning of the fusion of the divided self to the end of achieving wholeness. The autobiography is a testament to the continued and continuous existence of a positively and distinctively West Indian self. In the beginning, there was only the word.
Works Cited


184


Drayton, Geoffrey. *Christopher*. 1959. London:
Heinemann, 1972.


---. KAS-KAS: Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas. Ed. Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander. Austin:


Jelinek, Estelle C. "Introduction: Women's Autobiography


---. "Walcott and the Audience for Poetry." Caribbean


Olney, James. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical


---. Voyage in the Dark. 1934. The Complete Novels. New


Curriculum Vitae of
Margaret Kent Bass

EDUCATION


Bread Loaf School Of English, Middlebury College, Vermont, Summer Session, 1984

M.Ed., 1979, Special Education, University of Mississippi

B.A., 1973, Literature and Language, Wilmington, College, Ohio

HONORS

Fulbright Fellowship awarded by the United States Information Agency for dissertation research in Jamaica, West Indies, January–December, 1989

Organization of American States PRA Fellowship awarded for research in St. Lucia, West Indies, September–December, 1987

Kathleen Downey Scholarship awarded for study at Lincoln College, Oxford, England, 1986

Louisiana State University Alumni Federation Fellowship 1985–89

NASA Teacher in Space Selection Committee, Mississippi 1984

Lynnhurst Foundation Grant, Bread Loaf School of English 1984

Tuition Scholarship, Wilmington College, 1967–68

Honorary fraternities: Pi Delta Phi, Societe D'Honneur Francaise 1984, Kappa Delta Pi (Education) 1979

PAPERS PRESENTED


PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Louisiana State University, School of Engineering. Instructor, REHAMS Summer Program for gifted high school students. English Composition, 1987 and 1988


Senatobia, MS Municipal Separate School District. Psychometrist, 1980-81

Simpson County, MS School District. Teacher: Remedial Reading, Remedial Mathematics, English; itinerant teacher for migrant education program, 1974-79

Sleighton Farm School for Delinquent Girls, Philadelphia, PA. Cottage Life Supervisor, 1973-74

ADMINISTRATIVE

Board of Directors, Oxford After-School Care Program, 1983-85
Superintendent's Advisory Committee, Oxford Municipal Separate School District, 1983-85
Teacher-Counselor, Foreign Study Tour to Europe, Mississippi High School, 1979

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Prof. Daniel Mark Fogel, Department of English, LSU
Prof. Prabhakara Jha, Department of English, LSU
Prof. James Olney, Department of English, LSU
Prof. Emeritus Lewis P. Simpson, Department of English, LSU

CREDENTIALS

Credentials may be obtained from the Career Planning and Placement Center, Louisiana State University, 1502 CEBA, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803-6403, upon request.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Margaret Kent Bass

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: To Be West Indian: Autobiography and West Indian Literature

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

12/11/89