At Home in the World: Masculinity, Maturation, and Domestic Space

in the Caribbean Bildungsroman

by

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ABSTRACT

This project examines C.L.R. James, V.S. Naipaul, and George Lamming's appropriation of the European Bildungsroman, a novel depicting the maturation of the hero prompted by his harmonious dialectical relationship with the social realm (Bildung). I contend that James, Naipaul, and Lamming use the Bildungsroman genre to critique colonialism's effects on its subjects, particularly its male subjects who attend colonial schools that present them with disconcerting curricula and gender ideologies that hinder their intellectual and social development. Disingenuously cloaked in paternalistic rhetoric promising the advancement of "uncivilized" peoples, colonialism, these novels show, actually impedes the development of its subjects. Central to these writers' critiques is the use of houses, space, and land. Although place functions differently in Minty Alley, A House for Mr. Biswas, and In the Castle of My Skin, the novels under consideration here, the corresponding relationship between a mature, autonomous self and a home of one's own is made evident in each. Tragically, the men in these novels are never able to find communities in which they cease to feel out of place, nor are they ever able to find secure domestic spaces. Because the discourse of home so closely parallels the discourse of Bildung, I contend that the protagonists' inability to find stable housing suggests the inaccessibility of Bildung in a colonized space. Further, I assert that this literal homelessness is symbolic of the educated male's cultural exile; he is unable to find a location where he can live in dialectical harmony with any community, which is the ideal aim of Bildung. Leaving the Caribbean proves to be the colonized male's only strategy for
pursuing *Bildung*; thus, these novels suggest that while *Bildung* is impossible in the Caribbean, it is not impossible for the Caribbean subject.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF BILDUNG IN THE CARIBBEAN

“The readiest account of place might define it as nation . . . But, this idea of place does not cover the nuances, principally of reassurance, fitness, belonging, association, and community, entailed in the phrase at home or in place”

Edward Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic

I. At Home in the World

In Gareth Griffith’s A Double Exile, he writes of the Caribbean subject, “Colonial exploitation deprived him of the possession of the islands in a spiritual sense. This lost sense of place and identity has been something against which generations of West Indians have struggled” (110). Notable about Griffith’s remark is his acknowledgement of the concomitant nature of place and identity, and his tacit conviction that one’s identity is bound with one’s location. An individual’s location, the geographical space he inhabits, largely determines whom he will encounter, what experiences he may or may not have, what his educational and professional opportunities will be, what sort of material resources he will have access to – in short, his horizon of opportunities. Griffith’s current of thinking runs through most discussions of Caribbean identity. Many of the key issues on which Caribbean studies are focused – exile, diaspora, marginalization, liminality – are either explicitly concerned with the subject’s location or use spatial metaphors to understand a condition of being in which he feels out of
place. Indeed, homelessness, whether it is of a physical, social, or spiritual nature, might very well be the defining theme of scholarship pertaining to identity and culture in the Caribbean.

This project looks at home, homelessness, and identity by examining C.L.R. James, V.S. Naipaul, and George Lamming’s appropriation of the European Bildungsroman, a novel depicting the hero’s self-cultivation propelled by the establishment of a harmonious dialectical relationship with the social realm (Bildung). I contend that James, Naipaul, and Lamming use the genre to critique colonialism’s effects on its male subjects. Disingenuously cloaked in paternalistic rhetoric promising the advancement of “uncivilized” peoples, colonialism, these novels show, actually impedes the development of its subjects. Central to these writers’ critiques is the use of houses, space, and land. Although place functions differently in Minty Alley, A House for Mr. Biswas, and In the Castle of My Skin, the novels under consideration here, the corresponding relationship between a mature, autonomous self and a home of one’s own is made evident in each. An idealized notion of home also comes to represent an antidote to the feelings of homelessness that are endemic to diasporic peoples, feelings riddled with additional complexities for the colonized male who suffers the psychic split engendered by colonial schooling. Tragically, the men in these novels are never able to find communities in which they cease to feel out of place, nor are they ever able to find secure domestic spaces. Because the discourse of home so closely parallels the discourse of Bildung, I want to argue that the protagonists’ inability to find stable housing suggests the inaccessibility of Bildung in a
colonized space. Moreover, I contend that this literal homelessness is symbolic of the educated male’s cultural exile; he is unable to find a location where he can live in dialectical harmony with any community, which is the ideal aim of *Bildung*. *Bildung*, these novels demonstrate, is simply not possible for men in the colonized Caribbean.

My decision to focus on narratives about young men is partially in response to the broader trend in contemporary criticism of Caribbean literature to look exclusively to the female experience when studying literature through the lens of gender; Gisela Bock has noted that academic “questions about gender have mainly focused on the female sex, on the ‘woman question’. Men appear to exist beyond gender relations to the same degree that they dominate them” (17). The absence of scholarship focusing on masculinity in Caribbean literature is largely due to the feeling that, as Belinda Edmundson puts it in *Making Men: Gender and Literary Authority*, “the male experience . . . has already ‘made its case’” (3). Edmundson’s point is not totally inaccurate in the sense that first- and second-wave Caribbean writers were male, and thus much of the work on Caribbean literature was consequently male-centered. However, this criticism did not focus on examining masculinity as a gender issue, partly because “the phenomenon of gender is so closely associated with women’s issues and concerns in the English-speaking Caribbean that the discourse has rarely involved consideration of the extent to which masculinity forms an integral part of the dynamics of gender relations” (Lewis 98). I would assert, however, that if we take gender as a construction, as an “allocation, investiture, assumption and performance of social
roles and identities based on biological sex” (Forbes 4), then we should bear in
mind that “masculinity and femininity are relational constructs, [and] the
definition of either depends on the definition of the other” (Kimmel 12). In other
words, if we are going to look at how femininity is constructed and enforced
through social and political discourses of power, we ought to do the same for
masculinity. Contrary to Edmundson’s claim, scholarship about men and gender
in Caribbean literature is far less common than that about women. In the field of
Caribbean literary studies, men and masculinity have not, in fact, made their case.
To my knowledge, the only study of the Caribbean male Bildungsroman is a
chapter in Geta LeSeur’s Ten is the Age of Darkness. While LeSeur’s work is a
useful resource, it is somewhat cursory because it is done in the context of a much
larger survey of African-American, Caribbean, and African male and female
Bildungsromane undertaken in order to demonstrate overarching similarities in
the experience of childhood among black individuals. Thus, this project seeks to
fill a gap in the scholarship by investigating the male experience of maturation
and socialization depicted in the Bildungsroman.

My study is also motivated by the observation that while prior scholarship
on the postcolonial Bildungsroman has rightly observed writers’ use of the
Bildungsroman as an instrument of critique, I do not think it has adequately
investigated the narrative strategies used to make this critique; I find this to be
particularly true in the cases of James and Naipaul. ¹ Much has been written on

¹ I use Ashcroft, Tiffin, and Griffith’s definition of the postcolonial as that time
period which covers “All the culture affected by the imperial presence from
their reliance on the European novel tradition. Edmundson’s book takes as its point of departure her fascination with what she describes as male Caribbean writers’ “Victorian sensibilities” (2) and she contends that their obsession with “Victorian writers and writing that reveals itself in this primarily male West Indian canon, then, becomes a factor in the construction of the nation itself” (2). However, these studies do not look at how the writers subvert these traditions. I believe that in the cases of James’s Minty Alley and Naipaul’s A House for Mr. Biswas, the writers use their fluency in European literary traditions, particularly that of the Bildungsroman, to engage in acts of satire; James writes what I shall call, drawing on Homi Bhabha, a “mimic Bildungsroman” and Naipaul uses an ironic narrative strategy to contradict the superficial resolution of his novel. Lamming, on the other hand, does not exhibit a Victorian sensibility; instead, his heteroglossic, fragmented narrative aligns itself with a distinctly modernist tradition. Finally, I hope to add to the body of scholarship on discourses of home by examining the previously unexplored connection between home and self in the Bildungsroman and fleshing out a model of home that shows why houses are such powerful symbols in these novels.

II. Postcolonial Bildung and the European Tradition

The Bildungsroman, a genre of the novel that depicts the young subject's personal and social development in relation to the community, traces its roots to the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). Thus, even though all of the novels I am studying take place and were written in the colonized Caribbean, I use the term "postcolonial" when referring to them.
late eighteenth-century German philosophy. In its classical form, it is a profoundly conservative genre which endorses a patriarchal bourgeois social order; however, the genre has been repeatedly adopted and adapted by writers far in time and space from its German Enlightenment origins, particularly by those in regions of the world colonized by European imperial powers. The Bildungsroman is a controversial genre because its original definition is both precise and narrow to the extent that few works seem to meet its requirements. The classical Bildungsroman is enmeshed in specific socio-historical circumstances that circumvent its application, and yet it is a term that remains in wide usage beyond those circumstances. The apparent contradiction between what a classical Bildungsroman actually is and what Bildungsroman is often used to describe has been widely commented on by scholars of the genre who lament the promiscuous use of the term and quarrel over what can and cannot be considered a Bildungsroman. Other critics, exasperated with the genre's historical baggage, have advocated for abandoning the word in favor of other terms that are more specific to the texts they presume to name. Critical frustrations are not unfounded, for those who closely study the genre are likely to find a bedeviling object of study.

The term Bildungsroman was not coined until 1820, 25 years after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, which is widely considered the genre’s prototype. Goethe, however, did not set out to write a Bildungsroman, per se. It was Karl von Morgenstern who coined the term in his lectures on the essence and history of the novel (Martini 8). Though the
appellation originated with von Morgenstern, it was not introduced into common usage until 1906, when Wilhelm Dilthey defined the whole genre in accordance with *Wilhelm Meisters* in his essay on Holderlin. Dilthey explained that when reading a Bildungsroman "a regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time a basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass" (qtd. in Steinecke 92). The classical *Bildung* plot follows a certain trajectory in which the protagonist

[b]reaks from the familial and social authorities in order to experience the world freely; but youthful rebellion turns out to be a forgivable, even necessary interlude before a reconciliation with those same authorities . . . He is a bourgeois hero, in rebellion from the father and the social values he represents, seeking an apprenticeship to life in symbolic journeys and edifying sojourns.

In the end the *Bildungsheld* returns to the fold, still young but a little wiser -- a prodigal son, artistic rebel, and good bourgeois -- returns to close the circle. (Castle 9)

In other words, the classical Bildungsroman begins with a dissatisfied or curious protagonist leaving the realm of familiarity and patriarchal authority on a quest that entails some sort of aesthetic education and perhaps an apprenticeship and concludes with a peaceful acquiescence to the dominant social order. This acquiescence marks the successful transition into adulthood, as Franco Moretti
asserts, “A Bildung is truly such only at a certain point . . . youth passes into maturity” (26), a maturity signaled by the protagonist’s assumption of his proper bourgeois role. In Hegel’s wry summation, “in the end [the hero] usually gets his girl and some kind of position, marries and becomes a philistine just like the others” (qtd. in Swales 50).

The term is now generally used to broadly refer to coming of age narratives, to the dismay of some scholars of genre and German literature who have engaged in lengthy arguments surrounding the genre. Jeffery Sammons maintains that the Bildungsroman is a “peculiarly German form” (28), one that

Initially . . . was by no means devised to define a type of the European novel. In its modern history, which begins with Wilhelm Dilthey just around the founding of the German Reich, it came to lay claim to a particular German tradition with its philosophical origins in the Classical-Romantic age of Humanitätsphilosophie and its literary archetype, Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. This is just the period when German literary history was subjected to an elaborate and long influential recanonization [. . .] This took place under intense nationalistic and ideological pressures, with the aim of demonstrating a German cultural Sonderweg that was not only different from but in some ways superior to the foreign cultural developments in both West and East. (29)

For Sammons, then, the Bildungsroman cannot be examined outside of its German Enlightenment origins, so indivisible it is from its genealogical roots in
the work of “Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Herder and the philosophical milieu of late eighteenth-century Germany” (Esty, *Unseasonable Youth* 5). Additionally problematic is that so few texts actually meet the generic requirements of the classical Bildungsroman. While many novels loosely follow the narrative arc of the Bildungsroman, few end with the harmonious reconciliation with the social world which is the hallmark of a successful Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman, to the chagrin of Sammons and other German literature scholars who see the use of the term outside of its German context as dubious and inaccurate, has come to signify many things and is often casually used to describe coming of age novels, novels of education, and novels of maturation that do not have anything to do with *Bildung* in its Goethean sense. As Sammons complains

> It seems clear that if the term is to be applicable to the whole universe of discourse of general literature, the claims made for its peculiar Germanness in its initial introduction dissolve . . . introducing[ing] an uncontrollable arbitrariness into the usage of the term that, in turn, raises questions why we should retain it. (35)

Susan Fraiman, Wangari wa Nyetutu-Waigwa, and Lucy Wilson raise different concerns from those of Sammons; they believe that the term is so loaded with historical baggage that it ceases to be an apt descriptor for novels written by women, people of color, and postcolonial people and instead offer alternative terms.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Fraiman, in her study of nineteenth-century female Bildungsromane submits the alternate phrase “novels of development,” and Wangari suggests we use “liminal
However, I proceed from the position that genre must be flexible to remain viable and that, as Alastair Fowler reminds us, "we are not at liberty to invent generic groupings as we like, but have to come to terms with the institutionally objective genres discovered by the methods of literary history" (260). Genre is an attempt to categorize literature in order to help reader's situate their expectations and to facilitate conversation about literature. As Franco Moretti points out, formal patterns of genre "are what literature uses in order to master historical reality and to shape its materials in the chosen ideological key" (Moretti xiii) and the Bildungsroman "stands out as the most obvious of the (few) reference points available in that irregular expanse we call the novel" (Moretti18).

We must keep in mind Martin Swales’ reminder that the literary species or genre is, then, a historically evolving thing and that the mechanism of that evolution is the interlocking of – in T.S. Eliot’s terms – tradition and the individual talent . . . Herein resides the element of newness, the individuality which is at one and the same time the modification and the transmission of the literary genre. (48-9)

novel” when discussing postcolonial coming of age narratives. The liminal novel is “a novel of coming of age in which the rite of passage [. . .] remains suspended in the middle stage” (3). The African protagonist, Wangari argues, cannot have any sort of Bildung because the dynamics of colonialism have left him unable to reach a complete maturity. Wilson argues that “the novel of development has undergone such a radical transformation in the hands of West Indian Women writers that it is no longer appropriate to refer to it as Bildungsroman”(283). Instead, Wilson suggests the phrase “novel of relational autonomy” to describe narratives that trace “the expansion of the protagonist’s consciousness as she recognizes and acknowledges the complexity of the world, defining herself in relation to it” (285).
In order to ensure the genre’s continued viability, we must be willing to acknowledge and accept that growth and self-realization mean different things in different contexts and are highly dependent on factors such as gender, culture, class, and location; the struggles a young Indo-Caribbean boy faces in Trinidad to come into his own, as well as his limited opportunities to do so, will be quite different from those of a white bourgeois male in Weimar. A more inclusive approach to the study of the Bildungsroman is possible if we can acknowledge that Dilthey and Morgenstern’s ideas about the genre were descriptive rather than prescriptive, derived as they were from observations of Goethe’s novel rather than broad theories of the novel. Accepting Moretti’s more generous definition of the Bildungsroman as the narrativization of “The conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally impervious demands of socialization” (19), permits us to continue to use the term to account for novels that grapple with the conflict between self-development and social integration, even when these novels arise from historical circumstances and material conditions not conducive to classical notions of Bildung, including those in postcolonial regions like the Caribbean. Indeed, studying literature through genre can provide unique insight into those regions because, as Tzvetan Todorov points out, “Like any other institution, genres light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong” (19).

Mary Louise Pratt’s theory of “transculturation” provides a way for readers to understand how postcolonial writers could appropriate the Bildungsroman. Transculturation is a process whereby “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s terms”
The term is used to denote the colonized’s strategic borrowing and transformation of materials, concepts, and ideals transmitted from the dominant culture. Thus, when we speak of the Caribbean Bildungsroman, we speak of a transculturated model wherein colonized writers adapt the form and use it to represent their own experiences and realities which often entails a necessary turning away from what are considered generic norms. In order to understand why this transculturation is compulsory for Caribbean writers, I want to look at the basic philosophical assumptions underpinning the concept of Bildung.

Scholars who study Bildung begin with Prussian educator, linguist, and diplomat Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose *The Limits of State Action* (1791) details the ideal relationship between the individual and the state and in respect to Bildung. In *The Limits of State Action*, Humboldt argues, "The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole" (10). The stress on self-cultivation and self-reflection is reiterated in his assertion that the greatness of mankind is reliant upon him working "towards [that] which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts: individuality of energy and self-development" (2). However, this development must occur in a context that encourages it through the recognition of individual rights. While maintaining the importance of living within the confines of lawful society, Humboldt placed a premium on the individual subject; in his view, social relations were necessary but secondary to one's internal growth. The state's most important function was to
assure the citizen the freedom, an indispensable condition in Humboldt's formulation, for that harmonious development of one’s highest powers:

The state must wholly refrain from every attempt to operate directly or indirectly on the morals or character of the nation . . .

Everything calculated to promote such a design and particularly all special supervision of education, religion, sumptuary laws, etc. lies wholly outside the limits of legitimate activity. (81)

Humboldt believed that the state could best assure this freedom by protecting its citizenry from the threat of outside forces and remaining disengaged from its private lives. Simply put, the state’s role was not to order and discipline but to support and protect.

Humboldt’s vision of Bildung, then, rests on two requisites: opportunity for development and a state that is hospitable to such a process. Alas, neither of these requisites is met in a colonized setting. Humboldt explained that Bildung was catalyzed by an energy which he characterized as “the first and unique virtue of mankind” (72), but for the colonized subject there are very few ways to expend this energy in a quest to reach one’s highest potential. The lack of material resources available to the colonized is inherently problematic for self-cultivation; the colonized Caribbean lacked printing presses, museums, libraries, and widely-accessible schools. Even for that rare scholarship student who did get a secondary education, professional opportunities were strictly limited. The economic structures of colonialism assured that the vast majority of colonized subjects in the Caribbean toiled in poverty so dire that their lives were consumed by ensuring
the satisfaction of their basic needs. As David Sorkin points out in his study of Humboldt, “An individual’s development depends upon finding appropriate outlets for that energy so that he can engage in activity by means of which he realizes his potentialities and increases his abilities” (58), but for the colonized the problem of finding appropriate outlets is a significant one. However, an even more pregnant problem for the practice of Bildung in the Caribbean is the colonial superstructure, one which, far from giving its subjects freedom and opportunity, was predicated on the colonized’s lack of freedom. The harmonious relationship between the state that Humboldt envisions is not feasible in a colonial state, for the basic economy of colonialism is based on depriving colonized subjects of freedom. To be colonized, by definition, is to not be free.

Albert Memmi describes a bond between the subject and the state in colonial spaces that is markedly different from that which Humboldt valorizes. Although Memmi is not writing about Bildung, per se, I believe that his discussion of maturation under colonialism in The Colonizer and the Colonized can be viewed as a theorization of the impossibility of Bildung under colonialism. Memmi’s seminal text provides a psychological interpretation of the dilemmas faced by both the colonizer and the colonized due to the power dynamics inherent in their relationship; his portrait of the crisis facing the young colonized man is particularly useful in understanding why the colonized youth’s pursuit of Bildung is doomed to failure. For Memmi, one of the primary problems facing the colonized subject is that

The colonized enjoys none of the attributes of citizenship; neither
his own, which is dependent, contested and smothered, nor that of
the colonizer. He can hardly adhere to one claim or the other. Not
having his just place in the community, not enjoying the rights of a
modern citizen, not being subject to his normal duties, not voting,
not bearing the burden of community affairs, he cannot feel like a
true citizen. As a result of colonization, the colonized almost never
experiences nationality and citizenship, except privately.
Nationally and civically he is only what the colonizer is not . . .
Nothing therefore suggests to the young colonized the
self-assurance or pride of his citizenship. He will expect nothing
more from it and will not be prepared to assume its responsibilities.
(96-97)

What Memmi describes here is a kind of cultural homelessness that leads to a
crisis in identity formation. Deprived access to many of the social networks which
humans use to constitute their self-identities, the colonized suffers from an
absence of affiliations and is exiled in his own homeland. The colonized nation
does not provide a context within which Bildung can occur; in this respect, the

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3 My use of “affiliations” here is meant to recall Edward Said’s “Secular
Criticism” in which he defines “filiations” as relationships with one’s natal
and familial communities “held together by natural bonds and natural forms
of authority” (The World, the Text, and the Critic 19) and “affiliations” as
relationships with the communities of one’s choosing, i.e. “a party, an
institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world vision” one that is
“greater than the individual adherent or member . . . the ideas, the values, and
the systematic totalizing world-view validated by the new affiliative order
are all bearers of authority too, with the result that something resembling a
cultural system is established” (20).
geographical location of the colonized, the space he inhabits, becomes antagonistic to his internal life. He does not choose his identity; instead, he is merely "what the colonizer is not," in a place where he does not belong. In addition to the personal trauma this causes the colonized subject, Memmi points out, this lack of opportunity functions to perpetuate and sustain colonial rule by ensuring that the colonized persist in a state of suspended development that renders them incapable of civic participation and self-government, and thereby remain in a condition of childlike-dependency on the colonizer.

This dependency is figured as a perpetual adolescence. As an adolescent, Memmi explains, the colonized boy feels discontent with the colonial state of affairs and this discontent, combined with a normal teenage desire to separate from one's family and forge a path in the world, leads the adolescent to revolt against the father. This revolt is "wholesome" and an "indispensable one for self-achievement" (97); it is what allows a young man to "start his adult life - a new unhappy and happy battle - among other men" (97). This movement away from the family, from filial to affiliial realms, suggests a desire for Bildung, as the colonized subject sets out to create himself, independent from his family and find his own place in the world. However, for the colonized adolescent, this rebellion is doomed because it is predicated on the condition that "movement be possible" (98), and movement, choice, momentum, and change are the very things which Memmi asserts are not possible in a colonial society:

The colony's life is frozen; its structure is both corseted and hardened. No new role is open to the young man; no invention is
possible . . . colonized society is a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures. Its century hardened face has become nothing more than a mask under which it slowly smothers and dies. Such a society cannot dissolve the conflicts of generations for it is unable to be transformed. The revolt of the adolescent colonized, far from resolving into mobility and social progress, can only sink into the morass of colonized society. (99)

The calcified nature of colonial life is reflected in the young man's own arrested development; his pursuit of Bildung is stymied on both the personal and communal fronts in that he is deprived of the necessary material opportunities for self-cultivation while also being denied a civic role in the community.

Unable to engage in the enterprise of choosing a direction in life, unable to find any role for himself as a man, the colonized subject is left with three options: revolution, assimilation, or petrification. Memmi argues that revolution is crucial to the liberation of the colonized's psyche, but it is also the least likely choice among the three options, for the colonized must have enough of a consciousness to recognize his own plight. Though the colonized might opt for assimilation initially, he will soon learn that assimilation will be refused him by the colonizer. Assimilation proves to be a double bind, for it entails "impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self. The crushing of the colonized is included among the colonizer's values. As soon as the colonized adopts those values, he similarly adopts his own condemnation" (121). On the other hand, even should
the colonized be able to endure the "internal convulsions and contortions" (123) endemic to assimilation, it is still precluded by the colonizer's rejection, for "all that the colonized has done to emulate the colonizer has met with disdain from the colonial masters" (124). Thus, without revolution, petrification becomes the default condition, whereby the colonized is driven back by colonization and, to a certain extent, lives with that situation in which "planning and building his future are forbidden. He must therefore limit himself to the present, and even that present is cut off and abstract" (102). The calcification of colonized society paralyzes the colonized subject's development at the point of adolescence as his revolt fails and he sinks back into that "morass of colonized society." This "sink" is characterized by the young man's return to the family, which is "an internal catastrophe. He will remain glued to that family which offers him warmth and tenderness but which simultaneously absorbs, clutches, and emasculates him" (101). What is important to note is that the return to the family not only infantilizes the colonized man, but it also feminizes him; his inability to leave the family home and create his own leaves him psychically castrated.

In the three novels I investigate in this project, we see Memmi's observations borne out. Haynes in James's *Minty Alley* ends up in that petrified state of which Memmi speaks, as does Biswas in Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Despite both their attempts to develop their inner lives and find a community where they can bring these inner lives into fruition, both men end the novels in states very similar to those in which they began. However, G. in Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* revolts against this stasis in the form of self-
imposed exile. His friend Trumper’s revolutionary words echoing in his ears, G
seems on the precipice of a new journey at the end of the novel, which suggests
that perhaps the only way the colonized can revolt against the developmentally
paralyzing conditions of colonialism is through exile. The contrast between
Humboldt and Memmi’s formulations reveals why any Caribbean Bildungsroman
is going to differ dramatically from the classical version, for a colonial state
stands in opposition to the conditions which Humboldt argues are necessary for
Bildung and which the colonizer champions at home in the metropolitan center.

III. The Caribbean Bildungsroman

Despite the considerable historical and cultural baggage the
Bildungsroman genre carries and the problems of Bildung for the colonized
subject, many postcolonial writers have chosen to write novels depicting the
subject's transition from childhood into adulthood and attempts at self-
development and finding a community that can sustain him. Gareth Griffith
attributes the popularity of accounts of childhood and adolescence in Caribbean
literature to the historical conditions of the Caribbean which left the writer with
"only the fact of separate existence, his colour, and his distinctive habits to oppose
the colonial values he has inherited" (79). Consequently, "all that he can begin
with is his own experience" (79). Griffith also writes that "by recreating the
experience of childhood, the novelist can literally trace the growth of a specific
West Indian consciousness, and show how it is shaped into a unique and
distinctive pattern by the social, political, and geographical realities it encounters"
Simon Gikandi’s *Modernism in Limbo* can also shed light on this choice of genre. Gikandi contends that Caribbean literature and culture are haunted by the presence of the “discoverer and the historical moment he inaugurates” (1). He explains that in order to claim any sort of subjectivity, Caribbeans had to struggle for “historicity and that "the history of Caribbean literature can be written as the evolution of a discourse striving to establish its identity within the parameters defined by the European language" (19). Because "Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European modernism, especially as defined by the colonizing structures, but neither can they escape from it because it has overdetermined Caribbean cultures in many ways" (3-4), writers must find a way to "inscribe Caribbean selves and voices within an economy of representation whose institutional and symbolic structures have been established since the discovery" (10). In other words, while Caribbean writers can use genre to resist and critique, because they lack their own native textual conventions, they must work within those predetermined generic parameters to represent their experiences. Writing the Bildungsroman is one strategy by which Caribbean writers can carve out a space for their voices within a literary tradition that is at once foreign and inescapably familiar.

There has been a fair amount of criticism dedicated to the postcolonial Bildungsroman. In “Kim, Huck, and Naipaul: Using the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman* to (Re)define Postcoloniality,” Feruza Jussawalla offers a specific model of the postcolonial Bildungsroman. She writes:

They [the colonized protagonists] first go to school and come in
contact with English (or French) language, with Christianity, and
with Westernization. After having taken a journey that . . . leads
the child to solitary speculation about who s/he is, they usually
connect with the land and the quintessential culture of the land.
The child then reaffirms his/her turn away from Westernization or
modernization and turns towards an introspective knowledge of
who he or she is within the parent culture. (32)

I admire Jussawalla’s efforts at defining the genre but cannot help but sharply
dissent from her position. While she points to Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic
Verses* and *The Moore’s Last Sigh* and Rudolpho Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima,*
among a few others, as examples of the model she constructs, there are far more
Bildungsromane written by postcolonial writers that do not end in this rediscovery
and reaffirmation of the subject’s parent culture. Jussawalla may be describing
what the ideal *Bildung* in the postcolonial novel *should* resemble but her model
does not fit the reality. Indeed, Jussawalla is the rare critic that sees the possibility
for a harmonious resolution to the postcolonial Bildungsroman.

Most criticism has zeroed in on the way *Bildung* is problematized in the
postcolonial Bildungsroman and what the failed pursuit of *Bildung* suggests. Jed
Esty argues that “colonialism disrupts the Bildungsroman and its humanist ideals,
producing jagged effects in both the politics and poetics of subject formation”
(41) and that authors of such novels “rework narrative time via youthful
protagonists who conspicuously do not grow up. Moreover, they use plots of
colonial migration to establish the blocked attainment of maturation or social
adjustment” (“The Colonial Bildungsroman” 41). In his study of African Bildungsroman, David Mickelson suggests that the form depicts the struggle and ultimate inability of the subject to “achieve a balance between the civilizing education of the colonial power and the traditional culture of his forefathers” (12). Defining the classical Bildungsroman as “the legitimation in narrative of the process of socialization itself” (434), Maria Helena Lima assumes a similar position to Mickelson and explores the ways in which this sort of legitimation is obstructed by colonialism. The opportunities available for self-determination, material success, and community power are severely limited by colonial structures, and it is these limitations that render the European Bildungsroman unsuitable for the Caribbean writer, in that “for both male and female adolescents in the West Indian the task of choosing a direction in life, then, may bring about painful discovery and crisis, as they are faced with only limited options and apparently conflicting cultural systems” (435).

Critics also look at how the Bildungsroman is used as an instrument of critique by postcolonial writers. José Santiago Fernández Vásquez believes that “one of the reasons why postcolonial writers turn to the Bildungsroman is the desire to incorporate the master codes of imperialism into the text, in order to sabotage them more effectively” (86). Leila Gandhi examines how Indian writers subvert the Bildungsroman form by casting the knowledge of England as a problem, and Lima argues that female Caribbean writers’ choice of the Bildungsroman is an attempt to lay claim to a “European tradition that is in a sense hers; by transforming the genre, however, she demonstrates how inadequate
a white male model is to her reality” (455). While Lima’s argument is based on the central notion that the Bildungsroman is not an appropriate form for postcolonial writers, she does not champion the abandonment of the genre by Caribbean writers. She believes that the concept of genre takes on increased importance when reading the postcolonial Bildungsroman; genre becomes “central to reading postcolonial literatures, to understanding how ‘the Empire Writes Back to the Centre’ since different cultures, at different times, (re)produce genres to serve culture-specific purposes” (432).

I do not take issue with any of these critics’ perspectives on postcolonial writers’ choice of the Bildungsroman form; I think it is used in various ways and for a variety of purposes. However, there is another reason I believe it to be such an effective tool of critique that has gone largely unmentioned: it makes visible the utter duplicity at the heart of the civilizing mission which was used to justify colonialism. Through the depiction of colonized subjects who desperately try but cannot achieve Bildung, these novels reveal the hollowness of the civilizing pretensions which England used to legitimate its rapacious exploitation of the non-European coordinates of the globe. This strategy is especially powerful when we consider who comprised the primary readership for these writers’ work.

When Lima says that the study of genre is important to understanding how “‘the empire writes back’,” she is borrowing the phrase from Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths’ seminal text of the same name. What is crucial to observe in this title is the assumption of a dialogic relationship between the metropolitan center and the imperial outpost; if the empire is writing back, then it
is doing so with the intention of being heard (or read) by the imperial powers. Indeed, many Caribbean writers have noted that their audiences are primarily British; because of the dearth of educational and publishing industries, as well as a primarily illiterate population in the Caribbean, there simply was not much of an audience for Caribbean writers in their home islands prior to the 1960s, when educational opportunities became more widely available. These writers, then, faced a situation in which they were read by the very people they were critiquing. This circumstance is discussed at length by Lamming in his essay “The Occasion for Speaking.” Compounding the problem of a largely illiterate population in the Caribbean, Lamming argues, is the problem that even those who can read choose not to read literature. He writes, “the West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilized activity which justifies itself in the exercise of his mind” (42). Lamming attributes this aversion to reading among the literate to an association of reading with rigorous and culturally irrelevant schooling. Because of this lack of an audience, “the West Indian writer does not write for them [West Indian people], nor does he write for himself. He writes always for the foreign reader” (44), and in the case of West Indian writers, that reader was British.

Ironically, it is in England that Caribbean literature as a genre came to be born. The first novel to be published by a black Caribbean (C.L.R. James’s *Minty Alley*) was published in London in 1936 by Secker & Weinberg. Both Naipaul and Lamming’s first novels (along with most of their subsequent work) were first published and distributed in England by British publishers. The British
Broadcasting Company (BBC) ran a program from 1943 to 1958 entitled “Caribbean Voices” which, according to Kamua Brathwaite, was “the single most important literary catalyst for Caribbean creative and critical writing in English” (87), and not only featured and promoted virtually every major Caribbean writer of the era but also provided employment for many of them, as well. During this era, Caribbean literature was read, studied, reviewed, and discussed far more in England than it was back in the Caribbean. This most likely would not have been the preference of these writers, but, as Lamming explains:

> The historical fact is that the emergence of a dozen or so novelists in the British Caribbean with some fifty books to their credit or disgrace, and all published between 1948 and 1958 is in the nature of a phenomena . . . what is important . . . is the tragedy that there is hardly a West Indian politician – Williams is the only exception to my knowledge – who knows this fact or who would be capable of evaluating its significance. (“Occasion for Speaking” 29)⁴

Because of this lack of a reading public in the Caribbean, Caribbean writers were painfully aware that any audience their work found would be among the colonizers.

> With this audience in mind, I contend that the Bildungsroman provides an especially appropriate choice as a purveyor of criticism because it is predicated on

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⁴ Here Lamming refers to Eric Williams, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago from 1956 to 1981. An early disciple of C.L.R. James, Williams held a Ph.D. in history and was a professor at Howard University. He wrote the landmark study of slavery in the Caribbean, *Capitalism and Slavery*. 
the successful transition from childhood to adulthood which colonialism purported to engender in its primitive subjects. Indeed, the entire British colonial endeavor was ideologically based on the idea that it would better the uncolonized parts of the world by bringing them the fruits of civilization and modernity. These novels of failed Bildung expose the hypocrisy in those colonial professions of good intent; counter to its purported ambitions to improve and to develop, to essentially parent, those child-like barbarians of the “uncivilized” world,

IV. The White Man’s Burden

In English Thought in the Nineteenth Century, DC Somervell writes, “imperialism was a sentiment rather than a policy; its foundations were moral rather than intellectual” (qtd. in Nandy 1). This is simply not true. Imperialism’s foundations were economic. However, a great deal of discourse was devoted to legitimizing imperialism through casting it as a moral endeavor dedicated to civilizing less evolved peoples. Indeed, even the legal basis for imperialism was dependent on the idea that those who dwelled in the regions conquered by colonial powers were not fully developed as human beings. Wolfram Schmidgen points out that in seventeenth century England “the three central mechanisms for claiming foreign territories – conquest, cession, and occupation – were worked out in natural law” (32), law that relied on the doctrine of terra nullius which literally means “no-man’s land” (33). By the criteria of natural law, conquering other territories was legally acceptable so long as those territories were unoccupied. However, for a region to be terra nullius did not mean that, in fact, no man occupied it. Instead, the notion of terra nullius “made it possible to
distinguish between the occupation of land and the mere presence of native peoples on that land, and thus enabled an original claim to possession” (33) by deeming territory that lacked “clear signs of cultivation and permanent settlement and that was not physically connected to a larger national unit to be vacant – unoccupied and hence unpossessed” (33). For instance, Australia, Schmidgen points out, qualified as *terra nullius* not because it lacked a sizeable indigenous population but because that population was judged by English powers as lacking the economic, developmental, and social maturity that would have bestowed it with exclusive property rights (33). If a people did not meet British standards for development, then they were not considered as such and any claims they might have had on the land were null. Thus, accordance with natural law demanded England designate indigenous peoples as primitive.

Imperial England defended the violent attainment of its colonies not only through designating native peoples as underformed but by promising to help develop them into full human beings via the civilizing mission, the idea that colonizers’ central purpose was the betterment of those less advanced people of the world. As Michael Mann writes, “the most powerful tool of self-legitimation was the colonizer’s claim to improve the country” (5) and the lives of its subject people. “Colonialism,” Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, is supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-
century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority.’ (9)

Such a legitimation was necessary because, according to Ashis Nandy, “colonialism minus a civilizing mission is no colonialism at all” (11). Central to the civilizing mission was an explicit corollary between primitiveness and childhood, a homology that Nandy explores in *The Intimate Enemy*, looking at how “colonialism dutifully picked up these ideas of growth and development and drew a new parallel between primitivism and childhood” (15). Growth, development, betterment, formation – all of these things we associate with the movement from childhood into adulthood; in this respect, we can read the civilizing mission as a promise to raise children into adulthood. Jo-Ann Wallace explains:

> An idea of the child is a necessary precondition of imperialism – that is, that the West had to invent for itself the child before it could think specifically about colonialist imperialism . . . it was an idea of the child – of the not yet fully evolved or inconsequential subject – which made thinkable a colonial apparatus dedicated to, in Thomas McCauley’s words, ‘the improvement of colonized people’. (172)

The logical converse of the homology between the child and the “inconsequential subject” is one between the parent and the civilized “consequential” subject; in

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5 Here Wallace refers to Thomas Macauley’s “Minute on Indian Education”
this schema, the colonizer thus becomes “parent” to the colonized “child” and colonialism a “necessary stage of maturation for some societies” (Nandy 14). By casting the colonized as children, colonialism legitimizes itself in two important ways. First, it positions the colonizer in an intellectually, emotionally, and socially superior position; the colonizer is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the colonized because, as the more mature party - the parent - he knows better. Second, it accommodates the dismissal of indigenous resistances to colonial authorities by equating those resistances with the tantrums of petulant children rather than entertaining them as the concerns of equal subjects who warranted equal consideration. This infantilization of colonized subjects “allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories should be subjugated, and, on the other hand, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the imperium as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples” (Said, Culture and Imperialism 10).

One way these patriarchal, civilizing pretensions manifested in the later years of colonialism was in a colonial education endeavor, which actually contributed to the retardation of its subjects. Schools additionally problematized these exclusively male students’ gender developments. The history of education in the Caribbean is the history of an institution mired from the beginning in the inequality, racism, and violence inherent in colonial ideology. Colonial schools were not designed to cultivate and truly educate the colonized, for as Amon Saka Sakaba puts it, "the liberation of field hands is costly business" (23). Instead, they
were meant to give former slaves vocational skills to create a low-level laboring
class sympathetic to the colonial enterprise and, later, under pressure from
English critics, create the illusion that the empire was in fact preparing its
denizens for a future which they might rule.

Education in the Caribbean began with religious institutions. In the late
1700s and early 1800s, a small number of Christian missionaries constructed
schools in the Caribbean for the children of slaves; however, only a few children
were allowed to attend these essentially proselytizing schools. It was not until the
Emancipation Act in 1833, outlawing slavery in British colonies, that England
considered schooling for the newly freed slaves. The Emancipation Act included a
resolution to provide schooling based “upon liberal and comprehensive principles
for the religious and moral education of the Negro population to be emancipated”
(Gordon 19). According to John Willinsky, this “investment in colonial schooling
signaled a move from imperial adventure to colonial consolidation, from the reign
of European bandit kings, in Ashis Nandy’s formulation, to the dominion of
philosopher kings” (89), a move that sought to “instill a manly maturity in its
students that, within the moral economy of empire, would repay the rights of
occupation” (91). To this end, in 1835, the British government commissioned
John Sterling, an Anglican minister, to travel to the newly freed colonies of the
West Indies to ascertain the educational needs of the area. The primary issue at
hand was whether the education of the emancipated slaves should be entrusted to
religious bodies or local legislatures. Both groups were problematic, but, given
that local legislatures were comprised primarily of local plantation owners who
were unhappy about the loss of their free labor force (the Southeast Asian imported indentured laborers would soon assuage this loss) and generally opposed education for these laborers, Sterling recommended that education for the former slave children of the islands be administered by religious bodies. Britain initially offered £30,000 a year for the education of ex-slaves, although this amount began to decrease in 1840 until the funding was finally stopped in 1845 (Ramchand 18). The reasoning behind the decision to rescind funding was explained in a dispatch from the British government outlining its position that the ten years of education Britain had provided was enough to get the former slaves on their feet and which read in part:

> Her Majesty cannot doubt, that if the Labouring Classes at large should be animated by the same spirit of steady and patient industry, which ought always to accompany good instruction, the boon of freedom will not have been bestowed on them in vain, but will give birth to all the fruits which Her Majesty and other well-wishers expected from it. (Ramchand 19)

In reality, ten years of shoddy, disorganized, substandard education could not manifest in this idyllic scenario. For the next 120 years, education on the different islands was wildly varying and inconsistent. The availability of local funding was affected by island economies, conflicts between local legislatures and the religious bodies who had already undertaken the education mission, and disagreements as to whether the majority of funds should be put into primary education or the development of secondary schools (Ramchand 5).
The lack of pedagogical and ideological coherence in the school systems of the West Indies persisted throughout the nineteenth century. The curriculum later began to emulate classical British modes which were no longer used in England and bore little relevance to the lives of the students (Ramchand 4). In the mid- to late nineteenth century, fueled by a Matthew Arnold-esque fervent faith in the ideological powers of literature and education, schooling took on a new aim - to create a class of citizens sympathetic to British views and tastes. Underlying this aim was a belief in Johann Gottfried von Herder's maxim that "the barbarian rules by force; the cultivated conqueror teaches." (qtd. in Willinsky). By 1938, the British government was quite aware of the inadequacies of the colonial school system in regards to creating this class. The British government-commissioned Moyne report of 1939 documented that “curricula are on the whole ill-adapted to the needs of the large mass of the population and adhere far too closely to models which have become out of date in the British practices from which they were blindly copied” (qtd. in Ramchand 5). The British were unfortunately distracted from remedying the educational predicament by World War II, and these educational systems persisted until the decolonization process began in the 1960s when national schools began to emerge and the colonial schools began to fade away in the face of newly burgeoning nationalisms.

Perhaps the most significant problem in educational policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was determining what proportion of available funds should be allocated to secondary schools. That the vast majority of funding was, in fact, used for secondary schooling is a testament to the
inequalities inherent in the school system and England’s lack of concern for West Indian children. To attend a secondary school was an enormous privilege, largely because very few schools existed and those that did charged tuition prohibitive for most black, Asian, and Indian families. Consequently, these schools’ student bodies were comprised primarily of middle- and upper-class whites. Authorities in the late nineteenth century answered charges of racism and dereliction by creating exhibition schemes that allowed a few children to win scholarships to secondary school (Ramchand 27). These exhibitions consisted of a series of exams in several disciplines that required months of intense preparation; a small number of students of color (generally two or three) were granted entry through this rigorous and competitive admission process. Exhibitions were extraordinarily difficult, grueling to the point of cruelty, and, as Ramchand describes, “nothing short of criminal” (27). Additional obstacles for colonial students were rules prohibiting admission for illegitimate children who were, in effect, the majority of black children in the West Indies (Ramchand 27).

It would seem that Bildung would be more accessible for black, Indian, and Asian students lucky enough to attend school. However, these students faced a disconcerting curriculum that, in reality, proved to be an additional obstacle to Bildung. In Lamming’s In the Castle of My Skin, the novel’s protagonist, G., has no awareness of slavery; in fact, he thinks that “it is too far back for anyone to worry about teaching it as history. That’s really why it wasn’t taught. It was too far back . . . Probably it never happened at all” (58). This historical erasure was rooted in a curriculum based on a Manichaean value system whereby white was
privileged over black, male over female, and, most overwhelmingly, England over the Caribbean in such a way that knowledge was removed from the realm of experience. Anything and everything worth knowing was foreign to the colonized student, and home was always elsewhere.

The pernicious effects of colonial education on those few colonized subjects who were allowed access to it are well-documented. By attempting to indoctrinate students with ideology that privileged the metropolitan center and ignored Caribbean culture and history, colonial schools socialized students into a world apart from their own communities; “To be converted savage,” Lamming writes, “is to be lost in an intellectual schizophrenia that cannot be redeemed” (“Western Education” 6). The school grounds were what Pratt calls a “contact zone”, a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (7). Colonized students encountered colonial teachers, social codes, sports, and curricula that sought not to liberate but to indoctrinate them with imperial attitudes and train them mostly for mid-level civil service or teaching positions. Students were marginalized from their own people by virtue of the privileges to which education entitled them, and yet still faced rigid, invisible lines demarcating race, class, and power boundaries that they could not cross, for the dominant culture’s power was predicated on exclusion. This experience created an intellectual schism in students, a sort of double-consciousness that alienated them from their native communities and left them conscripted in to what
Lima calls “a cultural middle passage” (444). Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o explains:

“Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one’s environment” (28). As a result, colonial education stymies the pursuit of Bildung for the educated subject by further complicating the relationship between development and community.

One particular way education contributed to boys feeling out of place was by privileging models of masculinity that were not accessible to colonized men. As Aviston Downes points out, the colonial education system "with its imperial dictates, and its functional linkage with Euro/Christianity contributed to the creation of a version of masculinity intended to sustain the dominance of the ruling class men" (107). This model of masculinity was largely tied into the ideal of the English gentleman; Downes writes:

The appropriate values of hegemonic masculinity were those represented by the English gentleman, since historically creoles were viewed as inferior to their metropolitan cousin. The features of hegemonic masculinity, then, were precisely those which were privileged within England in the Victorian and Edwardian periods: sociopolitical leadership, economic dominance, heterosexuality, headship of nuclear family; chivalric defense of property, empire, and family. Moreover, there was a renewed emphasis on physical prowess, expressed in sports and war which served to reinforce the naturalness of male power. (107)
The model of manhood presented as the masculine ideal was not available to colonized boys for a number of reasons. Most obvious is the fact that the Caribbean student was, in fact, colonized. Imperial masculinity's emphasis on military valor and triumph immediately emasculated colonized men whose colonized state was evidence of their lack of military prowess. British discourses of power often attributed their success to a superior brand of masculinity, a masculinity that was "articulated in the first instance through the symbolic feminization of conquered geographies and in the erotic economy of colonial discovery narratives (McClintock 99). Playing on the popular image of England as the benevolent motherland, colonized boys were cast as children, as a "persistently patriarchal-racist ideology represented black men as 'boys' - permanently infantilized and thus not yet ready for the leadership, certainly not when were whites were available" (Downes 109). Moreover, the very construction of imperial masculinities was predicated on the feminization of colonized men. As Downes explains: "for any representation of masculinity to become hegemonic, the co-optation or complicity of lesser masculinities is necessary. The consequence is empowerment of most men over women, but a control predicated also on the control men" (107). Thus, hegemonic imperial masculinities depended on their ability to emasculate colonized men as a part of demonstrating and defining their own strength. A second reason hegemonic masculinity was not accessible to colonized men was its innate belief that men are "what they can do": what is of central importance to the concept of masculinity,
however, remains the exercise of power and the issue of control. Masculinity is predicated on the presumption of power, whether real or imagined . . . Masculinity therefore is often associated with access to and control over resources, privilege, and status." (Lewis 98)

However, under colonialism, what can men do in these terms? Their limited resources, paths to power, and opportunities for financial success significantly restricted what they could do to assert their masculinity. Thus, while colonized men could mimic hegemonic masculinity, they could never fully inhabit imperial models of manhood and their "pursuit of masculinity defined in British imperial terms would prove illusory" (Downes 107).

Joseph Valente’s work on colonial “manliness” further sheds light on the problems of gender performance. Colonized males faced a double-bind in which any performance of masculinity would be used as evidence for their inability to lead and for the necessity of a continual colonial presence. The role of the English gentleman that colonized students were taught to aspire to was characterized by a type of masculinity Valente calls “manhood.” Colonial manhood entailed self-control, self-restraint, and self-discipline, conduct which was read as the transmutation of base masculine energies into a higher order performance of masculinity. For the English gentleman, the “enactment of lawful self-discipline was received in the larger social arena as a supreme expression of masculine aggression, strength, and fortitude. It bespoke a social cachet and authority too assured to be flaunted, a possession of the phallus in appropriately veiled terms”
(9). However, when performed by the colonized, this brand of manhood, which was not easily differentiated from weak passivity “signaled the absence or loss of stalwart masculinity necessary to justify any bid for liberation” (10). The other available mode of masculinity – violent self-assertion and excessive virility – was also interpreted as a symptom of the colonized man’s underdevelopment in its opposition to the self-control demanded by manhood and used as further evidence of the inability of the colonized to self-govern. Consequently, whether through “lawful acquiescence or lawlessness, even violent opposition, the subaltern can only seek what George Mosse calls ‘the quiet grandeur’ of the manly estate by proving himself unworthy thereof” (10). Colonized men who did not attend colonial schools and were not trained to valorize the English gentleman most likely did not suffer this double bind as acutely as those who did. However, by teaching students to valorize a performance of manhood which could later be used as confirmation of their own emasculation while simultaneously teaching them to disparage the masculinity available to members of their native communities, colonial curricula exacerbated the psychic split suffered by these students.

These things in mind – the depersonalization of land, the infantilization of indigenous peoples, the promise of progress and maturation through the civilizing mission, the problematic colonial education system, the distorted vision of masculinity – I contend that the Bildungsroman, a European genre that is entwined with the cultural politics of European imperialism through “its talismanic association of pedagogic and political privilege within Enlightenment thought that paves the way for the civilizing mission” (Ghandi 60) is an especially
effective tool for striking a blow against the self-legitimation of colonizing discourses. By focusing on education as a problem, particularly for men, and revealing how colonialism, in fact, prevented the development and maturation it promised, postcolonial writers are able to strategically write back to the empire.

V. What They Talk About When They Talk About Home

James, Naipaul, and Lamming largely rely on houses and spatial movement among dwelling places to reveal the impossibility of Bildung for the colonized male. Indeed, this study was in part prompted by noting the emphasis on domestic and community spaces in much of Caribbean writing – villages, rooms, blocks, and houses all figure prominently in many of these texts. Plots are largely driven by the protagonists’ movement from residence to residence, characters are often exclusively associated with one place, and a good deal of textual attention is paid to dwellings under construction, in states of decay, or recently demolished. Houses are the settings for both the openings and closings of the three novels I am studying, and yet the protagonists are rarely at home; their sojourns in various places are seldom permanent, and they often feel uncomfortable in their domiciliary surroundings. Indeed, all three of the novels featured here have titles that invoke place. These observations lead to a number of questions: Why do these characters feel so ill at ease in their domiciles? Why is it that "the construction or demolition of houses is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of postcolonial literature" (Ashcroft, et.al. 27)? Moreover, what role do homes play in the Bildungsromane of James, Lamming, and
Naipaul? It is my contention that in these novels, a home of one’s own comes to be associated with a mature, autonomous male identity; in other words, Bildung. That these characters are never able to find stable housing is used by the writers to reveal the impossibility of Bildung in a colonial context; there simply is no place, no home for a mature, powerful colonized man in a colonized homeland.

Certainly, there are historical reasons that home would take on an increased importance for Caribbeans. For one thing, the Caribbean is a diasporic region – there are no native populations. In other words, in terms of ancestral origins, it is no one’s home. The Taino, Caribs, and Ciboneys, tribes who originally inhabited the islands, are extinct, fallen victim to the expansionist ambitions of the misdirected Christopher Columbus, who wrote of the people he encountered in his diary upon accidentally stumbling on to Caribbean sands:

They brought us parrots and balls of toon and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded everything they owned. They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want. (qtd in “Western Education,” Lamming 36)

Columbus and his imperial cohorts, later from England, France, and the Netherlands managed, through battle, enslavement and the introduction of disease, to wipe out the three tribes in under 200 years. This loss of slave labor left colonial powers, which had seized control of most of the Caribbean by 1800,
in a predicament: who would comprise the labor base that supported colonial economies? In order to do the physical work once done by enslaved natives, colonizers initially repopulated the region with people from Africa, men, women, and children uprooted from their homelands and forced to traverse the Middle Passage as cargo. Later, upon the abolishment of slavery in the British colonies in 1832, successive waves of immigrants from Southeast Asia, China, the Middle East, and Portugal arrived as indentured servants, further contributing to the region’s global transplant population. The result was a population that arrived in the Caribbean under duress, people who were forced to leave their homelands, either through the slave trade in the case of Afro-Caribbeans or because of dire poverty that left them unable to sustain themselves in their native country and forced them to turn to indentured servitude as a means of survival.

This history in mind, it makes sense that for people permanently stranded in a region far from their native lands that home be of premium consequence. Exiled from their countries of origin, Caribbean people look to the creation of homes to signify the creation of new origins and histories. As Alison Blunt points out, home is “a place located on the thresholds between the past, present and future” (19), a place inextricably entwined with the notions of origins and personal history. She points to Derrida’s work connecting archives and houses to support her point, writing:

As Derrida famously observed, the very idea of the archive is bound up with an idea of home. As he writes, the word ‘archive’ comes from the Greek arkheion: ‘initially a house, a domicile, an
address the residence of superior magistrates . . . It is, thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. (Blunt 17)

In this respect, home becomes a place where identity is partially constructed through history. We can read this desire for a home as a desire, to borrow from James Clifford’s work, to turn “routes” to “roots.” Moreover, this desire for a home is also illustrative of a desire for relief from a feeling which Homi Bhabha describes as “unhomely,” “an estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” that is “a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (“The Location of Culture” 13). To be unhomed, Bhabha explains, is not to be homeless, but rather to exist in a state in which one does not feel at home in his or her place. The distinguishing feature of the unhomely condition is a sense of in-betweeness that is created by the collapsing of boundaries between home and world, for “in that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (13). Thus, not only can we read the longing for a home as a longing for history, origins, and permanence but also for an antidote to those feelings of in-betweeness which characterize the postcolonial condition.

I believe that home represents these things in the Bildungsromane of James, Lamming, and Naipaul. However, I want to go further and argue that home comes to represent Bildung. A considerable amount of work has been done in recent years to destabilize and challenge traditional discourses of home which
conflate home and self, much of it emerging from feminist scholars. While this work is exciting and important to understanding how the idea of home functions as a discourse, what I am interested in here is what a house represents for the protagonists of the novels I am studying and why a house specifically would represent these things.

To theorize a model of what I believe home symbolizes in Minty Alley, A House for Mr. Biswas, and In the Castle of My Skin and why it proves to be an apt symbol for Bildung, I draw on the work of J. Douglas Porteous. In his essay “Home: The Territorial Core,” Porteous argues that “at all levels of territoriality . . . from body space to national loyalties, the exclusive control of territory confers three substantial benefits upon its occupants. These essential territorial satisfactions are identity, security, and stimulation” (383). According to Porteous, home provides both individuals and the small groups who occupy it with all three of these satisfactions, satisfactions which result from the control of physical space maintained in two ways: the defense of space and the personalization of space (383). The defense of space creates physical security and the personalization of space creates psychic security. The personalization of space not only provides psychic security but also promotes identity by providing a space that allows “personal identity to flower” (384). Porteous’s use of “flower” here evokes that growth and maturation which is part of Bildung. Protected from the external

6 See Rosemary George’s The Politics of Home, Gillian Rose’s Feminism and Geography, Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty’s “What’s Home Got to Do with It?”, Minnie Bruce Pratt’s “Identity: Skin Blood Heart,” and Caren Kaplan’s “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse.”
world, basking in his privacy, the individual has time and space for self-discovery
and self-reflection; he can work to cultivate his identity. Identity, according to
Porteous, “includes not only one’s self-knowledge but one’s persona as
recognized by one’s fellows” (384) and thus the personalized space of a house,
particularly its outer appearance, comes to represent how “the individual sees
himself, how he wishes to see himself, or how he wishes others to see him. The
house, then, is a means of projecting an image, both inwardly and outwardly”
(384). What Porteous describes here is remarkably similar to the dialectic of
Bildung in which the subject brings his inner life to fruition in the outer world; a
house becomes a symbol not only of one’s individuality but of the recognition and
respect of that individuality by those outside the house. This recognition assures
the physical security of home of which Porteous speaks. As dependent on the
personalization of space home is, it is equally dependent on the recognition of
others as a place belonging to someone, a place built on, in the words of
Rosemary George, “a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions” (2). Home is
defined as much by who is in the house as who is not; the outsider’s respect for
the domestic boundaries of the dweller further resembles Bildung in that home
depends on both the dweller and the community to derive its meaning.

This model of home makes it a useful symbol for Bildung, for it represents
not only the manifestation of the dweller’s inner life through the personalization
of space but also autonomy and power through the ability to draw boundaries and
decline who is included and excluded. However, this idealized space of home
proves to be inaccessible in the Caribbean Bildungsroman; home eludes the protagonists, as does the Bildung which home represents.

VI. The Bildungsromane of James, Naipaul, and Lamming

I begin my investigation of how James, Naipaul, and Lamming use the Bildungsroman to critique colonialism using the trope of homelessness as a metaphor for the inaccessibility of Bildung with a study of James’s one and only novel. In the second chapter entitled “Arrested Development in C.L.R. James’s Minty Alley,” I argue that James writes what I shall call, drawing on Homi Bhabha, a mimic Bildungsroman. The novel, I attempt to demonstrate, adheres quite closely to the classical Bildungsroman plot. However, there are moments of small but significant differences, of slippage, that reveal the subversion at work in James’s text, most significantly James’s reworking of the homecoming that concludes the classical Bildungsroman. With this chapter, I hope to make a critical intervention into scholarship that sees this book as unimportant and irrelevant to the rest of James’s body of politically-oriented work by showing that the novel is a critique of both middle-class colonial mimicry and of colonial discourses that leave those middle-class men with no other options.

My third chapter, “‘Nothing Was Created in the West Indies’: The Failed Pursuit of Bildung in V.S. Naipaul’s A House for Mr. Biswas,” argues that Naipaul’s novel parallels Biswas’s pursuit of a home of his own with the pursuit of Bildung. Biswas’s quest for Bildung, however, is problematized by his lack of material resources and the hostility of his communities to his individuation. That Biswas is finally able to own a home of his own seems to him a great triumph,
Bildung achieved. This victory takes on additional meaning through its symbolic triumph over the historical grasp of the indentured servitude particular to the Indo-Caribbean experience. However, through an ironic narrative strategy and a series of leitmotifs meant to emphasize the lack of progress and development over the course of his life, Naipaul reveals that Biswas’s home is no victory at all. Instead, the house works to symbolize not only the impossibility of self-invention in colonized Trinidad but also the impossibility of escape from the clutches of colonial history.

In my final body chapter, “‘In the Cage of the Eye’: Colonized Space and Exile in George Lamming’s In the Castle of My Skin,” I investigate how Lamming creates a binary between houses and land to reveal the vulnerability of the colonized’s subject position in a colonized homeland. Through depicting the island terrain as a panoptic space in which the inhabitants are always under surveillance, Lamming reveals the hostility of the colonized space to the autonomy and development of the subject. Moreover, I assert that Lamming suggests exile as a potential new strategy for colonial Bildung. In this respect, Lamming’s novel is the most optimistic of the three studied in this project in that G. does, in fact, develop a critical consciousness that allows him to identify the sources of his oppression.

Finally, in my conclusion, I suggest that what these novels imply is that while Bildung is not possible in the colonized Caribbean, it is possible for the Caribbean in a non-colonized place. In this respect, exile becomes a pre-condition for Bildung for the colonized subject. In order to be at home, he must first,
paradoxically leave home. Moreover, colonial education is revalued in the respect that while it further inhibits Bildung in a colonized state, it is also what provides these men with the means for exile and writing, which in turns, offer alternative strategies for being at home.
CHAPTER 2
ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT IN C.L.R. JAMES'S MINTY ALLEY

I. “I Was Just Writing a Story”

C.L.R. James’s Minty Alley (1936) was not only the writer’s first novel but also the first novel by a Caribbean writer to be published in England. Minty Alley follows Haynes, a young black man, over the course of two years as he lives at Minty Alley, a boarding house he moves into upon the death of his mother. Before her demise, Haynes’s mother cautions him, “I want you to be independent, my boy. And for a black man to be independent in these islands means that he must have money or a profession” (22). A few sentences later, we learn that his mother’s plans for his independence entail sending him to the United States or England; to grow up, he must first go away. The mother’s warning intimates what Minty Alley makes clear: the difficulty of constructing a mature, independent male identity in the colonized Caribbean. I argue that this problem is illuminated through James’s mimicry of the Bildungsroman genre to make a dual critique of both men who ape colonial behaviors and postures and the colonial conditions that deprive them of other means of self-cultivation and gender expression. My use of “mimicry” here alludes to Homi Bhabha’s theoretical work on the destabilization of hegemonic discourses endemic to their rearticulation by colonial subjects. I argue that Minty Alley is a mimic Bildungsroman in that it closely adheres to the classical Bildungsroman plot and clearly embraces most of the genre’s conventions, while it simultaneously tweaks many of these same
conventions to problematize the discourse of Bildung in respect to colonized men. I focus on three of the genre’s characteristic conventions that James subverts: the hero’s entrance into the social realm; his development of a mature, gendered identity; and his home-leaving/homecoming, which initiates and closes the pursuit of Bildung. These subversions expose how colonialism causes educated men to suffer a developmental stasis and a cultural deracination that are antithetical to Bildung and that leave these men feeling permanently out of place.

Criticism of Minty Alley has been rare, in large part because it is still not widely available and was not published in the United States until 1971. Moreover, James was primarily a historian and political theorist; his body of fiction is comprised of Minty Alley and the short stories “Triumph,” “La Divina Pastora,” and “Turner’s Prosperity,” as well as the play Touissant L’Overture. James is far more well-known for his memoir, Beyond a Boundary, and an account of the Haitian revolution, The Black Jacobins, than anything else he wrote. Nonetheless, there have been some thought-provoking studies of his work by critics such as Frank Rosengarten, Eric Keenaghan, H. Adlai Murdoch, Sylvia Wynters, D. Elliot Parris, and Nicole King which I will be engaging with in this chapter.

A less obvious reason that Minty Alley may have captured little critical attention is because it lacks the overtly political tone of James’s other writing, and the politics that critics do read in the novel do not seem entirely in line with those espoused in the rest of his writing. Though he believes that the text does intimate at James’s later political views, Parris says of Minty Alley, “This is no protest novel; though written in the 1930s when the fires of nationalism were beginning
to inflame the region, the novel pays scant attention to the political causes that ultimately account for the circumstances of poverty, which encircles its characters. Colonialism is assumed, not discussed.”

James himself lent confirmation to this idea when, in a 1973 speech reflecting on the novel’s composition, he remarked, “This is 1928. I haven’t the faintest idea about political or social relations. I am just writing a story” (qtd. in King 71). In the absence of an overt anti-colonialism, the novel has often been viewed as a youthful aberration from the rest of James’s work.

However, the novel’s anti-colonial politics become far more apparent when we consider it as a Bildungsroman. Rosengarten and King are the only two scholars to examine Minty Alley as a Bildungsroman. Rosengarten identifies the novel as a “small Bildungsroman” (164) that “represents raw life without embellishments or rationalizations of any sort . . . Therefore, popular or populist are appropriate words with which to suggest the nature of James’s narrative effort” (168); however, despite his use of the word Bildungsroman, Rosengarten does not explore the novel in terms of genre, other than to say, rather unhelpfully, that part of what makes Minty Alley an entertaining book is that readers are generally compelled by narratives of development. Only King, in C.L.R James and Creolization: Circles of Influence, engages in a sustained assessment of the

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7 Originally a print journal featuring prominent writers and scholars, Urgent Tasks is no longer in circulation and I was unable to acquire a hard copy. As a result, I cite the website where it is archived which does not give page numbers.
text as a Bildungsroman. King finds that *Minty Alley* seeks to “disrupt the cultural
norms of respectability of early-twentieth century Trinidadian society as well as
some of the conventions of the bildungsroman” (52) by attempting to “articulate a
revolutionary ideology (the dialogic interplay between class and gender in
colonial Trinidad) from within a bourgeois form” (71). King’s work is particularly
useful here in terms of the ways it traces Haynes’s development, and I concur
with her on many points, especially her assertions that the novel “fails to effect a
Bakhtinian dialogism between the individual and collective” (70) and that there is
an implicit critique of class in the novel. Moreover, we both see Haynes’s
development as fundamentally insignificant insofar as it stems from his adoption
of a colonizing role. However, there are some salient points upon which King and
I diverge, most notably, the ideological underpinnings of Haynes’s failed *Bildung*,
and given the similarity of our positions in other respects, these differences are
worth fleshing out.

King reads Haynes’s failure to achieve *Bildung* as a mark of James’s own
ambiguous relationship to the working class (James himself grew up in a solidly
middle-class family); in marked contrast, I see it as a conscious authorial choice
on James’s part. King often refers to Haynes as though he is a reflection of
James’s own consciousness and believes that “by writing Haynes as a thinker and
by writing the Minty Alley residents as flesh, specifically through Maisie, James
inscribes his own class bias” (58). While she concedes that in many ways *Minty*

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8 Many have noted the similarity of the names Haynes and James, and there
are certainly some autobiographical elements in *Minty Alley*; James himself
Alley manifests a radical impulse to challenge European genre, she concludes that it ultimately affirms Haynes’s middle-class perspective. King also argues that by giving narrative primacy to Haynes as an individual, James “formally endorses Haynes over the Minty Alley collective” (21). More problematically, she views the depiction of the other people living at Minty Alley as “one dimensional” and finds that this portrayal “exclusively endorse[s] colonial bourgeois education and individualism as normative or unproblematized experiences” (66). In the end, while King finds James laudibly subversive in his attempts to put an “emphasis on admitted that the novel was loosely based on his experiences living at a working-class boardinghouse when he was in his late 20s. That said, given that James creates Haynes as a 20 year old character suggests, in Nelson’s words, that “we should read the same sort of ironized distance between James and Haynes that we can read between all the characters of this book” (27). To read Haynes as a direct representation of James is problematic in light of the pains James takes as a writer to undermine Haynes’s narrative authority. Indeed, the character who one might argue James identifies most with is Maisie. As Rosengarten points out, there are some interesting similarities between James and Maisie. It is Maisie who, like James himself, eventually leaves Trinidad for the unknown (in her case, the United States, in his, England), and both possess fiercely independent streaks and a compulsion to speak their minds. More striking, however, is an odd coincidence that no one except Rosengarten has noticed. Throughout Minty Alley, we are never really sure how much time has passed or what time of year it is. There are occasional hints here and there – references to Christmas, the tropical storm season, summer holidays, etc., but, in general, the text is not particularly rooted in temporality. The one time a specific date is mentioned is in reference to Maisie’s birthday: “On January 4 (Maisie’s birthday) Haynes learnt that Ella was in town” (168). There are no mentions of anyone else’s birthday. The significance of this inclusion is that January 4 was James’s birthday, as well. That James would relate more to the vivacious Maisie than the passive Haynes is not surprising.

James scholar Paul Buhle takes King to task for the view that the depiction of Minty Alley is one dimensional in a review of her book, writing, “If the working-poor neighborhood of Port-of-Spain described in the book’s title is "one-dimensional," it is the best one-dimensionality achieved in literature anywhere in the contemporary Caribbean, with the possible exception of poetic giant Aime Cesaire’s Martinique.”
the vernacular Trinidadian speech, working-class characters, and his consistent attempts to make the community as important as the protagonist” (53), she believes them to be efforts at which James falters. This critical position, along with Parris’s contention that *Minty Alley* is not a protest novel, suggests that the novel is the product of an underdeveloped political consciousness and is merely a precursor to James’s more important anti-colonial work.

The view that *Minty Alley* is not an anti-colonial novel might stem from the fact that, as Parris notes, any reference to colonialism is conspicuously absent in the novel; however, I contend that the absence is meant to call attention to itself. Reading the text without prior knowledge of the cultural climate from which it emerged, one would not have any idea that it took place in a region dominated by a foreign power. Yet with this awareness in mind, we cannot help but realize just how much the novel’s characters are at the mercy of a colonial discourse that pervasively shapes the course of their lives. There are no white characters (other than the Nurse, who, it is implied, is actually creole), no reference to politics or racism, and no discussion of colonialism, revolution, or political turmoil. There are some relics that do gesture towards the story’s colonial context but they go without comment. For example, the ramshackle Minty Alley is on Victoria Street, thus linking it with the Victorian era of high imperialism. The street name is a cruel irony in that the British discourse about colonialism in large part centered on the civilizing mission and the idea that colonialism ameliorated the lives of the colonized, and yet the street is inhabited by those inescapably marginalized and impoverished by the Age of Victoria. It
also signals a replication of the relationship of Trinidad to England; Nelson points out, “As Trinidad as to England, then, a marginalized outpost of the empire that in fact makes possible the empire of Queen Victoria, so Minty Alley appears an offshoot, and an eccentric one at that, of the colony’s main business” (29).

Another quiet indicator of the region’s colonial past is Mrs. Atwell and Mrs. Rouse’s devout Christianity, a religion inherited from the zealous missionaries who invaded the region beginning in the late 1700s. Mrs. Atwell frequently cites the Bible (although sometimes incorrectly) and fervently professes herself to be a Christian. Mrs. Rouse hangs a poster of Jesus Christ over her bed and devoutly prays, invoking the name of the lord when she has been wronged, usually at the hands of Benoit and the Nurse. Notably, Mrs. Rouse’s Christianity is a creolized Christianity; pray as she might, we find out towards the end of the novel that she has been taken in by a charlatan who pretends to “know things” in exchange for money. His chicanery leads Mrs. Rouse to fire, against her own judgement, her loyal and hardworking employee, Philomen. This creolization reminds us that while the dominant powers can control the distribution of ideology, they cannot always control its circulation and interpretation.

I claim that the lack of attention paid to colonialism to which Parrish refers is a deliberate narrative strategy. Because the narrative is told in third person limited and focalized through Haynes, the reader experiences 1920s Trinidad through his perspective. Though it is true that Haynes does not refer to colonialism, it is also true that his underdevelopment and lack of internal life is a central focus of the novel. Colonialism’s absence in the novel highlights one of
Haynes’s major problems: his inability to recognize the source of his own oppression. The novel does not pay attention to colonialism because Haynes does not pay attention to colonialism, a blindness which is symptomatic of a colonized subject who subscribes to hegemonic belief systems.

This blindness is often emphasized in concrete ways. When Ella first mentions that a room is available at Minty Alley, Haynes has to ask where it is, even though it is only a few blocks away. Once he decides to visit to determine whether he wants to take a room, he realizes that “Minty Alley was not two hundred yards away and the house was one on which his glance must often have rested. But it was only now when he approached it as a prospective lodging-house that he took particular notice of it” (25). In contrast, upon meeting Haynes, Mrs. Rouse, the landlord, says, “Come in, Mr. Haynes. We know you. We see you passing up and down” (25). Even when he lives among the poverty-ridden lodgers of Minty Alley, Haynes remains oblivious to the struggles for survival around him. He has an epiphany late in the text when, during a conversation with Philomen, Haynes becomes aware that while he has three meals a day, Philomen and the other people at Minty Alley are going hungry; there often is not enough money for Mrs. Rouse to cook even one meal a day.

Further, while King is correct that Haynes is granted narrative primacy in the novel, there are many instances in which the unreliability of his perceptions and the narrator’s own mocking skepticism towards Haynes emerge, suggesting that Haynes is neither particularly bright nor particularly perceptive and certainly not privileged by the narrator or James. For instance, there are frequent hints that
the people who Haynes grows to think of as friends are actually trying to swindle him. Mrs. Atwell goes so far as to tell Haynes that “They does nothing but sit and conspire how to get you into their clutches. . . They see you look soft, Mr. Haynes, and they wants to jostle you, but they can’t fool me” (53). This suggestion is confirmed during a later conversation when Maisie, upon learning Haynes only makes $5 a week, lets it slip that “We all thought you were getting ten dollars a week at least” (120) and that the Nurse had tried to “pump” Ella for information regarding Haynes’s salary. Later, Ella grows ill and takes some time off, during which Haynes boards with Mrs. Rouse. When he decides to send for Ella again, Mrs. Atwell, in an attempt to persuade him to board permanently at Minty Alley, informs Haynes that Ella is still sick at her relatives’ house. However, Haynes runs into Ella, who tells him the truth -- that everyone at Minty Alley is well-aware that she is back in town. Further, Maisie proves to be Haynes’s primary source of information about the other residents of Minty Alley and yet she is known as an inveterate liar; she is, in fact, quite open about her dishonesty and the amusement it brings her. Eric Keenaghan points out, “The threat of what Maisie knows and the threat of not being able to determine the veracity of her narrative opens up the structure of the story, shaking the foundations not only of Haynes’s epistemological position but also of our own” (4).

Just as the other characters’ comments suggest the unreliability of Haynes’s acumen, the almost entirely silent narrator occasionally points this out, as well. After a dramatic blowout with Mrs. Rouse, Benoit comes to Haynes’s
room for advice and to ask why Mrs. Rouse is so offended by his dalliances. Haynes densely answers, “She’s jealous” at which point the narrator intrudes to opine “said Haynes, student of human nature” (80). This moment is conspicuous because it is the first time the limited third person narrative has commented on Haynes from an outside position and because the description of Haynes as a “student of human nature” is mocking him; from the opening days at Minty Alley, Mrs. Rouse is very obviously tortured by Benoit’s indiscretions, and her blatant jealousy is plain to everyone. That Haynes’s sage counsel on this matter is to venture that Mrs. Rouse is jealous certainly would not qualify him as a “student of human nature.” The narrator makes fun of Haynes on another occasion when Haynes comes outside to the aid of Mrs. Rouse after she has fainted in the yard. His advice is to get Mrs. Rouse off the ground and inside the house. Frightened and bewildered, he is able to come up with this rather uninspired idea because, the narrator tells us, “Haynes was a boy scout of many badges” (86). Of course, Haynes’s total ineffectuality and general incompetence have been his most salient characteristics up until this point and any intimation at industriousness or resourcefulness is certainly made ironically. The effect of this commentary is such that the reader is tipped off that she is not meant to uncritically identify with Haynes. Counter to King’s charge that James’s middle-class bias is revealed through choosing Haynes as the novel’s narrative center, I posit that this choice is made to invite skepticism and criticism of this bias; we are to consider Haynes from an ironic distance.
Finally, it is problematic to say, as King does, that James ultimately affirms a middle-class perspective. The novel is in many ways a critique of an educated middle-class that uncritically absorbs and emulates colonial values. James dedicated his life to decolonization and economic and social equality - when *Minty Alley* was published in England, James was travelling with renowned cricket player Constantine Leary throughout England promoting the cause of West Indian independence. As King herself points out, for James to paint himself as a political ingénue at this point his life by saying “I was just writing a story” is a bit disingenuous given his involvement with the liberally-minded Beacon group which produced *The Beacon*, an influential Trinidadian literary and political magazine, and that 1920s Trinidad was a place of considerable social and political upheaval (71-72). This historical background makes James’s characterization of himself difficult to believe. Moreover, though *Minty Alley* was completed when James departed for England in 1932, he had already started writing *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* and had been writing for *The Beacon* for some time. He would go on to write such revolutionary texts as *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* (an edited version of *Cipriani*), *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, *The Black Jacobins*, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, and Lenin*, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, and perhaps his most celebrated work, *Beyond a Boundary*. Additionally, in *Beyond a Boundary*, James writes at length about the prejudices, classism, and racism he witnessed in the selection of players for various Cricket clubs as a teenager and of his negative reactions to the
politics of this process, evidencing an early sensitivity to the nuances of race and class divisions. James was a man whose anti-colonial political engagements were a defining feature of his life. In light of James’s ideological commitments and other accomplishments, I find it difficult to believe that his sole novel seems to subscribe, even partially and conflictedly, to a belief system that was anathema to the rest of his life’s work, particularly work that was undertaken during the same time period as *Minty Alley*.

This is all to say that if Haynes’s pursuit of *Bildung* fails in *Minty Alley*, the failure is by design, not because James lacked the self-awareness to sufficiently interrogate his own class position so as to avoid inadvertently inscribing it into the text. When we examine the text through the lens of the Bildungsroman genre, we see that the politics underlying the novel are, in fact, consistent with James’s later anti-colonial positions, for in *Minty Alley* I posit that James is more than just writing a Bildungsroman in order to reveal the impossibility of *Bildung* for the colonized male subject; he is writing a *mimic Bildungsroman*.

**II. Of Mimicry and Genre**

When I use *mimic Bildungsroman*, I am relying on Bhabha’s theory of mimicry. Mimicry is a term employed by Bhabha in “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” to describe the results of the colonizer’s attempt to reproduce colonial subjects in his own image through the inculcation of colonial values, ideologies, and norms as a tactic of political control. Seeking to fortify their political strength in the colonies, the British attempted to create
colonized subjects that, in effect, mimicked the colonizer. Bhabha argues that the 
colonial desire for mimicking subjects is 

the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of

that mode of colonial discourse that I have called

mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminancy: mimicry

emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process

of disavowal. (122)

As Bhabha points out, efforts to create “mimic men” are problematized by the fact 
that the colonizer’s power is predicated on his self-ascribed ontological and 
cultural superiority; if the colonized can, in fact, “mimic” colonial behaviors, then 
the unassailability of the colonizer’s dominant position is called into question.

When the colonized mimics, Bhabha asserts, he “radically revalues the normative 
knowledges of the priority of race, writing, and history. For the fetish mimes the 
forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them. Similarly, mimicry 
rearticulates presence in terms of its ‘otherness’, that which it disavows” (130).

Thus, mimicry can be a transgressive, menacing act, whereby the colonized, in 
“almost, but not quite” replicating colonial discourses, “reverses, ‘in part’ the 
colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s 
presence; a gaze of otherness, that shares the acuity of the genealogical gaze 
which, as Foucalt describes it, liberates marginal elements” (126-7). In Minty 
Alley, I contend that James is engaging in an act of textual mimicry. The novel 
obviously follows the classical Bildung plot but also deviates from it in subtle but
significant ways that disavow the Enlightenment-driven narrative of civilization and progress underlying Bildung.

In order to understand how James is mimicking the Bildungsroman, let us review the genre. In Jerome Buckley’s seminal text, *Seasons of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, he offers the following overview of the Bildung plot:

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his ‘real’ education begins, not only his preparation for a career but also – and more importantly – his direct experience of urban life . . . The latter involved at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraises his values. By the time he has decided after soul searching the sort of
accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered his manhood. (17-18)

Moreover, the archetypal Bildungsroman also includes a homecoming, as the Bildungsheld returns to his origins, ready to assume his rightful place as a man and as a citizen. Although Buckley concedes that not all Bildungsromane fit this formula exactly, he argues that they all adhere to it more than not. Crucial to Buckley’s formulation is the idea of home, for Bildung is initiated by a departure from the family home and successfully concluded by either the return to that home as a fully-formed adult or the creation of a new home in the world. A home of one’s own becomes the marker of maturity and manhood.

In most ways, Minty Alley superficially conforms to this formula. When we first meet Haynes, despite being twenty years old, he is sensitive and quite childlike and is characterized as a blank slate, a tabula rasa. He is lonely and deeply dependent on his late mother, who has exercised total control over his life and impeded his own development. Haynes, however, experiences a sense of discontent and craves a change of some sort, for “at the back of his mind, unformulated but nevertheless a steadily growing influence, was the desire to make a break with all his monotonous past life, school, home, and drowsy book shop . . . His mother was no more than a memory, a tender memory, but nevertheless only a memory” (23); in Minty Alley, it is the mother, not the father, whom the protagonist symbolically rebels against (she is, after all, dead). We see the unformed, immature Haynes struggling with his current station in life as he feels a “sea of life” (23) within him, even though “he did not think these things
out clearly, but he knew of them as people are aware of thing without putting them into words” (23).

Consequently, Haynes departs from his childhood home. Although he does not go to the city, as does the European Bildungsheld, he does go to the radically different environs of #2 Minty Alley, a boarding house populated by a group of desperately poor women and one man, Benoit; as Ella, Haynes’s servant tells him, “they are ordinary people, sir. Not your class of people” (21). Haynes is not wealthy, but he has a job in a bookstore and is the landlord for a few apartments in the slum quarter. Moreover, he has received a formal colonial education and plans to study abroad. His class position is markedly higher than that of those he dwells among, who live uncomfortably close to the precipice of destitution.

Once at Minty Alley, Haynes is immersed in a world of passion, betrayal, melodrama, trickery, and poverty. During the two years he lodges at Minty Alley, Haynes does begin to exhibit some signs of developing and receiving a “real education,” as he learns to become more assertive, establishes friendships, and participates in a love affair with Maisie that is both exalted (he does adore her) and debased (he treats her like a prostitute at times); he also seems to be creating a home for himself as he increases his domestic authority. He develops a slight class consciousness when he realizes how poor his housemates are while at the same time realizing how hard they work. As Rosengarten notes, “In daily contact with his fellow boarders at #2 Minty Alley, Haynes acquires at least the rudiments of practical life experience that his previous education had not given him” (163).
Haynes is also mentored in the performance of masculinity by Benoit and, in turn, becomes more “manly.” At the end, Haynes leaves Minty Alley, and while he doesn’t return home per se, returns to a condition of being associated with his childhood home.

Thus, *Minty Alley* follows the departure-immersion-“real” education-transformation-return pattern of the classical Bildungsroman. However, there are some conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman that James subverts, some instances of difference that indicate the text’s mimicry at work, three of which I want to focus on here. The first is the depiction of Haynes’s initiation into the social realm. Becoming part of the Minty Alley community encourages Haynes’s own development and that ideal dialectical relationship between one’s internal and external worlds that lies at the heart of *Bildung* seems to blossom. The second convention of the classical Bildungsroman that James will play with is the male’s transition from boyhood to manhood. A meaningful part of Haynes’s *Bildung* is his cultivation of a masculine gender identity, a process which he is mentored in by Benoit. Finally, James also structures the novel around the classical Bildungsroman’s home-leaving/homecoming telos and uses Haynes’s relationship with his domestic space as a barometer of his development. Close analysis, however, illuminates how James problematizes these conventions so that in each instance, what looks like *Bildung* is not. To recall Bhabha on mimicry, Haynes’s development is an “almost the same but not quite” dialectical process leading to an “almost but not quite” mature male identity. By examining *Minty Alley* not just as a Bildungsroman but as a mimic Bildungsroman, we see how James explores
the plight of colonized men who are not only kept in a permanent adolescent state but also socialized away from their native communities via colonial education. Refused acceptance by the dominant colonial community he has been educated into, the colonized man is left without any ways to engage in social relations or perform masculinity other than re-enacting classist and patriarchal tropes in forms of domination on those beneath him in a gendered socioeconomic hierarchy that, in turn, further alienate him from those communities.

III. “You Are One Of Us Now”

One convention of the Bildungsroman that James mimics is the establishment of a dialectical relationship between Haynes and the women he lives among at Minty Alley. Haynes’s development over his time at Minty Alley, though small, is catalyzed by his relations with the women who live there, for the more time he spends with those around him, the more mature, confident, and assertive Haynes becomes. However, further examination reveals that the dialectic is not harmonious and is instead predicated on the reproduction of colonial power structures which place Haynes, as an educated, middle-class man, in an authoritative position of privilege. These are the same power relations which serve to marginalize Haynes in the outer world, and, as a result, the development engendered by Haynes’s relationship with his immediate community, the only one he has ever felt at home in, is unsustainable beyond the boundaries of Minty Alley.

When we first meet Haynes, he is characterized as ineffectual and immature. He worries that despite his education, he is not “trained for anything”
and feels that “his life is [sic] empty” (23). Even though he can no longer financially afford to remain in his mother’s house after she dies (he must either rent it out entirely or take on boarders), he continues living in the house “from sheer inertia” (23). It is Ella, his mother’s servant, who finally forces the issue; it is also Ella who finds for Haynes the two places where he might move. Haynes seems unable to do anything for himself; he has no sense of who he is or what courses of action he should take. Not only does Haynes exhibit a stunning lack of maturity, he also suffers from a lack of social relations. We learn that growing up he was a “shy, solitary boy” (22) and has never had any friends. Instead of socializing with other children outside, his “childhood and youth has been passed [in the house], untroubled by anything except his own adolescent dreams” (22) and in terms of family, “he had none that mattered” (22). He suffers a dearth of both, in the words of Edward Said, filiations and affiliations.

Once at Minty Alley, Haynes begins to undergo a period of development that is in large part catalyzed by his increasing entrance into the social realm – the ideal aim of Bildung. His development occurs most significantly in that he learns to speak up, he becomes more confident, and he begins to perform masculinity; these changes, in turn, help him to make friends and assume a position of domestic authority. Unlike the classical Bildungsheld, who has a wide array of options, these are the only ways Haynes can grow, and close scrutiny again reveals the textual mimicry at work, for these changes are both slight and unsupportable outside of the space of Minty Alley and do not quite line up with those in the classical Bildungsroman.
In the beginning of the novel, Haynes totally lacks social relations, in part because he is so passive and rarely speaks. Just as Haynes cannot put into words the sense of his life’s emptiness, he often cannot assert his more obvious needs and wishes, nor can he communicate on a social level with other people. This silence and inarticulateness is emphasized throughout the earlier portions of the text and learning to simply talk to others begins Haynes’s initiation into the social realm. When Haynes first arrives at Minty Alley, he is uncomfortable and out of place; though he has left the oppressive atmosphere of his childhood home, he is distinctly not at home at Minty Alley. Ella is right – the other residents of Minty Alley are not his kind of people. They are loud, nosy, and busy. Mrs. Rouse and Aucher are overwhelmed with their cooking tasks in the kitchen and many people walk up and down through the yard; Haynes dreads the fact “there were more people to come yet” (32). Haynes avoids conversing with the other residents, and when Mrs. Rouse asks him to intervene in a domestic matter, “he could make no reply” (70) at this request. His social awkwardness is highlighted in an earlier scene in which he learns about the much vaunted Nurse, who also intermittently inhabits his lodgings, and responds lamely, “‘I hope I don’t get ill’” simply “in want of something to say” (33). Haynes, we see, is often “in want of something to say” and so instead stays quiet, a tendency on which the earlier portion of the novel dwells. Haynes’s hesitance to speak is nowhere more problematic than in a disturbing scene when the Nurse sadistically beats her small child, Sonny, who runs to Haynes for protection. However, Haynes is too scared to speak: “‘Nurse,’ he began falteringly before going silent” (44). As Rosengarten, noting Haynes’s
helplessness, says, “a more decisive intervention is beyond him at this early point in the story” (164). Haynes himself is ashamed at his failure to speak up and help Sonny.

However, as the story progresses, Haynes begins to speak more and consequently establish the foundations of those social relations he never had while living with his mother. This confidence in speaking is a result of his relationships with the people he lives among. A dialectical relationship is established that suggests *Bildung*; as they engage him in conversation and are friendly to him, Haynes, in turn, becomes increasingly comfortable voicing his opinion, a habit that the other residents, particularly Benoit and Maisie, encourage further. Though Haynes is initially friendless, he longs for companionship. After the Nurse’s savage beating of her son, Haynes vows to leave Minty Alley, but is placated later that night by a visit from the Nurse, in part due to his admiration for her light skin color and refined speaking voice, a point I shall return to later. She soon begins to visit Haynes twice a day when “she talked easily, told him a lot about herself, and extracted twice as much from him” (49). That Haynes so easily forgets the Nurse’s earlier violence when she begins to converse with him is a testament to his loneliness. Benoit, who is puzzled by Haynes’s reticence and lack of sexual activity, also begins to stop by Haynes’s room for chats. Many of their chats involve information about the web of relations existing outside of Haynes’s door – gossip, sexual exploits, romantic histories. Benoit also encourages Haynes to make a sexual advance towards Maisie. However, Benoit’s advice is not of a seductive nature; he instead tells Haynes that he must voice his wants: “If you
don’t ask,” Benoit tells him, “You don’t get” (141). If Benoit tells Haynes that his sexual success with Maisie is based on his asking for it, Maisie teaches Haynes, through her forceful advice and constant companionship, that getting what he wants is predicated upon assertively speaking up. Maisie’s encouragement later leads Haynes to muster up the courage to ask for a raise. More important than her encouragement to be more assertive is Maisie’s friendship; she is his first friend and the first person in whom he can confide. Haynes realizes that “day by day they became better friends. Intimate conversations they had only when lying in bed together” (169). Prior to his relationship with Maisie, Haynes had never had an intimate conversation with anyone.

His social development is highlighted through a series of incidents meant to stand in comparison to Haynes’s earlier moments of reticence. Hearing their vituperative attacks on one another, Haynes intervenes in a particularly acrimonious exchange between Mrs. Rouse and Maisie. He has a short but sharp battle with himself. Hitherto whatever part he had taken in the upheavals at No. 2 had been inadvertent and, in fact, against his will. Should he go out or not? His old timidity was still strong upon him, but he knew the respect with which they listened to anything he said. After all, why shouldn’t he? (102)

While in the midst of the drama, Haynes feels an urge to disappear back into his room but feels that he has a responsibility and “could not leave things like that” (103). The contrast between his intervention here and his quiet resignation during the child beating incident is striking, a difference that is brought into sharp focus.
by the reference to his “old timidity,” for in describing it as “old” the narrative makes clear that Haynes has evolved. Moreover, Haynes later worries about the quarrel “between both his good friends” (153), whereas he had previously lamented his loneliness because he did not have any friends. Additionally, while Haynes had ignored her earlier requests, Mrs. Rouse finally is able to convince him to speak with Benoit about his indiscretions. The connection between Haynes’s *Bildung* and his increased skill in speaking is cemented in a humorous Boxing Day scene when he gives a speech at the dinner table. When the women of Minty Alley plead with Haynes to give a toast, he agrees, although he is haunted by memories of speeches past, for “on the few occasions in his past life that he had been called upon to speak he, having prepared carefully, had made rather a mess of things” and remembers that “never-to-be-forgotten occasion on which he had begun with, ‘I – personally – myself –’ and then could go no further” (150). However, after having resided at Minty Alley for a considerable amount of time and developed friendships with his fellow boarders, Haynes has a different response to public speaking: “he rose to his feet . . . It was up to that time the speech of his life” (150). Afterwards, he finds himself feeling “exhilarated by the unexpected fluency he had found in his tongue. And that had given him a new confidence” (151). Throughout the novel, we see this correlation between Haynes’s social interaction with others and an increased confidence in speaking, a dialectical relationship between Haynes and the women that results in the accumulation of domestic authority. Not only is Haynes “at home” enough among the women to confidently speak, which for Haynes translates into a
confidence in his “intellectual superiority” (150), he is now the head of the household, the one elected to give speeches at the dinner table.

Yet Haynes becomes comfortable speaking because the other people at Minty Alley authorize him to do so; they are constantly asking his advice on matters and look to him as the voice of reason out of reverence for his elevated class position and the fact that he is a man. Philomen asks Haynes to speak to Mrs. Rouse on her behalf when Mrs. Rouse is angry with her, implicitly acknowledging that Mrs. Rouse will listen to Haynes and value his opinion more than her own words. After Benoit leaves Mrs. Rouse for the Nurse, Mrs. Rouse, who has managed her business affairs for years, turns them over to Haynes; Benoit, in turn, asks Haynes for a letter of recommendation for a job. Mrs. Rouse also consults Haynes about a proposal she receives from Mr. Parks because felt she should talk to Haynes and “hear what you had to say” (176) before accepting. Even the incorrigible Maisie looks to Haynes for absolution after she has been particularly nasty in one of her many fights with Mrs. Rouse. The childbeating incident, during which Sonny runs to Haynes, a man he hardly knows, for protection is particularly telling. Even as a child he is able to sense the authority Haynes holds in the household. The confidence that the other characters place in him gives Haynes the assurance and ability to speak and act; he is treated as special, as possessing wisdom and judgement absent in the others. Because he is treated as a confident, wise leader, he thus begins to think of himself as such. Much of Haynes’s development comes from realizing and exercising an increasing amount of authority in the domestic realm, for he is never treated as an
equal, and through this veneration for Haynes, the group as a whole falls into a colonizer-colonized dynamic whereby “the entire social structure is based on the acceptance and implementation of power relations as the normative mode of relations” (Wynter 77).

Part of the reason that the people of Minty Alley so wholeheartedly defer to Haynes is because he is educated and, when he does speak, speaks “proper” English. This education, which also functions as a marker of class, creates an unbridgeable social gap between Haynes and the uneducated plebeians he lives among, yet it also bestows upon him the authority which further motivates his maturation. While he makes more money than the people of Minty Alley (though he is essentially a shop boy), Haynes is in no way particularly exceptional or successful. That said, he is educated and does speak in a formal standard English that eludes the non-educated. His education automatically earns him respect from everyone around him. When Mrs. Rouse initially implores Haynes to talk to Benoit on her behalf, she begs, “He will respect what you say. You are young, but you are a gentleman and you have education” (70). His position also intimidates people and governs the ways they address him, as in the case of Ella. Despite having a warm, intimate relationship with his maternal servant, there are certain boundaries preserved between the two. When Mrs. Rouse asks Haynes if Ella has written him about falling ill, Haynes replies, “No, she hasn’t; but she wouldn’t write” because “Ella would have died rather than expose her writing and spelling to her master” (155). As Rosengarten points out, the chatty Mrs. Atwell makes it a
point to impress upon Haynes that while she may not be as educated as he is, she is not ignorant, either. Upon returning a book to Haynes, she explains

   Mr. Haynes, the last one was good, a little high for me, but good. I is not a person of much education and I knows nothing about stories and so on. I used to be a great reader of novels in my day. That is a long time now. And novels isn’t serious books. Though some of them has good morals. But I pass through the Universal Spelling Book at school, Mr. Haynes, and when you pass through that you knows something, you can take it from me. And I can tell you, Mr. Haynes, it was a real good book. AI [sic] and no mistake. High, high, class. (152)

Mrs. Atwell is also well-aware of the status and privilege conferred upon the educated and swears, “If I had a child I would sacrifice anything to give him education” (152). Even Benoit, who is generally unimpressed with Haynes’s education, compliments Haynes by saying, “You know how to wield the pen, man” (83). Kenneth Ramchand points to this “awe of the illiterate at the power of education and the written word” (West Indian Novel 8) as part of what contributes to the “mutually impoverishing alienation of the educated West Indian from the people” (Minty Alley: Introduction 13) that is evidenced in the novel.

   James focuses on this “mutually impoverishing alienation” by representing education and reading as things that insulate Haynes from his own people and keep him preoccupied with matters unrelated to his own reality in Trinidad.

Books are repeatedly tied to Haynes’s old life throughout the text, a time when he
experienced life vicariously through reading rather than actual living; they are also associated with his colonial education. After his mother gets him a job at the bookshop, Haynes simply returns to the house and reads in the evenings which does nothing to assuage the loneliness he has felt throughout his childhood. Reading is often cast as a crutch that provides a way to avoid engaging with the world. During his first encounter with Haynes, the virile Benoit notes, “You do a lot of reading, I see” (30). Benoit later implies that Haynes’s lack of sexual experience is a result of his proclivity for hiding in his room with books, observing “you are a funny fellow. You only reading books the whole day. A young man like you. Man, when I was your age, by the time one was out, another one was in” (79). The text links Haynes’s increased engagement with the people around him to less time spent reading; as Haynes grows closer to Maisie, “he found himself liking her more and more and spending hours talking with her where formerly he would have been reading” (203). The foot injury that results from a bookshelf falling on Haynes’s foot indicates the ways that reading cripples him, both literally and metaphorically, and “underscores the extent to which his bookish life has incapacitated him for life’s daily struggles” (Rosengarten 29). Moreover, despite his literacy and formal education, Haynes is limited in his career opportunities, and he works at the bookshop because he has no training in anything else. Parris finds that, through the novel’s depiction of education as something that socially hinders Haynes, the novel implies “the Caribbean petit-bourgeois has been rendered relatively impotent by its education” (qtd. in Rosengarten 212).
His education has seemed to instill in Haynes an insurmountable inability to fully identify with his own people: the colonized. He has internalized a colonial ideology that privileges hierarchies and class and racial stratifications, one that views the colonized “as elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards,” (Black Skin, White Masks 17). If Haynes notices the Nurse’s elevated speaking manner, he notices because it is so clearly absent in the way the other inhabitants of Minty Alley speak. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffith offer a useful explanation of the connection between colonial education and language:

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities . . . Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structures of power is perpetuated. (7)

Haynes speaks in standard British English, which stands in contrast to the colorful vernacular of all of the other characters in the novel, and, consequently, every time Haynes talks to one of those characters, their differences are reaffirmed in Haynes’s mind, differences he does not question. For the uneducated Mrs. Atwell, Haynes’s refined manner of speaking correlates to moral character; she tells him “I remember the day you came here. I was inside and I only hear your voice talkin’ to Ella. And I say, ‘Well, I ain’t see ‘im. But ‘is speech like a nice young man’” (234) and frequently implores the totally unremarkable young man to run for the legislative council, a notion that even he finds embarrassing in its
excessive flattery. It goes without mention that everyone at Minty Alley refers to him as Mr. Haynes, including Maisie after they have become lovers, no matter how friendly they get. Further, while Haynes in many ways adores Maisie, he is well aware of the class boundaries between them, boundaries that he is unwilling to cross outside of the bedroom. When Mrs. Atwell teases Maisie that she acts as though she is Haynes’s wife, a chord is struck in Haynes and he wonders “if the girl of his dreams, the divine, the inexpressible she whom he was to going to marry one day, he wondered if in some things she would be to him what Maisie was in all” (212). As Keenaghan and King both point out, marriage to the wild, working-class Maisie is out of the question for Haynes, despite that it is she who was “making a human creature out of him” (202). Maisie is well aware of this, for when Haynes mournfully bids her goodbye and promises to never forget her, Maisie smiles knowingly and responds, “Of course you will, Mr. Haynes” (252).

While Haynes does care about his companions at Minty Alley (to be fair, Haynes is a generally kind, well-intentioned character), he always maintains a certain distance from them and never fully becomes part of the Minty Alley collective community, despite Mrs. Rouse’s words that “you are one of us now” (92).

Maisie is right, for at the end of the novel, after Mrs. Rouse sells the house, Haynes returns to Ella; without the community of women to empower him, Haynes’s development is undone. As King puts it, there is not a “new concept of community created for Haynes, who, at the novel’s close, must step back into his old life” (65) rather than stepping into the new life he has created, a creation that is the capstone of the classical Bildungsroman. Haynes’s inability to achieve
Bildung is represented through Haynes’s development being circular rather than linear; instead of moving forward, Haynes ends the novel in the exact same condition he was in at its beginning. This annularity suggests the impossibility of Bildung for the colonized male. Back under the care of Ella, friendless, still working at the bookshop, no closer to studying abroad as he was two years prior, Haynes is a young man with nowhere to go, nothing to do, and nobody to commune with.

**IV. Becoming a Man**

Another way in which Minty Alley mimics the classical Bildungsroman is through its portrayal of Haynes’s masculinity. As John Smith points out, “Bildung . . . is not an organic but a social phenonenon that leads to the construction of a male identity in our sex-gender system by granting men access to self-representation in the patriarchal symbolic order. As such, Bildung is a central form of institutional cultivation of gender roles” (216). A significant part of the development Haynes undergoes is related to his gender identity, as he attempts to transition from boyhood into manhood. This transformation is complicated and problematic, for the colonized man does not have access to self-representation in the colonial patriarchal order, and thus finds himself searching for alternate ways to represent his manhood. If Haynes’s initial immaturity is appended to his emasculation, then part of his maturation is linked to the performance of masculinity. His increased sense of masculinity, however, is, again, a result of his emulation of patriarchal tropes upon the women around him, particularly Maisie. Without the poverty-stricken women to dominate, Haynes remains part of the
mass of men emasculated by colonialism. The novel reveals how artificial and untenable this power-based masculinity is while at the same time showing how few ways colonized men have of performing masculinity, for they can either reproduce the aggressive, patriarchal domination they experience from the colonizer upon women or they can strive to embody an idealized colonial manhood. Both strategies, James implies, ultimately fail colonized men who seek to perform masculinity, a failure they are doomed to by circumstances beyond their control.

As colonized men, both Haynes and Benoit, the novel’s two central male characters, are shaped by colonial discourses which are premised on the emasculation of colonized men. From its inception, British imperialism was framed in gendered terms. In the colonial imagination, the British colonizers were the active, strong, *masculine* counterparts to the passive, infantile, feminine colonized. Ashis Nandy notes, “colonialism . . . produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and feminity” (4), which gave a legitimacy “to what in the dominant culture of the colony had already become the final differential of manliness: aggression, achievement, control, competition, and power” (9). Thus, by characterizing the colonized as feminine, colonialism became defensible because it perpetuated, on a global scale, the natural order of male domination. This ideology and rhetoric had significant repercussions in terms of gender roles for both men and women in colonized territories in that it cast men’s lack of political autonomy as a symptom of their effeminancy. The result of this
effeminization was often that colonized men would, in turn, attempt to reassert their masculinity through the domination of colonized women. Nandy explains:

Crucial to this co-optation [colonialism] was the process psychoanalysis calls identification with the aggressor. In an oppressive situation, the process became the flip side of the theory of progress, an ontogenetic legitimacy for an ego defence often used by a normal child in an environment of childhood dependency to confront inescapable dominance by physically more powerful adults enjoying total legitimacy. In the colonial culture, identification with the aggressor bound the rules and the rule in an unbreakable dyadic relationship. (7)

Thus, one way of performing masculinity for colonized men was to reproduce the patriarchy which marginalized them upon colonized women. In dominating women, they re-enact colonial relations that define masculine power as the ability to act upon someone in a weaker sociopolitical position.

During his time in school, Haynes would have been taught to valorize a different form of European masculinity: that personified by the English gentleman. To recall Aviston Downes’s work on gender ideals in colonial curricula discussed in the previous chapter:\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Though Downes’s analysis is focused on Barbados, British colonial curriculums did not vary from island to island; thus, his arguments are equally pertinent to discussions of education in Trinidad, where \textit{Minty Alley} takes place.
The education system of Barbados with its imperial dictates, and
its functional intended to sustain the dominance of the ruling class
men . . . The appropriate values of hegemonic masculinity were
those represented by the English gentleman, since historically
creoles were viewed as inferior to their metropolitan
privileged within England in the Victorian and Edwardian periods:
sociopolitical leadership, economic dominance, heterosexuality,
headship of nuclear family; chivalric defense of property,
empire, and family. (107)

Colonial schools’ privileging of and training in hegemonic masculinity
problematises the cultivation of a gender identity for colonized men in two ways.
First, it constructs as normative a performance of gender premised on options that
are not accessible to colonized men. Because he is a member of a colonized
population, he has no way of pursuing a political leadership role; under
colonialism, his property is not his, and economic dominance eludes him, even
with an education. As Downes points out, “‘Whereas education reform facilitated
the creation of a non-white (predominantly male) middle-class, relegation to the
lowest ranks of business functions in the commercial or plantation enterprises and
confinement to the lower rounds of the civil service was still their lot” (128).

Second, the strand of masculinity that distinguishes the English gentleman – what
Joseph Valente calls “manliness” – is not consistent with Caribbean conceptions
of masculinity. Manliness and manhood, according to Valente, were to be
expressed not just through action but through self-governance and restraint;
Valente explains, “The ideal of manhood consisted in the simultaneous necessity for and achievement of a vigilant, rational self-control – in strong passions strongly checked” (3). However, the self-restraint, self-containment, and reticence demanded by colonial manhood is interpreted as an absence of masculinity by colonized subjects who have not been exposed to it.

While Haynes does lack a masculine maturity – he seems to lack any sexuality and is totally reliant on maternal figures to guide him – he is not as effeminate as his new neighbors read him; they just do not recognize the attributes of colonial manhood which Haynes has been educated to embody. The women at Minty Alley think he looks “soft.” He learns later that when he moved in, the Nurse remarked to Mrs. Rouse that Haynes “was still a baby, that she had never seen such an innocent as you and that she would like to take you away to the seaside for a month and when you came back you would be a man” (169), to which Mrs. Rouse replied, “Leave the poor darling alone. You don’t see them often like that today” (170). That he stays in his room so much and lacks male friends is read by the other inhabitants of Minty Alley as an absence of masculinity, for Caribbean masculinity “necessitated male homosocioability; to be a loner or houseboy was to be unmanly” (Downes 113). While Haynes is heterosexual, his experience with women is limited to his mother and Ella, and “though passionately interested in women and always reading about them, had never since he was grown up kissed or been kissed by a woman who he was not related to . . . and often experienced difficulty looking young women fully in the face” (37). So striking is his lack of masculinity, which is in part signaled by the
fact that he rarely leaves his room, that Benoit questions his heterosexuality: “You are a funny fellow . . . What’s wrong? You sick? . . . You don’t go after girls?” (79).

Benoit is an example of what has been called a “Bad John” in Caribbean culture and literature. The Bad John exemplifies a masculinity that is “exceedingly promiscuous, derelict in his parental duties, often absent from the household, and, if present, underwilling to undertake his share of domestic responsibilities” (Lewis 107) and in literature is depicted as “possessing a propensity for female beating, and a demonstrated valorization of alcohol consumption” (107). Kenneth Ramchand points out that the term itself “has early and strong associations with the yard, the ghetto, and lower class Trinidadian life” (“Calling All Dragons” 313). For a man of Haynes’s class and education background, the “bad john” would not be an appealing role, for it would be antithetical to “the enactment of lawful self-discipline [that] was received in the larger social arena as the supreme expression of masculine strength and aggression” that defined colonial manhood (9).

Benoit serves as a foil to Haynes who exposes Haynes to a model of masculinity that initially unsettles him with its sensuality and blatant sexuality, its uncontained hedonism. When avid reader Haynes asks Benoit what books he likes, Benoit responds, “No time for that, man. Since I leave school I ain’t open a book” (30). We do find out that Benoit is intrigued by the books of de Laurence “an American writer on magic and psychic science” (79) and, counter to Haynes’s interest in ornithology and physics, proclaims an expertise in the supernatural
sciences. His assertion that he can control spirits leads Haynes to wonder, “Was the man mad?” (79). Benoit’s voracious sexual appetite is matched by his desire for food and drink; he is almost always eating, drinking, or smoking. These appetites are contrasted with Haynes’s own inclination towards moderation in an early scene in which Benoit offers Haynes some nuts before asking him if he has eaten lunch yet. Haynes accepts and explains that if he had not eaten yet, he would be abstaining from eating the nuts because they would ruin his appetite. Benoit is surprised and points out, “You different to me. I not going to eat till near two, but I will eat four cents nuts and roast corn, I’ll suck orange, eat fig, many, anything, the whole morning; and that wouldn’t prevent me from eating my regular” (31). Haynes is shocked by Benoit’s candidness about sex, from his intimation that he might pursue Ella sexually to his admission of the way he seduced the Nurse. In contrast to Haynes, who is repeatedly referred to as a gentleman throughout the text and who fantasizes about his future bride, Benoit scorns the idea of marriage and frequently associates it with slavery, repeatedly proclaiming himself a “free man” because he is not married.

The sexual involvement between Benoit and the Nurse causes Haynes to reconsider his views of masculinity, for in having sex with a white woman, Benoit is able to come closer to approximating colonial masculinity than Haynes is with his attempts to play the gentleman. The Nurse is a mysterious and dominant force at Minty Alley; that she, a white woman with a respectable job, would live among the lower-class black people is a source of much puzzlement for Haynes. When Haynes sees the Nurse embrace Benoit, he is shocked, for “Benoit didn’t seem the
kind of man to attract her. He was very black, with no compensation of money, profession, or personal charm to atone for the social and economic disadvantages of his black skin” (48). In Black Skin, White Masks Frantz Fanon argues that for the black man, the sexual conquest of the white woman comes to represent a symbolic escape from his debased subject position, a way of reclaiming the masculinity of which the white colonizer has robbed him. The colonized black man, Fanon asserts, desires the white woman because he hopes that “by loving me, she proves that I am worthy of love. I am loved like a white man” (45). The nurse, whose only sign of blackness is her “tale tell fingernails,” makes the black men on whom she lavishes attention feel elevated and powerful by providing them with an alternate strategy of embodying colonial masculinity. Even after witnessing her child abuse, Haynes is “curiously flattered” when the Nurse visits him and quickly forgives the savage beating incident. Part of the reason that Haynes is so quickly able to forget his repulsion towards the Nurse after the beating is because he admires “the extreme fairness of her complexion and her long, silky, almost golden, hair. If she had money she would have been able to take her place with the white aristocracy, ninety-nine per cent of whom had more coloured blood than she had.” (48) Benoit also fetishizes the Nurse’s whiteness. Despite having been with Mrs. Rouse for 18 years, he, without hesitation, chooses to be with the Nurse when given an ultimatum by the former. He tells Haynes that cannot give up the Nurse because a “white woman is too sweet” (67) and, later, because “she is a nice woman, man. Nice colour, straight hair” (63).
As Haynes learns of the circumstances of Benoit and the Nurse’s affair, he begins to see Benoit as something other than the ne’er-do-well that he is, for not only does Benoit have sex with the white Nurse, but he claims to have power over her. That Benoit is responsible for such a stunning reversal of racial power relations leads Haynes to believe that “This Benoit was a hell of a fellow” (64). Benoit claims that he initially seduced the nurse by using his knowledge of “science” to help her get a job, a process that entailed the Nurse standing naked before Benoit as he prayed and bathed her daily for nine days. While Haynes recognizes the ridiculousness of the procedure (he asks himself, “Was there ever such a rigmarole? If Benoit was not there he would have burst out laughing”), he is still “fascinated” (64). Benoit claims, “I’s I who fixed her up. If wasn’t for me she would have been still down to the ground” (64); he also says that he can “make her do anything I want” (65). Haynes’s disapproval of Benoit turns to awe, despite the fact that he realizes the Nurse is “a woman who had had so long a string of lovers and in such quick succession as to justify any title which one might choose to apply to her” (73); her promiscuity, her child abuse, her sadistic cruelty to Mrs. Rouse – all of these negative attributes are outweighed by her whiteness in Haynes’s mind. Soon the luster of the English gentleman begins to dull for Haynes as begins to aspire towards Benoit’s model of masculinity.

Benoit’s masculinity is far more accessible to Haynes: social and sexual domination of women, a “masculinity predicated on the assumption of power, whether real or imagined” (Lewis 18). James, however, shows that this is not a legitimate source of power for either Haynes or Benoit, because they do not have
power over anyone other than the women at Minty Alley. James mimics the
mentor-mentee relationship that often occurs in the classical Bildungsroman by
depicting a mentorship which leads Haynes to act in a worse way; rather than
reaching a higher state of awareness or happiness, Haynes becomes less likeable
as he imitates the masculinity which Benoit guides him in.

With Benoit’s encouragement and his own growing confidence, Haynes begins to have a sexual awakening that is inextricably intertwined with his own sense of himself as a man. So remote is the possibility of sex for Haynes when he first moves in that he hardly notices Maisie, despite her striking attractiveness and closeness to his age. It is not until much later, after a number of conversations with Benoit, that “a new aspect of Maisie, vaguely present for some time in the background of his mind, suddenly emerged clearly. She was a damned, pretty girl, and would be very nice to sleep with” (78). As the women in Minty Alley grow increasingly reliant upon Haynes after Benoit leaves, he becomes aware of the power of his masculinity which is manifested in a previously non-existent gendered sexual confidence; he tells himself at one point “‘It’s good to be a man’ before “girding himself for the task of showing both Maisie and himself what a man he was” (154). Of note in this sentiment is the idea that Haynes must demonstrate to himself that he is, in fact, a man. It evidences a growing awareness that masculinity is something that Haynes must perform, something that not only must be exhibited but something that he lacks. It also suggests an insecurity on Haynes’s part about his own femininity; Haynes seems less concerned with being a man than proving himself distinct from women, which is evinced by Haynes’s
repeated references to himself as, specifically, “a man,” as though it is a new identity of which he must remind himself. Indeed, his very sense of himself as a man becomes dependent on an increased domination of the women around him.

Interestingly, his performance of masculinity makes Haynes a far less likeable character. This is nowhere more evident than in the evolution of Haynes’s relationship with Maisie. As Haynes grows confident in his sexuality, his attitude towards Maisie changes. Instead of intimidation and trepidation, he begins to feel that “he could do what he liked with Maisie when he pleased” (151), a sentiment that empowers Haynes by allowing him to at least pretend to have some control of her sexual agency; it also recalls Benoit’s earlier remark that he could make the nurse do whatever he wanted, thus aligning Haynes’s masculinity with that of Benoit. Haynes, in fact, attempts to appoint himself guardian of Maisie’s sexuality, despite the fact that both know that Haynes has no true control over the defiant, spirited young woman. Though it was Maisie’s sexually alluring nature that initially attracted Haynes, he later disapproves of it; when Maisie asks his advice on whether she should make a dress out of a red or green fabric, he tells her that she shouldn’t wear red because “only Spaniards from South America wear red dresses . . . Make your red dress. Only, when you are wearing it and I meet you in the street, please don’t think anything if you see me looking the other way,” (210) invoking a sexualized racial stereotype of Spanish women as garish and sexually available. While Maisie is the sexually experienced one who guides Haynes through his sexual initiation, he later casts himself in a parental role, lecturing her on the importance of making plans for her
future (though Haynes does not have any exciting plans on the horizon for his own life). Maisie, who has Hayes figured out and refuses to be bullied by anyone, looks at him with a “slow, amused almost derisive” smile and asks, “What next, teacher?” to which Haynes responds, “You want smacking?” (205). The contrast to Haynes’s earlier demeanor when, as Maisie points out to Haynes, “you couldn’t say boo to a goose” (205), is startling. Not only has Haynes presumed to instruct Maisie on how she should live her life, but he also reacts to her challenges to his newly-assumed authority with the threat of violence. His threat of a smacking also hearkens back to an earlier moment in the novel when, reflecting on the Nurse’s behavior towards her son, he longs for his own peaceful childhood, one in which “never had Haynes’s mother even hinted at the possibility of his being beaten” (44). In feeling himself grow more powerful and manly, Haynes unknowingly begins to imitate a colonial authority which professes to know what is best for those under its control and relies on the possibility of violence to thwart challenges to its vision.

Haynes also begins to see himself as the head of the household at Minty Alley, the “man of the house” in Benoit’s words, as he is entrusted with broadening responsibilities. His increased authority over the women is matched by an increasing sense of being at home, for once he is charge at Minty Alley, the pressing desire to leave he felt when he first moved in vanishes. Mrs. Rouse, struggling to keep creditors at bay as Benoit does everything he can to sabotage her ability to keep her home, eventually turns all of her finances over to Haynes, despite the fact that he has no special accounting or bookkeeping skills. However,
Mrs. Rouse’s respect for Haynes’s education and manners leads her to assume that he can manage her affairs better than she. This ceding of control results in the inscription of patriarchal ascendancy [that] reinforces the codification of Haynes as the embodiment of the master’s discourse, his appropriation of those functions typically restricted to the colonialist figuring his separation from and definition of those around him. With patriarchy the overriding trope governing relations between Haynes and his fellow colonials, the assimilation of his role to one that replicates the colonial paradigm is made a more integral part of the novel’s structure. (Murdoch 68)

Once Haynes has assumed almost total control over the affairs at Minty Alley, he starts to believe that “he was the master of the house,” and goes so far as to consider Mrs. Atwell and Mrs. Rouse his “slaves (173). Given the colonial setting, the focus on Afro-Caribbeans who were descendents of Africans brought to the West Indies via the slave trade, and James’s own deeply anti-colonial views, the characterization of Haynes as a master and the other women as slaves is jarring and emphasizes the extent to which Haynes has begun to emulate a colonial authority figure.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^\text{11}\) Not only do these words invoke the dynamics of a historical relationship (slavery) which resulted in the oppression, poverty, and powerlessness of the people of Minty Alley, but it also alludes to Hegel and his work on the master/slave dialectic, a dialectic which does not ultimately benefit either the slave or the master. This Hegelian reference is further complicated because it is made by a black narrator with roots in Africa, a place which Hegel said “is not a historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit . . . What we properly understand by Africa, is the
However, this sort of sexist, authoritative masculinity is unsustainable for both Benoit and Haynes. While the Nurse may have sex with Benoit (and ultimately marries him, purely, it would seem, out of spite for Mrs. Rouse), Benoit is basically a failure in every respect. He is not employed, often drunk, overweight, and ill-kempt; his clothes are dirty and torn, his hair messy. For all his crowing about being an independent man, he is actually entirely reliant on the financial support of Mrs. Rouse and, later, the Nurse. Moreover, he ultimately pays dearly for his obsession with the Nurse’s whiteness, as it compels him to marry her and leave Minty Alley. Once Benoit is outside of the social hierarchy at Minty Alley, where he resides at the top (he is deferred to as “the landlord,” even though it is Mrs. Rouse’s labor and funds that make the payments on the mortgage for the property), we see how powerless he actually is; indeed, he assumes a distinctly feminine role, for when the Nurse is “out on a job, she getting everything she want; he at home . . . he got to cook” (144). Although the Nurse had promised to obtain respectable employment for Benoit (since he cannot do it himself), she does not, and instead asserts authority over him by reminding him that she has paid for “the boots you married in, the hat, the ring, the shirt, the collar, the tie . . . I do everything for you. You do nothing for yourself” (144).

Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history” (99). Of Africans, Hegel warned that “we must lay aside all thoughts of reverence and morality – all that we would call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him. There is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character” (93). James was enough of a Hegel scholar to write a book on him in 1948, Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, and Lenin.
This turn of fortune for Benoit is reflected in his appearance and demeanor; when Haynes runs into Benoit for the first time since the wedding, Benoit’s “face was blotchy, which, with his black skin, gave him a particularly unhealthy look . . .

The trim and slick Benoit, who used to be such a delight to the eye of Mrs. Rouse when he took the street was no more” (138). On the street, outside of Minty Alley, “the fighting cock could not flap his wings” (138), his machismo and authority vanished without women to authorize them. Benoit ultimately dies a pauper’s death in the hospital, with only Mrs. Rouse caring.

Like Benoit, Haynes’s newly acquired masculinity cannot be performed outside of his temporary home at Minty Alley, for at the novel’s end, Maisie leaves for the United States, Mrs. Rouse sells the house, and Haynes is back under the care of Ella, who finds him another room to rent. Once Mrs. Rouse decides that she is going to sell the property, she immediately instructs Haynes to call for Ella because she understands that for all of the ways that Haynes might have grown over the previous two years, he is still unable to care for himself. He is once again back to being an effeminate child, living under the guidance of a maternal guardian. Though he is no longer a virgin, he does not have a romantic companion. Just as colonial manhood has eluded him, patriarchal and sexual dominance of women has also ended up a fruitless strategy of performing masculinity. The transition from boyhood to manhood in the Bildungsroman proves to be an illusion, for Haynes, as a colonized subject, simply does not have any viable models of masculinity.

V. A Home of One’s Own
The third way I believe the mimicry at work in the text emerges is through the twist on the home-leaving and homecoming patterns in the classical Bildungsroman. As in the European model of the genre, the initial stages of Haynes’s pursuit of Bildung are tied to leaving his childhood home, for his infantilized, alienated state is associated with his mother and, by extension, her house. This underdevelopment is in part due, one suspects, to Haynes’s mother, who is characterized as a loving but dominating force in Haynes’s life; she is also linked with colonialism through her endorsement of colonial education. Reflecting on her death, Haynes’s realizes that “ever since he had known himself, he had known and accepted her plans for his future” (22). It was his mother who decided that Haynes would eventually study abroad and become a doctor. Haynes’s mother is also the one who obtains him employment at Carritt’s bookshop after he graduates from school. Though Haynes’s mother may have wanted him to be independent, she has essentially kept him dependent on her by preventing him from making any of his own decisions.

James consistently links Haynes’s mother to domestic space they share. We learn that Haynes had grown up “under the shelter of his mother, to whom he was everything and who was everything to him” (22; italics mine). His mother worked doggedly as a teacher in order to afford the house, and elicits a promise on her deathbed from Haynes that, no matter what, he would keep the house in the family name. So enmeshed with the house is Haynes’s mother that even after her passing, “the influence of his dead mother still dominated the house” (19). As a result, important to Haynes’s pursuit of Bildung is a departure from the home he
shared with his mother, for “the sea of life was beating at those walls which
enclosed him” (23), phrasing which connotes images of birth and emerging from
the womb and which further relates his the maternal body to the house. Upon
starting to awaken to his life’s insignificance, he decides, “Yes, he would leave
and go live somewhere else. It was time” (23). Haynes understands on some level
that in order to find himself, he must leave the house so inextricably intertwined
with his mother’s presence and his childhood. However, it is imperative to note
that Haynes *does* want to return home at some point: “He had promised his
mother he would keep the house and he would keep it at whatever cost. He would
someday marry and bring his bride home. But till that time, anywhere except
staying here” (24). The only way he can return to and claim the space his mother
and he shared is to return with a woman over whom he can now establish
authority. Through this sentiment we see that for Haynes, the ideals of home,
adulthood, and domestic authority over women are linked. Bearing these
associations in mind further helps us to understand why Haynes’s maturation and
feelings of social confidence develop in proportion to his accumulation of
domestic authority at Minty Alley.

Prompted by this recognition that “he must move,” Haynes leaves his
mother’s home for Minty Alley “not two hundred yards away” (24). This
departure is another one of those moments of difference of which Bhabha speaks
in his discussion of mimicry. Haynes does, in the tradition of the classical
*Bildungsheld*, set out on his own, leaving that which is familiar and associated
with his childhood. However, he does not, like the European *Bildungsheld,*
embark on a pilgrimage to London, Dublin, Berlin, or Paris; he moves six hundred feet away. The difference in spatial scale between the departure in the classical Bildungsroman and in *Minty Alley* provides an ironic commentary on the lack of mobility for the colonized; it also foreshadows how small and ultimately insignificant Haynes’s *Bildung* will be. This abridged movement again recalls Memmi’s assertion that for maturation to occur, movement must be possible.

James relies on domestic space to suggest the uneven power relations that develop between Haynes and the other occupants once he settles into Minty Alley, for the relations are emphasized by the fact that Haynes rarely emerges from his room, but, rather, the others come to him to converse. While he watches the activities at Minty Alley through his peephole that peers out into the yard, it does not occur to him leave his room and interact with the others. Part of the problem, Nelson acknowledges, is that “Haynes is a colonized subject who views himself as apart from the masses of colonized subjects” (30) and as Murdoch observes, “the primary construct among the novel’s characters is thus the tendency to view the colonial counterpart from the perspective of the colonialist himself” (68-69). Language with connotations of theater that casts Haynes as the audience to the lodgers’ spectacle illustrates this distance. After seeing the interlude between the Nurse and Benoit, the next morning Haynes watches out of his peephole, excited, because “the stage, he felt, was set for a terrific human drama” (38). He at other times refers to the other characters as “players.” Moreover, he knows that when he gets bored with reading, he can retreat to the privacy of his room and simply spy on his neighbors through his peephole. The
implication is that no matter how involved he becomes in the quotidian affairs at Minty Alley, Haynes maintains a certain degree of remove. Haynes’s psychic isolation, for which his spatial isolation functions as a metaphor, is symptomatic of what Fanon identifies as a certain brand of individualism learned by the colonized intellectual from the colonizer: he explains, “The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native’s mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is his individual thought” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 47).

What is problematic for Haynes, however, is the lack of depth to his thinking; consequently, Haynes is “shut up” in his own subjectivity, but it is a shallow and bland subjectivity. Part of his desire for a *Bildung* is a desire to escape that bland, isolated subjectivity. Alas, Haynes has been so indoctrinated by a Western colonial perspective that he cannot recognize or transcend the ideological contours which shade his perceptions of the world around him and keep him imprisoned within himself, an imprisonment reflected by the reality that we rarely see Haynes outside of his room and we never see him outside of the boarding house.

The text illustrates how untenable Haynes’s development has been through its subversion of the homecoming that normally concludes a Bildungsroman, for Haynes is not able to return home as a married man and assert a masculine adulthood by reclaiming his mother’s house. Instead, *Minty Alley* ends not with a homecoming that would suggest a successful *Bildung* but rather a return to the childlike state associated with his mother’s home. He loses touch
with everyone from the Minty Alley community, except Philomen whom he runs across and greets occasionally. Indeed, he falls back into forgetting to see Minty Alley at all; whereas initially “whenever he passed there in the tramcar he used to make it a point of duty to look . . . of late [he] forgets more often than not” (244). In the novel’s final paragraph, Haynes does stop at Minty Alley and peers in the windows at a new family from the road. He is once again, alone and on the outside looking in, “friendless in the middle of a crumbling imperial road, looking on wistfully as others make a life for themselves out of the materials at hand” (Nelson 35). Haynes’s obliviousness to Minty Alley and his position as an outsider looking in the windows in the final scene are both reminiscent of the story’s beginning when, first, he had never even noticed Minty Alley and then, after having moved in, his primary interaction with the residents was watching them through the peephole, docile and disengaged. Consequently, it seems that Haynes’s development at Minty Alley has served no material purpose, and, as Nelson suggests, “though young Haynes has been transfigured by his experiences, he has not truly grown into his own capacities” (34). King is even less optimistic about Haynes’s experience: “By the end of the novel, Haynes’s social position is not so much altered as it is embossed and ratified by his immersion in the Minty Alley community, an immersion that ultimately emphasizes his apartness” (62).

This lack of community, this inability to find a place where he can fit in, is symbolized by Haynes’s inability to find a permanent home.

**V. The Specter of Colonialism**
The return home is characteristic of the traditional Bildungsroman. However, that return home is a beginning of sorts; the Bildungsheld is ready to start his adulthood and all that that entails. However, Haynes’s return is a regressive move, for what he returns to is not a place or a family (he still cannot afford the house and he has no relatives or friends) but a developmental condition, the same developmental condition he was in two years prior. Outside of the microcosm of Minty Alley, where Haynes could reign at the top of the social structure and exercise a degree of power, Haynes remains constricted by colonialism; no one looks to him to speak or act, he is not in charge of anything, and he has no way of asserting his masculinity, for in the broader colonial world, without women whom he can take charge of and define himself accordingly by, he is still an emasculated colonized man. That the family Haynes watches from afar has a father reinforces the truth that Haynes’s pursuit of Bildung has failed, for he will only return to his own home once he has a bride and can be the patriarch of the house.

The presence of the father at the end of the novel is conspicuous because fathers are entirely absent from the novel. We know nothing about Haynes’s father except that he is gone and that Haynes is similar to him. When choosing a career path for him, Haynes’s mother insists that the only options for an educated black man are to be a lawyer or doctor, and the only option for Haynes is to be a doctor because, as she tells him, “law wouldn’t suit you, my child. You are your father’s son” (22). This statement seems to hint that Haynes’s father lacked assertiveness and/or vocality. The legal profession necessitates the ability to be
confrontational, argumentative, and assertive – all qualities, incidentally, 
associated with colonial conceptions of masculinity. His mother desperately wants 
Haynes to have a profession so that he can be independent, for she knows “how 
your father suffered, and you are so much like him that I tremble for you” (23). 
How his father suffered, we never know. These two excerpts are the only allusion 
to Haynes’s father in the entire novel, whereas his mother haunts the novel; it is a 
noticable absence. Given the extent to which Haynes is characterized as 
incompetent, ineffectual, and, well, feminine, that he is so much like his father 
that it inspires fear in his mother suggests a male unmanned to the point of 
oblivion.

Indeed, that a novel about masculinity and maturation in the colonized 
Caribbean pays so little attention to father figures and colonialism is striking, 
particularly when we consider the novel as a Bildungsroman, for in the classical 
Bildungsroman, it is the rebellion against the father which begins the quest for 
Bildung; Memmi echoes this sentiment when he argues that youthful rebellion 
against the father is a “a wholesome act and an indispensable one for self-
achievement” (48). Yet Haynes’s father is nowhere to be found. What the 
absences of colonialism and fathers suggest in the novel is the presence of a 
bigger father – the colonizer, a patriarchal presence that pervades every aspect of 
colonial life.

In closing, let us return to Haynes’s mother’s aspirations for him to be 
independent. What does it mean to be independent for a black man in a colonial 
context? What *Minty Alley* suggests is that independence cannot be found in a
colonized society; no matter where the black man seeks a mature identity, he will not find it. There simply is no place, no home for an adult colonized male, for he remains under the paternal authority of colonialism. The only way he can truly rebel is to actually remove himself from the spatial confines of colonialism. Outside of the barrack yard at Minty Alley, Haynes has no power to create himself and no future. With his mimic Bildungsroman James suggests that the colonized subject must look to an alternate course of development, one that is distinctive through its rejection of (not acquiescence to) the master discourse. However, this alternate course of development cannot occur in the colonial Caribbean; the subject must seek elsewhere to find a home.
CHAPTER 3

"NOTHING WAS CREATED IN THE WEST INDIES": THE FAILED PURSUIT OF BILDUNG IN V.S. NAIPUL’S A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS

“Mr. Biswas could not remember where the hut stood but the picture remained: a boy leaning against an earth house that had no reason for being there, under the dark falling sky, a boy who didn’t know where the road, and that bus, went.”

V.S. Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas

I. Two Worlds

V.S. Naipaul’s A House for Mr. Biswas is a novel about one man’s lifelong quest to build a life for himself out of the sparse opportunities and materials at hand in colonial Trinidad. Written in 1961 by a young Naipaul in London and based on the life of his father, Seepersad Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas is Naipaul’s most widely acclaimed novel (Time ranks it the 70th best novel of the 20th century). The novel explores the question: how does a man create a meaningful existence in a world that gives him little opportunity to do so? Through writing a Bildungsroman that depicts one man’s unceasing but ultimately futile efforts to cultivate a self-identity and find a place where that self can flourish, Naipaul indict colonialism and the limitations it places on its subjects in making their lives matter. Bildung is impossible for Biswas because he exists in a perpetual state of limbo; he is neither child nor adult, neither masculine nor feminine, neither at home or homeless. Indeed, that he is always living in other people’s homes comes to be the dominant metaphor in the text for his in-
betweenness. Naipaul’s text speaks specifically to the Indo-Caribbean experience by drawing strong parallels between Biswas’s liminality and the condition of being indentured. Thus, Biswas’s Bildung is largely defined by its attempts to escape the legacy of diaspora and indentured servitude in order to invent a distinctly modern self in the modern world. A house of his own comes to represent both escape and this new self for Biswas. Ultimately, Biswas does purchase a home. However, through an ironic narrative strategy, Naipaul suggests the hollowness of this victory, thereby revealing the developmental stagnation engendered by the historical conditions of indentureship and colonialism. The home of his own, and all that represents to Biswas, still eludes him at the end of his life.

Naipaul has been a lightening rod for controversy in the field of literary studies. Unlike most Caribbean writers, he claims no special allegiance to the region, no ideological agenda. As he explained in his 2001 Nobel Prize lecture, “I have no system, literary or political. I have no guiding political idea” (“Two Worlds” 247). Upon receiving the Nobel, he gave thanks to both England, his current home, and India, the home of his ancestors, but did not give mention to Trinidad, the country in which he was born and raised in. Indeed, he has consistently expressed his deep ambivalence about his native country. He sees the island as a chaotic place and candidly admits to fearing its disorder so much that he is often “awakened by the nightmare that I [am] back in tropical Trinidad” (Middle Passage 34). Naipaul’s lack of what have been deemed appropriate postcolonial politics and the wide perception of his depictions of colonized people
as racist have earned him much contempt from fellow Third World writers and critics. Edward Said accuses Naipaul of allowing himself “to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution. There are others like him who specialize in the thesis of what one of them has called self-inflicted wounds, which is to say that we non-whites are the causes of all our problems, not the overly maligned imperialism” (“Intellectuals” 53). Attributing Naipaul’s renown to his conservative politics, Amon Saba Saakana suggests that Naipaul’s fame comes from “the role he has played for white western societies in satirizing, ridiculing, and condemning both the Caribbean and Africa as ‘barren’ societies” (90). George Lamming insinuates that Naipaul suffers from a lack of intelligence and reduces Naipaul’s views of the West Indies to “a simple confession of the man’s inadequacy which must be rationalized since the man himself has come to accept it” (“The Occasion for Speaking” 30), and Jamaica Kincaid plainly remarks, “He just annoys me so much, all my thoughts are intemperate and violent. . . I think probably the only people who’ll say good things about him are Western people, right wing people” (qtd. in Winokur 121). The aforementioned criticisms are only a sampling of the vituperative that has been cast in Naipaul’s direction.

Many of the attacks on Naipaul point to two particular remarks he has made as evidence of his cruelty to and lack of respect for colonized people. The first is in an essay entitled “Conrad’s Darkness,” in which he describes colonized territories as “half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made” (163). This sentiment would be later thematically echoed in his 2001 novel, *Half a Life*. The second comment that has spurred outrage appears in the first
chapter of Naipaul’s Caribbean travelogue The Middle Passage, where he contemplates the difficulty of writing a history of the region because “history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was ever created in the West Indies” (20). Both of these comments have been widely cited and made the centerpieces of assaults on Naipaul. However, when read in the context of Naipaul’s oeuvre, what strikes me is that these comments, offensive though they may be, are not accusations aimed at the colonized but rather lamentations for the colonized. This is not to say that Naipaul has not been overly unfair to and critical of various groups of people (including women – in a 2011 interview, he maintained that no woman could match him in literary skill, in part because women writers too often become entangled in “banality” [Fallon]). As Patrick French’s recent authorized biography, The World Is What It Is, reveals, Naipaul demonstrates little in the way of compassion or kindness in his personal life to recommend him. However, he has been unwavering in his views that those half-made societies, that lack of creation, is primarily attributable to the scourge of colonialism. As Frank Kermode says, colonialism “is to Naipaul what the Mafia is to the great Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia – an image of evil, of the contagion of the world’s slow stain” (“Garden of the Oppressor”). A consistent theme – one might say obsession – in all of Naipaul’s work is the debilitating effects the colonial endeavor has had on those who were its victims. Thus, when Naipaul argues that these societies seem half-made, the implication is not that such a condition is attributable to the inherent inferiority of the people who comprise
them but is instead a result of their artificial creation and intentional underdevelopment by imperial forces.

What is also noteworthy about the two comments that have garnered so much attention is their characterization of the West Indies as a place where creation and construction cannot occur - a space anathema to growth and development. These conditions, then, make the Bildungsroman, with its premium on maturation, cultivation, and socialization, an ideal vehicle for providing a damning commentary on colonialism. Indeed, the entire novel is about Biswas’s unyielding efforts to create (a self) and to construct (a house); both efforts fail. While C.L.R. James directs his critical gaze at colonialism’s retardation of the colonized male’s psyche in Minty Alley, Naipaul’s depiction of Biswas’s futile efforts at creation and construction takes the form of a materialist critique and levels its criticism at an external world which is hostile to progress. Biswas, unlike Haynes, has a rich inner life, one that is generally tortured and unhappy. Lacking suitable outlets for expression, this inner life often manifests in cantankerous and self-defeating behaviors, or, in the case of Biswas’s time spent at Green Vale, mental illness. In many ways, Biswas is aware of the limitations and problems he faces in his pursuit of Bildung, although he generally misrecognizes the sources of his oppression, a point I shall return to later in my discussion of his adversarial relationship with the Tulsis. Whereas Haynes has no idea who he wants to be or how to go about creating that self, Biswas is constantly taking action, trying new strategies, experimenting with new alliances in an attempt to be the kind of man he wants to be, to have the sort of life he
wants, and to find a community that, if not amenable to, is at least not hostile to these endeavors. Biswas wants to find a place in the world where he is not out of place and “unnecessary and unaccommodated” (11); in short, a place where he can achieve Bildung. The text makes abundantly clear that his inability to do so is not because of some innate weakness or lack but rather because of two specific external obstacles related to colonialism: a lack of material opportunities and social networks unresponsive to his efforts at individuation and autonomy.

II. Meaning and Mattering

Biswas wants, more than anything, to be someone of importance in the world, which, in his mind, is largely tied to vocational and financial success; for him, Bildung is tied to the accumulation of capital as a signifier of subjectivity. Sadly, he faces failure at almost every turn in his professional enterprises. His failures, however, are due to the lack of resources in colonial Trinidad; as the text constantly emphasizes, the material conditions in which Biswas labors preclude the sort of development he seeks. Gordon Roehler remarks of Biswas, “he is so strongly an individual, and his limitations so grave” (92). Biswas simply does not have access to the resources necessary for Bildung, a reality that he is frequently reminded of through his contact with foreign books and magazines.

Biswas’s primary source of inspiration in his pursuit of Bildung is western literature; however, this literature emphasizes the stark contrast between the living conditions of its heroes and Biswas’s own. Appropriately enough, Biswas favors texts engaged with the theme of self-improvement such as Marcus Aurelius’s Meditations on self-discipline and self-awareness, Charles Dickens’s tales of
young men coming to the city to make something of themselves, and nineteenth-century self-help writer Samuel Smiles’s tomes. Lacking in formal education (Biswa leaves school quite early), the protagonists of these works serve as Biswa’s mentors. When he reads Smiles, Biswa sees himself in many of the heroes: “he was young, he was poor, and he fancied he was struggling” (75). However, Biswa is frequently confronted with the discrepancy between the worlds of those heroes and his own, for “those heroes had rigid ambitions and lived in countries where ambitions could be pursued and had a meaning. He had no ambition and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motorbus, what could he do? What could he invent?” (75). Moreover, while Biswa is intoxicated by the descriptions of landscape and weather in the stories of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, they also make him “despair of finding romance in his own dull green land which the sun scorched everyday” (74). Although his reading will bring Biswa comfort throughout his life, it is a comfort that begets a bitter melancholy by celebrating worlds which Biswa, due to circumstances of birth, will have access to only through reading.

Counter to the traditional trajectory of Bildung, Biswa’s self-education takes him further from the aims of Bildung, for his visions of success and his opportunities for it do not square. This disconnect produces a discordance that is “the consequence of his vivid, imaginative life created and sustained by the alien influences of his education” (Theroux 85) and leaves him “unable to transcend the limitations of which he is conscious (85). Trinidad is depicted as a place inhospitable to Bildung; indeed, the text characterizes Trinidad as unconducive to
any sort of productivity and commerce, a point that is emphasized by the common practice of “insuraburn” – burning one’s home or business for the insurance money. In this “half-made” society, destruction proves more profitable than production, decay more convenient than growth. It is against this backdrop that Biswas sets out to achieve some semblance of successful Bildung. When Biswas initially leaves home in rebellion against his mother, Bipti, his first step is to look for employment. Surveying the businesses along the Main Road, Biswas is dismayed at the professional opportunities available to him. He does not want to be a tailor because he does not “like the tailor he saw, a fat man sulkily sewing in a dingy shop” (64). He cannot be a barber, for he thinks the job disgusting, “a profession immemorially low” (65). The owners of other stores remain “in their shops, lost in the gloom and wedged between dry goods” (65). All that he sees are unhappy people menially laboring among disorganization and dirtiness – a far cry from Nicholas Nickelby’s spirited immersion in the work of adapting French tragedies. The following day, with his sagging spirits renewed, Biswas again returns to the Main Road and walks past “the same array of shops, it seemed, the same owners, the same goods, the same assistants. And it all filled him with the same depression” (66). So discouraged is he by the prospects for his life, Biswas announces to his mother that, given the options at hand, suicide is the most attractive. Bipti, perhaps the most downtrodden, pathetic character in the novel, nods in encouragement: “That would be the best thing for you. And for me” (66). Biswas will often think of suicide throughout his life when experiencing despair; at these times, he “longs for inertia, a relapse into darkness” (Roehler 86). This
longing is symptomatic of a profound exhaustion resulting from Biswas’s constant struggles for dignity and meaning in the face of adversity. It is tragically appropriate that when Biswas dies prematurely at the age of forty-five, it is from heart failure – in other words, a broken heart. However, up until his death, Biswas’s indefatigable spirit always overcomes these feelings to spur him on in his quest for self-realization. In this way, Biswas’s struggle itself becomes a small victory and expression of individuality, although he never does cease “to feel that some nobler purpose awaited him, even in this limiting society” (66).

For Biswas, that nobler purpose is the vocation of writer, an artistic man of letters; however, the closest he will come to this is in his capacity as a journalist for a local tabloid. The text underscores the impossibility of Bildung for Biswas by casting writing as a vocation that excludes and ignores the colonized through its privileging of the European experience as normative. Subsequent to his discovery of Marcus Aurelius and Dickens, Biswas will become “addicted to literature aimed at people who want to become writers; again and again he read how manuscripts were to be presented and was warned not to ring up the busy editors of London or New York papers” (328), advice humorous in its irrelevance. Biswas attempts to educate himself by reading every book he can get his hands on, including Cecil Hunt’s Short Stories: How to Write Them and How To Write a Book; he goes so far as to send away for a course offered by the “Ideal School of Journalism.” However, just as he cannot relate to the worlds in the novels he reads, he cannot relate to the topics these guides suggest and is again haunted by the idea that the real world is somewhere else. Lacking any suitable literary
models, Biswas does not consider anything around him worth writing about. Instead he submits articles about the four seasons (which Trinidad lacks), tragically writing in one, “we have chopped up logs for winter. We have gathered in the corn which soon, before a blazing fire in the depths of winter, we shall enjoy” (329). Biswas has unquestioningly accepted colonial ideologies which locate that which is real and important in the metropolitan center. In fact, over many years, Biswas starts and restarts the same story – one entitled “Escape” about a lowly journalist with four children (like Biswas himself) who seeks to, as one might guess, escape:

Sometimes his hero had a Hindi name; then he was short and unattractive and poor, and surrounded by ugliness, which was anatomized in bitter detail. Sometimes his hero had a Western name: he was then faceless, but tall and broad shouldered; he was a reporter and moved in the world derived from the novels Mr. Biswas had read and the films he had seen. None of these stories was finished, and their theme was always the same. The hero, trapped into marriage, burdened with a family, his youth gone, meets a young girl. She is thin, almost slim, and dressed in white” (330)

The variations on this story suggest not just the extent to which Biswas has internalized colonial racism but also how inaccessible the outside world is to Biswas; while he longs to escape to it, he cannot even fully imagine it. Whereas the Hindi character is described in exacting detail, the Western character is
faceless. Moreover, the story always remains unfinished because potential
directions the story might go are beyond the scope of Biswas’s imagination.

When he finds out that Shama’s older brother, Owad, is going abroad for school,
he is “overwhelmed . . . he had never thought that anyone so close to him could
escape so easily” (italics mine; 334).

Biswa’s frustrations recall Humboldt’s insistence on the necessity of
proper opportunities to engage in self-cultivation. In an essay on Humboldt,
David Sorkin reminds us “an individual’s development depends upon finding
appropriate outlets for his energy so that he can engage in activity by means of
which he realizes his potentialities and increases his abilities” (58). In Biswas, we
see enormous amounts of energy that lack proper outlets, a condition which is
figured in restless movement. Biswas is a peripatetic character, frequently
walking and riding his bike from place to place and yet really going nowhere. His
creative energies stifled, he spends considerable amounts of time devoting himself
“to some absurdity. He grew his nails to an extreme length and held them up to
startle customers. He poked and squeezed his face until his cheek and forehead
were inflamed and the rims of his lips were like welts” (175). Another time, he
“dabbed healing ointments of various colours on his face and went and stood in
the shop doorway greeting people he knew” (176); this instance reminds us that,
in addition to his literary aspirations, Biswas also has a passion for painting. The
novel offers a trenchant commentary on the impossibility of artistic creation in the
milieu in which Biswas exists when he is forced to rechannel his desire to paint;
rather than creating a thing of beauty in which he can take pride, he paints himself
to look as ugly as possible. In this deformed world, self-mutilation and self-humiliation become performance art, as Biswas’s artistic impulses can find expression only through the grotesque.

His energy also manifests in a series of rebellions. Biswas is always mouthing off and making sarcastic remarks, particularly to and about the family of his wife, the Tulsis. However, his rebellious efforts are misdirected and unproductive. While Biswas’s anger over the condition of his life is aimed at the Tulsis, the text makes clear that it is not the Tulsis who have prevented him from having the kind of life he envisions. Indeed, the Tulsis have, in fact, facilitated Biswas’s survival and provided care and shelter for his wife and children during his long periods of absence. He is regularly enraged by family members’ reminders that he came to them with nothing and they subsequently fed, clothed, and sheltered him, as well as offered him various employment opportunities in the family businesses, but these reminders are true; Biswas did have nothing. What he fails to see is that it is not the Tulsis (who, to be fair, are, by and large, an irritating lot) but rather the conditions into which he was born that make dependency on the Tulsis his only option for survival. This tendency is characteristic of many of the men in Naipaul’s fiction; Steph Ceraso and Patricia Connelly point out, “the male protagonists . . . remain profoundly unaware of how their unstable relationships with women are symptomatic of their marginalization as postcolonial subjects” (“The Destabilization of Masculinity”). Biswas blames his marriage, Mrs. Tulsi, and his children for his lack of freedom when forces far stronger govern his fate.
In addition to a lack of material resources and opportunity for self-development, Biswas faces another significant obstacle in his pursuit of Bildung: the inability to fit into the social realm and thrive as an autonomous, unique individual. As a poor, colonized man, Biswas is born into a world that does not even acknowledge his existence; his immediate community, on the other hand, seems downright hostile to him from birth. The result of these two circumstances is that Biswas cannot ever find a community with which he can establish that harmonious dialectical relationship that characterizes Bildung and community works against Biswas’s Bildung.

Biswa’s insignificance to the broader world is first symbolized by his lack of a birth certificate. Only when he begins school and must obtain one do we learn that no one even knows when Biswas was born or how old he is. After his mother and Aunt Tara, relying on some quick astrological calculations, venture a guess, he is issued birth papers in a sly clerk’s office and it is “in this way official notice was taken of Mr. Biswas’s existence and he entered the new world” (43). That it is when the colonizing government recognizes his existence that Biswas is “born” underscores the ways in which colonial discourses reserve the power to authenticate and define the subjectivity of the colonized. Moreover, the use of “new world” connotes Columbus’s discovery of the West Indies which was in part catalyzed by imperial powers’ desires to explore, map, chart, and label the “undiscovered” parts of the globe. In this respect, the phrase reminds us that power relations are often defined by the ability to name. Finally, it suggests a break from the past, for his birth is into another world, a new world; history for
Biswas will ultimately be an area of darkness - inaccessible, unknowable, and irrecoverable.

The novel further emphasizes Biswas’s lack of worldly significance through the disappearance of his childhood village and home. After the land is sold and found to be rich in oil, all the houses are razed and, as a result, “the world carried no witness to Mr. Biswas’s birth and early years” (44). This loss of origins suggests a parallel to the loss of India as a homeland for Indo-Caribbeans, particularly because Biswas’s family, like those impoverished people who indentured themselves one hundred years earlier, are forced to depart their home during his childhood because they are under financial duress and extremely marginalized by their community. As Naipaul writes regarding Indo-Caribbeans’ relationship to India, “the past of our community, indeed for most of us, began with our grandfathers [who emigrated]; beyond that we could not see” (“Reading and Writing” 10), a sentiment that is echoed in the novel when Biswas returns to his childhood village only to find that his “grandparents’ house had also disappeared, and when huts of mud and grass are pulled down they leave no trace” (40). The departure from and subsequent disappearance of the only house which Biswas ever had any claim to results in a state of affairs in which “for the next thirty-five years he was to be a wanderer with no place he could call his own” (39). This emphasis on visual presence suggests the necessity of being seen by others for asserting one’s subjectivity and foreshadows the two primary ways that Biswas will attempt to gain notice in the world – through writing and home ownership. Moreover, the disappearance of his childhood home and village will
lead to feelings of non-existence that Biswas both internalizes and protests against all of his life. When he looks at himself in the mirror, he despairs, “that is the whole blasted trouble . . . I don’t look like anything at all.” (35). He is unable to envision a future and instead sees “a blankness, a void, like those in dreams into which past, tomorrow, and next week and next year, he was falling” (152), and in a particularly depressed period, assures Anand, “I am not your father. I am just somebody. Nobody at all” (267).

However, Biswas also works to overcome these feelings. The written word will take on a premium importance in his life as a way of evidencing his existence and of engaging the external world in some semblance of the dialectical relationship that characterizes Bildung through demanding that he be read. Biswas is only “born” when his birth is documented on a piece of paper as an older child; his early years cease to matter because there is nothing left that “carried witness” to them. These circumstances lead to an obsession with documentation and textuality. Of all the jobs he has, the only two that Biswas enjoys and is at all capable are that of sign painter and journalist. Indeed, after many years of writing for the local paper, he still gets a thrill out of seeing his name in print and he frequently imagines his death being widely reported in the papers. This fixation on having his subjectivity affirmed in print is further revealed in one of Biswas and Shama’s biggest fights when he finds out that she has given their first born child a name he detests and his occupation has been reported on their child’s birth certificate as “labourer.” His response to the first affront is to write the name he wants the child to have in the back of a book in “large letters, as though his
succession had already been settled” (154). Again, this recalls the relationship among language, power, and naming; in this instance, words become a weapon. Biswas believes that if he can just write the words, he can assume a dominant position in the situation. Disappointingly, just as so many of his struggles to assert himself do, his petty effort results in a pathetic end: the book “as a repository of family records, proved to be a mistake. The endpaper blotted atrociously” (155). His sense of indignation at not being consulted over the child’s name pales in comparison to that at being called a labourer: “‘Sign-painter? Shopkeeper? God, not that!’” (156). Biswas then proceeds to cross out the word and write in “proprietor” on the official government document. The problem is that, as Shama rightly points out, Biswas is distinctly not a proprietor. However, labourer does not fit with Biswas’s image of himself and the legacy he wants to leave in the world, and so strong is his faith in the written word that he believes that if he can just officially document that he is a proprietor, it will somehow be true, not unlike imperialist designations of parts of the world as “undiscovered” when, in fact, those spaces were inhabited. While the outside world may see him as a “labourer,” the image does not match with Biswas’s self-conception. His own experiences in obtaining a birth certificate have created in him the sense that to be real is to be written about; he laments, “you know the government and nobody else did want to believe I was even born” (155). Biswas’s rage in regards to his daughter’s birth certificate is matched by joy when he receives a response to a letter he wrote to the doctor who behaved disrespectfully while presiding over his mother’s death. While writing the letter, Biswas is thrilled “to think of the
doctor’s surprise at receiving such a letter from the relation of someone he had thought only to be a peasant” (463). For Biswas, mastery over language becomes one of the few ways someone in his position can exercise power.

We can read this fixation on language and documentation as Biswas’s attempt literally to write himself into history, a history that has widely ignored the lives of people like Biswas and the Tulsis. Biswas does not want to be forgotten with the past and, as his friend Alec tells him, “the modern thing is to have lots of words” (72). Consequently, Biswas develops a fervent faith in the power of narrative, as Edward Said contends, to assert “the power of men to be born, develop, and die . . . above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, not an objective condition of history” (Orientalism 240). Here Said acknowledges that power is characterized by its ability to impose order on and arrange events in ways it sees fit through its narration of history. Thus, Biswas’s desire to document his existence in his own terms via text can be seen as a “will to power,” a spirited response to colonial discourses which have created the dominant versions of history that ignore the experiences and deny the value of the lives of the colonized. As Maureen Shay argues, Naipaul’s “characters find in the trappings of writing an alternative community to which they may belong and through which they may defy extinction . . . such characters long to re-order their worlds through a linguistic seizure of experience – to make their mark” (285). Although Biswas’s efforts are ultimately not as memorable as he would like, they are nonetheless admirable in their insistence that he be included in the written historical legacy of
the island in some small way, even if only in the town registrar’s records of existence and the archives of the local paper he writes for. These efforts are reminiscent of Naipaul’s own aims as a novelist, one who has frequently sought to shed light on the lives and histories of those who the dominant historical record has excluded.

That community will be problematic for Biswas is established early in the text, for even as an infant Biswas is at odds with his surroundings. He is born “the wrong way” (15) at midnight “the inauspicious hour” (16). The midwife who helps deliver him warns, “whatever you do, this boy will eat up his own mother and father” (16), and the next day when the pundit arrives, he predicts that Biswas will be a man of little character. The midwife and the pundit’s words in mind, Biswas’s family “never forgot that he was an unlucky child” (19). Before he is even a toddler, Biswas is blamed for most of the ill events that befall the family and viewed as an outsider among its members. Already his first community has rejected him to an extent and marked him as not fitting in. As he grows, he also cannot form friendships with the other boys his age. Biswas is forbidden from joining his brothers working at the buffalo pond with the other children his age because the pundit said he would be unlucky around water. Instead, he stays home, playing “house” and cooking with his sister, Dehuti, which prefigures the emasculation Biswas suffers throughout his life. The default assumption of a feminine role because of conditions that exclude Biswas from performing masculinity will be a running motif in the novel. Worth noting is Biswas’s complacency regarding this emasculation; as tortured by as many things as he is,
Biswa’s lack of masculinity is not one of them. As I shall explore later in this chapter, because there are few models of masculinity available to Biswas, he accepts a condition that Ashis Nandy calls “femininity-in-masculinity” (8) rather than perform a masculinity which offends his sensibilities. It is in his early years that Biswas’s “in-betweeness” is established – he is part of the family but an outcast, a boy who stays home and pretends to be a wife.

The community necessary for Bildung also eludes him as an adult. Biswas will spend his life at odds with the Tulsis among whom he lives, for any attempt at autonomy or independence is forbidden and ridiculed in that community. Hanuman House, where Biswas lives, is the residence for a large but unknown number of people who comprise the Tulsi clan. Everyone (with the exception of Sethe and Shama’s two brothers) is treated the same and expected to contribute to the household. Other than a few characters who play an integral role in the plot, residents are largely referred to by non-personal names – sisters, husbands, children. Privacy, with its implication of marking a space as personal, is forbidden, and secrets are impossible to keep because of the multitudes of children spread across the house. Biswas does not have his own room; instead, he rolls out a bed nightly in a hallway where he is “besieged by nameless sleepers” (98). Biswas deeply resents these conditions and tries to maintain a modicum of independence; when Govind suggests that he give up his sign-painting business, Biswas retorts, “Give up sign-painting? And my independence? No, boy. My motto is paddle your own canoe” (107). This remark will earn Biswas much scorn, and for the rest of his life, other Tulsis will occasionally refer to Biswas as
“paddler” in order to humiliate him by reminding him of his dependency. In another endeavor to assert his difference from the rest of the traditional Hindu clan, Biswas begins attending Aryan meetings, an endeavor that is met with amused skepticism by Shama and Sethe. However, when his name appears in the paper in an article about the Aryans, their amusement turns to anger; it allows him to stand out too much. Nowhere is the inhospitality of the Tulsi community to individualism more evident than in the incident with the dollhouse. Biswas buys an extravagant dollhouse for his daughter Savi as a pathetic substitute for the house he dreams of building for his family; in a cruel mockery of Biswas’s fantasy, he can only buy a toy version of his ideal home. However, when one week later he returns to Hanuman House, he sees the dollhouse destroyed in the backyard. He later finds out that it was, in fact, his wife Shama who destroyed the house because she and the children were so mistreated by other members of the community for standing out. She says, “You don’t know what I had to put up with . . . Everybody beating their children the moment they start talking to Savi. Nobody wanted to talk to me . . . so I had to satisfy them. I break up the dolly-house and everyone was satisfied” (216). As Mohit Ray says, “the incident of the doll house which Mr. Biswas gives his daughter as a gift and the ruthlessness with which it is torn apart are clear enough indications of the authoritarian way individualism is crushed in the Tulsi household” (48). Biswas’s experience at the Tulsi house makes evident the problem of Bildung for Biswas: the only community he has access to is one in which his membership is predicated upon on a conformity that is not only anathema to his non-conformist impulses but to
Bildung. His situation is reminiscent of one described in Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* in which, lacking any ability to make a life for himself, the colonized male will “remain glued to that family which offers him warmth and tenderness but which simultaneously absorbs, clutches, and emasculates him” (99).

As a result of his treatment by his childhood family and the Tulsis, Biswas soon comes to see other people as the enemy. A central obstacle to Biswas’s Bildung is his paradoxical dependency on people to confirm his existence but his repulsion at the terms in which they do so. Nowhere is this problem more evident than in his breakdown at Green Vale. Towards the end of his time at Green Vale, Biswas rapidly descends into madness when one night he is seized by an all-encompassing terror. He tries to locate the source of this terror and decides that it is other people: “People. He could hear them next door and all down the barracks. No road was without them, No house. They were in the newspapers, in the wall, in the photographs, in the simple drawing in advertisements” (254). This realization leads Biswas into a deliriously paranoid condition in which he begins to complain of “little black clouds” (263) floating in his brain and accuse a visiting Shama of wanting him dead, screaming, “I know you want me to get a real fever. I know all you want to see me dead” (263). So hysterical does Biswas become at this moment that he kicks his very pregnant wife in the stomach with all of his strength, an act of aggression completely out of character for the normally weak man. His paranoia leads him into a state in which “every man and woman he saw, even at a distance, gave him a twist of panic” (257). Given his
treatment at the hands of other people throughout his life, these feelings are not unfounded. However, the irony of Biswas’s illness is that while he attributes it to other people, it is only when he is totally isolated in his room at Green Vale that he begins to go insane; without other people around to help him combat those feelings of non-existence, he is unable to prevent himself from “surrender[ing] to the darkness” (255). On some level, Biswas seems to understand this, for, after Anand comes to stay with him out of concern, his greatest fear is that “Anand would leave him and he would be left alone” (270). Biswas’s simultaneous need and fear of people is just one way in which his life is characterized by co-existing and conflicting conditions that leave him in a perpetual state of limbo, a state definitively antithetical to the aims of Bildung.

III. At Home and Not at Home

This limbo is partially expressed through the depiction of Biswas existing in a developmentally liminal state in which he is neither infant nor adult. Though Biswas wants to be independent, he is largely reliant on the care of women functioning as mother figures (although he himself is a semi-active role father to his own children). Part of his desire for Bildung is his desire to cross the threshold into adulthood which for Biswas is partially marked by independence from women and self-determination. However, this transition will never be fully completed in his lifetime. Although his own mother neglects him, Biswas will rely on his Aunt Tara for protection throughout his life. When, as a young man, he feels that he has been tricked by the Tulsis into an engagement with Shama,
instead of standing up for himself, he entreats Tara to meet with them and extricate him from the arrangement. He is also dependent on grand matriarch Mrs. Tulsi for food, shelter, and general survival; this reliance is emphasized when, after deciding to “paddle his own canoe” by moving to Green Vale and suffering the breakdown, he is literally carried back to Hanuman House like a baby by Govind. His metaphorical regressive lapse into infancy is further suggested by his reversion into a pre-linguistic state (he does not talk at all during the journey back to or his first night at Hanuman House). Indeed, once at Hanuman House, Biswas is put in the womb-like space of the Blue Room where “every wall was solid; the sound of the rain deadened” (283) and he welcomes “the warmth and reassurance of the room” (283). To comfort Biswas, one of the Tulsi women brings him warm milk; this tactic for nursing Biswas back to health gestures at the nourishment of a mother’s milk. Although the text does not dwell on it, inexplicably there is a midwife waiting among the other Tulsi women at the house, a rare appearance of an outsider in the otherwise hermetic domicile. Her presence implies that of a newborn, and, indeed, as Biswas looks around the Blue Room, his sensations and impressions resemble those of one newly born: “he couldn’t assess what had gone before or what was to come. He felt he was continually awakening to a new situation . . . As he concentrated, every object acquired a solidity, a permanence” (283). Without a woman to mother him, Biswas is completely unable to take care of himself and, the text suggests, is as helpless as an infant on his own; he cannot survive without a mother figure. Throughout their marriage, though Biswas will frequently ridicule her, Shama
takes care of their financial affairs; both at the store they manage and the house they serve as landlords for, Shama works as the bookkeeper and deals with the tenants. At the end of his life, bedridden and ill, Shama nurses him while his elder daughter, Savi, financially supports him. Biswas never ceases to rely on mother figures for his care, and in this respect never develops fully into an adult.

His weak, unhealthy body metaphorically represents Biswas’s underdevelopment. Beginning when he was a child, stomach troubles torment him his entire life; he is constantly battling gas, indigestion, hunger, nausea, constipation, or, alternately, diarrhea. He lacks muscle and strength; he angers Shama early in their marriage when he “slapped his yellow, flabby calf and pushed his finger into the flesh. The calf yielded like a sponge” (114). Once he realizes this act’s power to annoy her, in typical Biswas fashion, he makes it a habit. By his late 20s, his body has become a disgusting sight, wracked by decay and disintegration: “he developed a double chin of pure skin which he could pull down so that it hung like the stiff beard of an Egyptian statue. The skin loosened over his arms and legs; his stomach was now perpetually distended” (174). The state of his body is in large part due to malnutrition; the food Biswas has access to is limited, generally unhealthy, and often stale. This physical malnourishment parallels Biswas’s spiritual, social, and intellectual malnourishment; he is enervated by the world around him to the extent that the one time he hits Shama, she does not hit him back because they both know “she was stronger than he” (184).
Biswas’s liminality is further emphasized through the entwined leitmotifs of waiting and debt. Both the conditions of waiting and owing debt suggest a suspension of forward movement, an abeyance of the progress that is necessarily entailed in Bildung. Biswas’s immediate circumstances are so unconducive to the life he desires and his immersion in European literature that he never ceases to feel that the “real world” and that “real life” is somewhere else. He finds that “he yearned after the outside world; he read novels that took him there” (198); he is both shocked and jealous to find that Shama has actually had contact with this world through her childhood correspondence with a young girl in North Cumberland. He longs for escape and frequently feels the need “to leave before it was too late” (505). These feelings engender a sense that life has yet to begin, that the life he is living is simply a prelude to the one he is meant to live; consequently, Biswas comes to feel that he is always waiting: “living had always been a preparation, a waiting.” (561). Rather than being a linear progression, time becomes meaningless, something to endure as Biswas waits for his life to pass so that he can begin having his real life. However, what Biswas considers real life will never come and all he can do is “wait-wait-wait” (563). Part of the reason Biswas feels this way is that he spends his life in debt; because he always owes money to other people for past purchases and transactions, he is never able to move forward in his own life through accumulating capital that, in turn, might grant him a modicum of independence. Debt maintains the debtor’s ties to the past, always pulling him backwards and keeping him suspended in time. Biswas finds debt to be a tragic burden, at once paralyzing and terrifying. Reflecting on
Guy de Maupassant’s story “The Necklace,” Biswas thinks, “He had never been able to understand why it was considered a comic story. Debt was a fearful thing and with all its ifs and might-have-beens, the story came too near the truth: hope followed by blight, the passing of the years, the passing of life itself, and the revelation of waste” (540). And yet Biswas spends his life in debt – to Tara and Ajodha, to the Tulsis, and, later, to the bank for the house. His debt tortures him, remaining “like a buffer at the end of a track, frustrating energy and ambition” (561) and makes him acutely aware of “time flying by . . . bringing disaster closer, devouring his life” (561). In relying on debt and waiting as motifs, the text distinctly recalls the institution of indentured servitude and thus highlights how the historical conditions of colonial Trinidad retard the development of its society overall and its individual subjects; in other words, how “historical event leads to historical event in a circle that cannot be broken” (Murray 59). Moreover, the novel speaks specifically to the Indo-Caribbean experience.

In order to understand why debt and waiting would be such useful tropes in conveying the static nature of time, a brief overview of the history of Indo-Caribbeans in the region is necessary. After the abolition of slavery in the colonies in 1832, plantation economies faced a serious labor shortage, and, after a few years of experimenting with various solutions to this shortage, a statute was introduced in 1844 for raising funds for the transportation of Indian laborers to Trinidad (Mohammed 59). In 1845, the first group of indentured slaves arrived. While these people were not kidnapped and enslaved in the same way that earlier generations of African slaves were, to say they came out of free will would not be
entirely accurate, either, as emigrants were “drawn from groups impoverished by conditions in India such as famine and drought . . . emigration offered possibilities of escape from starvation” (Mohammed 34). Thus, these Indians faced a choice between survival and starvation, which is not much of a choice at all. Under the system of indentureship, Indians were contracted to work for anywhere from three to ten years without wages in exchange for food and shelter, as well as either land or money at the end of their term and passage home. While a basic tenet of indentureship was that laborers were transient employees who would return home, this often did not happen, for “the proprietors had never supported the idea of repatriation and sought every means to subvert it” (Chamberlain 6). As a result, many indentured servants were left stranded in the Caribbean, unable to return home to India.

IV. The Grasp of History

Thus, the essential features of indentured servitude in the Caribbean were being indebted to one’s master, waiting out a period of time to repay that debt, and the promise of a home, either through the payment of land of one’s own or through repatriation back to the Indian homeland at the end of this period. These things in mind, then, we see how Biswas’s pursuit of Bildung is problematized by the fact that the legacy of indentured servanthood persists to such an extent that Biswas’s entire life bears strong parallels to indentured slavery, a reality that is brought into full focus through his relationship with houses and the idea of home. Indeed, Biswas’s desire for home represents not only a desire for a material
symbol of self and place where his community can accommodate him but freedom, autonomy, and dignity - relief from those conditions of indentured servitude and which are prerequisites to the pursuit of Bildung.

Naipaul draws clear parallels between Biswas’s life and those of his forefathers who came from India as indentured servants. As I noted earlier, poverty and marginalization necessitate Biswas’s family’s departure from his childhood home. This initial exile marks the starting point of a life that will be spent in the homes of others, tenancies that are dependent on both Biswas’s humiliation and labor and in that way keep Biswas in a perpetual state of indentured servitude. Consequently, his idealized notion of home is subverted, for to live in a home, Biswas must endure situations that make him feel distinctly not at home. His first home (after losing the family home) is at his Aunt Tara’s estate. However, his family does not live in the main house with Tara and her wealthy husband, Ajodha, but rather with “some of Tara’s husband’s dependent relations in a back trace far from the Main Road” (39) in a one room mud hut among strangers, conditions which bring him much shame. He is invited into Tara and Ajodha’s home only on two occasions: when they need a Brahmin to feed for a religious holiday or when Ajodha, finding it a sign of wealth to be read to, calls Biswas to read from his favorite newspaper column, That Body of Yours. Biswas is soon removed from school by Tara and sent to the home of Pundit Jairam where is to be trained as a pundit and endures grave humiliation. Jairam immediately puts Biswas to work, doing the “mechanical side of Jairam’s offices” (49), including gathering gifts for the Pundit and foraging for coins at the local
shrine, after which Biswas is suspiciously searched by Jairam, in exchange for this training and shelter. One night, when very hungry, Biswas takes one banana from a bunch that was gifted to the pundit; he is caught and, enraged, Jairam cruelly forces Biswas to sit down and eat the whole bunch until he is extremely sick as punishment. After again inadvertently offending the pundit in a humiliating incident relating to Biswas’s digestive problems, Biswas is sent home. His next home is with the despicable Bhandat; in exchange for laboring in the rum shop managed by Bhandat, Biswas will be given shelter, food, clothes, and a tiny wage. However, Biswas will also have to endure a good deal of abuse in exchange for these things. Because Bhandat realizes that Biswas knows he is stealing money from the store, he begins to wage a campaign against him, sneering to customers, “‘Look at him. Always smiling, eh? As though he is smarter than everybody else. Look at him.’” (59). With Bhandat’s encouragement, the shops patrons also begin to verbally abuse Biswas, seeing him as “someone who could be ridiculed” (59). Biswas finally leaves Bhandat’s home one night after Bhandat falsely accuses him of stealing money and drunkenly beats the innocent Biswas. In each instance, Biswas’s access to stable housing is predicated on his working for shelter and enduring ritual humiliations. As a result, Biswas comes to see a home of his own as the only way out of these circumstances; fed up with his state of dependency and his lack of dignity, he finally runs away from his mother’s hut, shouting, “‘I am going to get a job on my own. And I am going to get my own house too. I am finished with this’ He waved his aching arm about the mud walls
and the low, sooty thatch” (64). Biswas sees a home of his own as a solution to
demoralizing conditions.

Alas, upon arriving in the city, Biswas finds himself overwhelmed and
almost immediately a resident of Hanuman House, where his humiliation is most
acute and his state of indentureship most evident. Gordon Roemer makes a
persuasive argument that Tulsi House is, for all intents and purposes, a slave
society; however, I slightly dissent from this point of view, for I see it as an
indentured servant society, one in which “The daughters and their children swept
and washed and cooked and served in the store. The husbands, under Seth’s
supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served
in the store. In return they were given food, shelter, and a little money” (92). The
inhabitants of Tulsi house are free to come and go as they please; Biswas is not
owned by the Tulsis, nor are any of the other occupants of Hanuman House.
However, in order to receive the benefits of “Tulsi dom” – shelter, security, food –
Biswas, like everyone else, must work off his debt through labor for the family.
Although Shama reminds him, “well, nobody didn’t ask you to get married into
the family, you know” (100), his few options outside of Tulsi house put him in a
similar predicament to his ancestors who also “chose” to indenture themselves.

Even the gender dynamics at Tulsi House reflect the gender relations
among indentured slaves. During the years in which indentured servantship was
legal in Trinidad (between 1840 and 1917), Indian gender dynamics experienced a
significant shift in the colonies. As Patricia Mohammed has explored at length,
the migration of Indian males was far greater than that of females; over the course
of those years, the ration of male to female indentured servants ranged from 4:1 to 2:1 (37). The scarcity of women in the colonies elevated their importance and “they began to make choices and demands not possible in India. Indian women could begin to wield a power they did not possess under the dominant gender system from which they had emerged” (11). This change, along with the emasculating conditions of indentureship, the lack of access to resources used to traditionally assert masculinity in India, and the broader emasculation of the Indian male by colonial discourses, struck a painful blow to Indian men. All of these changes are exhibited at Tulsi house, which is ruled over not by a man but by the elderly Mrs. Tulsi. The Tulsi daughters who marry men of means move in with their husbands; however, a man like Biswas who has no money or position, is “expected to become a Tulsi” (93) rather than maintain his own last name, a circumstance which not only implies a total negation of a man’s masculine identity but also suggests the importance of capital in asserting masculinity. However, by keeping the Tulsi husbands indebted to and laboring for the family, Mrs. Tulsi deprives men of the opportunity to accumulate capital and escape their emasculation. This characteristic of Tulsi life is well-known; Tara is disappointed when she finds out Biswas has married into the family, remarking, “‘You have got yourself into a real gum-pot . . . and I had such nice plans for you’” (96). When Biswas worries that the clan might be angry at him, Tara snaps, “‘What’s the matter? Are you afraid of them already, like every other man in that place?’” (96).
However, despite his proclamations otherwise and his general
cantankerousness towards the Tulsis, Biswas is afraid of them and accepts his
emasculated role without protest. This is not because Biswas does not privilege
masculinity but rather because the only two models available to a man of his
station do not appeal to him. Throughout the novel, we encounter three types of
Indo-Caribbean masculine performance: colonial mimicry, sexual promiscuity,
and femininity-in-masculinity. Seth, who clomps around the house in his overseer
boots and asserts authority through the threat of violence, embodies the first.
When Biswas first meets Seth to discuss his wages for doing some sign painting
for the family, Seth is described as a “large, mustached, overpowering man” (78).
Seth’s negotiating style is described in violent terms: “Seth had beaten down
Biswas’s price and said that Mr. Biswas was getting the job only because he was
an Indian; he had beaten it down a little further and said that Mr. Biswas could
count himself lucky to be a Hindu; he had beaten it down yet further and said that
signs were not really needed but were being commissioned from Mr. Biswas only
because he was a Brahmin” (78). However, the instability of this mimic
masculinity is revealed later in the text when Seth, having had a falling out with
Mrs. Tulsi, returns to greet Owad back from his time in England, resembling a
shadow of his former self, nervous and in a cheap suit. Without access to the
power acceded to him through Tulsidom which allowed him to mimic the role of
powerful overseer, Seth is as emasculated as any other laborer. The second model
of masculinity available to Biswas is the hyper-sexual promiscuity of men like
Bhandat and his sons, who drink excessively and have mistresses. However, given
Biswas’s obsession with cleanliness, disgust with the body, and general lack of sexual interest, this sort of masculinity is totally unappealing to him. The third model of masculinity is a totally emasculated one, the sort embodied by Ajodha, Govind, and Biswas himself. What Biswas really wants to be is a gentleman and artist; however, barring that, he’d rather be effeminate than mimic those masculinities which he finds vulgar and counter to his refined tastes.

Because the promise of home, either a new one or a return to the Indian homeland, was an innate part of the institution of indentured servitude, the symbol of the house takes on an increased importance for Biswas, for it signals not only all those things he wants (autonomy, dignity, freedom, a welcoming community) but also an escape from his state of being indentured which leaves him in a perpetual limbo. Amazingly at the end of the novel, Biswas is finally able to purchase a home of his own, a triumph which fills him with delight. However, through an ironic narrative strategy, Naipaul reveals that this is not a triumph at all and that, despite Biswas’s perceptions otherwise, he is still really not at home in the world nor has he found any of those things which home symbolized for him. The target of this irony is not Biswas, for whom the text exhibits sympathy, but rather the material, social, and historical circumstances of colonialism which prevent the creation and construction of anything meaningful, including one’s self.

V. A House for Mr. Biswas as Ironic Bildungsroman
In order to illuminate what I mean when I call the novel an ironic Bildungsroman and precisely delineate Naipaul’s ironic mode, I turn to Douglas Mueke’s seminal work, *The Compass of Irony*. In his project, Mueke offers a comprehensive study and taxonomy of irony, one which, in turn, Wayne Booth would rely on extensively in his own notable text, *The Rhetoric of Irony*. Although irony is a term that is frequently bandied about, Mueke identifies three essential characteristics of irony: duality, the juxtaposition of dualities, and innocence.

Mueke argues that irony is in the first place characterized by duality. Irony must always have a doubleness to it; it is a “two-storeyed phenomenon. At the lower level is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony (where there is a victim) or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist (where there is an ironist)” (19). However, there is another level where we find “the situation as it appears to the observer or the ironist” (19). This distinction between the two levels does not need to be obviously announced, nor need it be “more than a hint that the ironist does not quite see the situation as he has presented it at the lower level or that the victim does no see the situation quite as it really is” (19). The irony appears in that space between events as they are presented and events as they are perceived. In this respect, irony always suggests a double meaning.

The second defining feature of irony is the juxtaposition of duality. Mueke argues that irony derives its narrative power through the difference between those two levels; there must be some contradiction between the interpretations of the lower and higher levels for the irony to assume meaning. There must be an
opposition which “may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility. What is said may be contradicted by what is meant; what the victim thinks may be contradicted by what the observer knows” (20).

The third basic feature of irony is innocence. In order for irony to function as such, the victim of irony must not have an understanding of the irony. The victim must be “confidently unaware of the very possibility of there being an upper level or point of view that invalidates his own” (20). Thus, in an ironic situation, someone is always ignorant of what the ironist implies is the true or valid understanding of events.

Mueke’s study is not focused on literature but is rather a comprehensive study of irony in all its forms. He does, however, discuss irony in literature, identifying Dramatic Irony as the primary mode of novelists. In this mode, Mueke writes, “the ironist does not appear either as an impersonal voice or in any disguise. He simply arranges that the characters of his play or novel, story, verse narrative, or dramatic monologue expose themselves in their ironic predicament directly to the audience or the reader. He himself is the puppet master out of sight” (92). However, for dramatized irony to function, it requires a reader who understands the irony of the situation presented.

How, then, are readers to know when a writer is being ironical? Here I turn to Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Irony*. Booth lays out extensive criteria for ascertaining whether something is ironic or not, exploring how writers guide their readers towards an understanding of ironic intent. Most pertinent are those strategies which Booth refers to as “straightforward warnings in the author’s own
voice” (53). These warnings can come in three forms: titles, epigraphs, and “other direct clues” (55), such as a statement featuring commentary from the author himself.

My argument here is predicated on the contention that Naipaul’s narrative mode in the novel is ironic in the sense of which Mueke and Booth discuss. I argue that Naipaul appropriates the Bildungsroman genre to comment on the limitations colonialism puts on the development of colonized people, utilizing irony to do so. Naipaul structures the novel so as to immediately create that duality which Mueke argues is endemic to irony between Mr. Biswas’s perceptions and the actual circumstances of events. In opening the novel at the end of Biswas’s life with his unremarkable death, Naipaul makes clear the ironic lens through which we are to read the text.

Integral to Naipaul’s ironic strategy is the novel’s prologue chapter which announces Biswas’s death. The second paragraph reads:

Mr. Biswas was forty-six and had four children. He had no money.

His wife Shama had no money. On the house in Sikkim Street Mr. Biswas owed, and had been owing for four years, three thousand dollars. The interest on this, at eight per cent, came to twenty dollars a month; the ground rent was ten dollars. Two children were at school. The two older children, on whom Mr. Biswas might have depended were both abroad on scholarships” (5)

Thus, on the first page of the novel, we learn of the protagonist’s premature death; moreover, we learn that the poverty which he had always sought to escape has not
abated, and he really does not own the house. A few paragraphs later, Naipaul gives a general forecast of the novel’s plot. He thus undermines Biswas’s perceptions that his life has ended on a note of success, as he believes that “now at the end he found himself in his own house, on his own half-lot of land, his own portion of the earth. That he should have been responsible for this seemed to him, in these last months, stupendous” (6). In short order, Naipaul has outlined the events of the novel while having already revealed their outcome and indicated the symbolic importance of home to Biswas. Moreover, he has revealed the juxtaposition between Biswas’s impressions that he has found his own portion of the earth and the reality that it, in fact, is not really his. The text goes on to reveal just how decrepit the house actually is. It occupies only a half lot of land and the architect “seemed to have forgotten the need for a staircase to link both floors, and what he had provided had the appearance of an afterthought” (7); additionally, “the upper floor sagged; there was no back door; most of the windows didn’t close; one door could not open; the celotex panels under the eaves had fallen out and left gaps between which bats could enter the attic” (10). That Biswas should feel triumph at being heavily indebted to paying for this ramshackle structure shows how little he can hope to achieve. The house is already set up not just as a material goal for Biswas but as a symbol for his own development. Moreover, Naipaul establishes the major motifs of the novel which are used as barometers of Biswas’s development - waiting, debt, education, the corporeal body, and masculinity – and shows that Biswas has not progressed in any of these categories.
Chronologically, the prologue comes after the epilogue, although the final paragraph of the epilogue takes place after the death of Biswas. Much of the epilogue is a retelling of the prologue. Both cover the final months of Biswas’s life, recount his being “sacked” by the Sentinel, and his death. Furthermore, the epilogue reaffirms that those dynamics that characterized the world Biswas wanted to escape from have not been escaped. Most importantly, though, it confirms, not ironically but tragically, how Biswas’s attempt to create a meaningful existence and a world which can accommodate that existence has failed. The final thoughts of Biswas in the prologue before his death are of gratitude for the house; he thinks, “how terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it . . . to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one’s portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated” (11). However, in the epilogue we learn that Biswas has, in fact, died unnecessary and unaccommodated. Despite Biswas’s frequent and desperate pleas for him to return home during his illness, his son, Anand, does not even return for his father’s funeral. Moreover, we learn that Biswas had always wanted his death widely reported with the headline “Roving Reporter Passes On.” However, his passing is reported only in one newspaper, an obituary for which the family pays, as “Journalist Dies Suddenly.” Finally, the house which Biswas takes so much pride in making, we learn, in his absence “does not fall” (564), suggesting Biswas’s final insignificance.

Naipaul structures the novel with chapter titles that are meant to emphasize the contrast between what is said and what is meant. The book is
divided into two parts; the first contains six chapters, the second seven. Each chapter takes place in one domestic space, and each opens and closes with movement to and from that space; the only exception to this pattern are the subsequent chapters “Among the Readers and the Learners,” which begins with a move, and “The Void,” which ends with a move. Bruce King argues that it is a carefully constructed novel “in which artistic order is imposed through such techniques as a tightly controlled formal structure, parallel events, recurring images and phrases, even tightly knit rhetorical patterns” (). The chapter titles reveal irony at play. The first chapter of the novel, “Pastoral,” not only depicts a childhood that is anything but, but also gestures at Naipaul’s willingness to play with genre. Marius Hentea, in his essay “A Pastoral for Mr. Biswas” offers a discussion of Naipaul’s fascination with the pastoral in much of his work. Hentea notes that there are two ways of defining the pastoral – technically and thematically. Technically, the pastoral must have a shepherd as a character; as Leo Marx puts it, “no shepherd, no pastoral” (Hentea 98). However, the pastoral can also allude to broader thematics; as M.H. Abrams defines it, the pastoral is “a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting” (202).

Naipaul subversively uses the pastoral mode here to emphasize his ironic approach, for as Hentea points out, Biswas is, in fact a shepherd. A sickly child, Biswas is unable to work with the gangs that care for the water buffaloes. However, he and his parents are pleased when he is able to obtain employment.
taking a neighbor’s calf for walks. However, on one of these walks, he loses the calf who drowns in a nearby stream. The calf’s disappearance leads to the death of Biswas’s father as he dives in the stream, believing Biswas to be at the bottom when he in actuality at home hiding under the bed. This event recalls another great figure of Western literature – Oedipus Rex; however, this “absurd Oedipus,” according to Gordon Roehler, “fulfills this prophecy in the most ridiculous of ways” (84). Moreover, far from recalling anything idyllic or peaceful, Biswas’s childhood is marked by the grotesque and absurd. Due to unfortunate circumstances surrounding his birth, the pundit predicts he will be “a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well” (16). His body is disgusting: “the malnutrition that had given him the sixth finger of misfortune pursued him now with eczema and sores that swelled and burst again until they stank” (27). The chapter ends with the family fleeing their home.

Although “Pastoral” is the most ironically named chapter, other chapter titles also tip us off to Naipaul’s ironic strategy. “The Chase” depicts Biswas and Shama’s time at the settlement known as the Chase, which is a “long, straggling settlement of mud huts in the heart of the sugarcane area” (135); however, the word chase also has a secondary definition as “a private game preserve; a tract of privately owned land reserved for, and sometimes stocked with, animals and birds to be hunted” (dictionary.com), giving it a double meaning pointing to the ways in which the colonizer dehumanizes colonized people. Though the chapter title “Green Vale” connotes fresh, idyllic scenes, it is actually characterized as a disgusting and dirty place where the trees were “full and straight and so hung with
long, drooping leave that their trunks were all hidden . . . new leaves came, as
sharp as daggers but there was no freshness to them; they came into the world old,
without a shine and only grew longer before they died” (197). Throughout the
novel, Naipaul juxtaposes phrases that suggest cultivation, fecundity, and natural
beauty with images of death, decay, and sordidness. Such a tactic, in conjunction
with the method in which Naipaul chronologically structures the novel and
subversively titles chapters, suggests that we are to read between the novel’s lines
to realize that often what is said is not what is meant.

Through this ironic strategy, Naipaul reveals that Biswas’s feelings of
triump in his pursuit of Bildung are unwarranted. Through creating a duality
between what Biswas perceives and what the text reveals, Naipaul uses irony to
reveal how this Bildungsroman is, in fact, the narrative of Bildung that does not
happen, that cannot happen, in a colony. However, to return to the critical charges
against Biswas that I discussed in an earlier portion of the chapter, I believe that
Naipaul lays the blame for this failure squarely at the feet of the colonial
superstructure. In Biswas, Naipaul creates a character who, while far from perfect,
truly does everything he can to create a life for himself. He reads, he tries
different professions, he works hard, he attempts to cultivate social relationships
which might further his status, he moves locations, he expresses his artistic
impulses whatever ways he can, he strives to be a good father and help his
children succeed, and yet, even at the end, when he achieves his dream of buying
a home, he is suckered by a shyster and then dies prematurely. Naipaul provides a
broader commentary on the inescapability of history, for try as he might, Biswas
cannot escape that long legacy of homelessness and indentured servitude. The novel makes clear that Biswas’s failure to achieve Bildung is not his own; if he has a “half-life” that is “half-made” it is because of colonialism’s historical legacies, not Biswas’s inadequacy, stupidity, or laziness. Despite the hopes implied in his numerous stories, there is no escape from his debased position for Mr. Biswas so long as he lives in a colonized land.
CHAPTER 4

ESCAPING THE "CAGE OF THE EYE": COLONIZED SPACE AND EXILE

IN GEORGE LAMMING'S IN THE CASTLE OF MY SKIN

“Each of us resides in the center of a personal universe. Our most important boundary is our skin; the most significant home for any of us is within our own bodies, for that is where all experiences of whatever larger environments we may encounter resides. Our awareness of the multifold hierarchies of space that constitute our world radiates from that center, like the ripples formed by a butterfly on the surface of a pond, intersecting and reverberating with those of other things and beings"

Barry Greenbie, Spaces: Dimensions of the Human Landscape

“Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in my own house? The shades of the prison closed about us all.”

W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folks

In 1991, James Hardin edited a seminal collection of essays on the Bildungsroman entitled Reflection and Action. This title was fitting in its identification of the basic economy of Bildung: self-examination and self-cultivation through “reflection” and purposeful engagement with the outside world through “action.” However, the reciprocal relationship between reflection and action has been missing in the two novels I have discussed thus far. In Minty
Alley, we encountered Haynes, who engaged in virtually no self-reflection and took very little action. Biswas, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, was excruciatingly aware of his discontent and tried many different tactics in his pursuit of *Bildung*, but his activeness was not matched by reflection; he rarely considered his own role in his misfortunes and generally centered his ire on the Tulsi family, rather than the broader historical circumstances which put him at the clan’s mercy. In George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, we see both reflection and action. Accordingly, I argue that the novel is the most optimistic of the three I work with, despite its focus on the acute suffering of its protagonist, who, unlike Haynes and Biswas, ends the novel in utter despair as he prepares to leave Barbados. Through leaving the island, I contend, G. reveals a tenacious determination to find himself and discover his place in the world that suggests quite the opposite of a failed *Bildung*; instead, it suggests *Bildung* in progress. Indeed, I believe that *In the Castle of My Skin* offers an alternative model of *Bildung* for the colonized, one that is characterized by the development of a critical consciousness and exile.

G.’s childhood and adolescence in *Castle* are plagued by loneliness and fragmentation. His time in school is especially problematic, for it engenders in him what W.E.B. DuBois calls a “double consciousness.” However, both his gnawing sense of alienation and his growing double consciousness are matched by an increasing awareness of the external causes of his suffering; G.’s psychic pain is so distressing that he is compelled to investigate its source. Although G. does not directly identify colonialism as the root of his problem, he becomes growingly aware that there is some obstacle, some force beyond his control,
holding him back in colonized Barbados. Through this slowly dawning realization, G. starts to develop a critical consciousness regarding his plight as a colonized subject.

This development of a critical consciousness, in turn, leads to the inevitable realization that G. must leave his home of Barbados. The text uses houses, land, and spatial configurations as metaphors to suggest that to live on colonized land is to live in someone else’s home: the House of Empire. Because Barbados is constructed in the text as the home of the colonizer, it becomes what Homi Bhabha calls an “unhomely” (familiar and not familiar) space for the colonized subjects who reside there. This unhomeliness proves to be counterproductive to Bildung in a number of ways, and thus exile, leaving the homeland, becomes a necessary step in Bildung. A colonized man, G. realizes, can never truly be “at home” in a colonized space.

Most criticism of Castle has discussed G.’s development as symbolic of or as an extension of the village’s, although the work of Geta LeSeur, Mary Donnelly, Gareth Griffiths, and Craig Traping prove exceptions. Such a position is understandable, in no small part because of Lamming’s own proclamation that Caribbean writers “[are] rarely concerned with prolong exploration of an individual consciousness. It is the collective human substance of the village itself which commands our attention” (‘Introduction’ xxxvi). It would seem, then, that Lamming would intend the reader to approach In the Castle of My Skin as the sort of national allegory of which Fredric Jameson speaks in ‘Third World Literature
It is hard to fully define G.’s role in the novel, for he is not a narrator in the traditional sense, which further complicates the reader’s understanding of his place in the novel. He disappears for chapters at a time, and even in chapters in which he is the first-person narrator, his textual presence fades through his silence over many pages. Indeed, the novel’s heteroglossic, polyvocal narration, changes in tense, and abrupt shifts in time, place, and point of view all work to de-emphasize G.’s role in the novel.

It is fair to say, however, that G. is the novel’s narrative center, what we might loosely call its protagonist, for the novel both begins and ends with his narration, and he is the only character who narrates in first person and whose internal life is depicted at length. G.’s maturation is quite different from that of the village, and his separateness from the other villagers is frequently dramatized in the text. In fact, one of G.’s central problems is that he does not relate to the village or its way of life; his education has created in him a “fundamental inability to inherit his history and cultural tradition” (Gikandi 77). Moreover, he suffers with a perpetual sense of restlessness, while most of the village is content to continue repeating its patterns of life. These circumstances create a distinct division between G. and his community.

12 It is in this essay that Jameson asserts that third world texts are inherently allegorical because “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory for the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” in that “the allegorical nature of third-world cultures where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (86).
Thus, I do not subscribe to the generally accepted assertion that G., in the words of Sandra Paquet, “emerges as a figure whose personal experience crystallizes the experience of the entire community” (14), and I do not think Helen Tiffin is entirely correct when she says of Castle “what might have become in the European tradition a ‘portrait of the artist as a young man’ becomes instead the evocation of a society slowly becoming conscious of an identity beyond that of Prospero’s shadow and reflection, an identity, however, that is still unformed and uncertain” (286). Despite G.’s unconventional role in the novel and Lamming’s own admissions, I believe that the novel in many ways is a portrait of the artist as a young man (G.’s blossoming artistic interests are alluded to a number of times in the text) and that the text’s non-traditional style does, in fact, align it with a European tradition – a European modernist tradition. This contention is largely supported by frequent allusions to two modernist texts, T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man, both of which use experimental narrative techniques similar to those we see in Castle and also focus on the development and expression of an individual consciousness in a hostile world. One of the central concerns of Eliot’s famous poem is the estranged Prufrock’s failed attempts to actualize some sort of social communion; instead, he ends up lonely, invoking the image of a crab to represent his desire to retreat from the unfriendly external world of the living. Prufrock is a man who laments that “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (ln. 73-4), one who describes his fragmented self in the plural as having “lingered in the chambers of
the sea/ By seagirls wreathed in red and brown/ ‘Till human voices wake us and we drown” (ln 129-131). This image of the crab is deployed on numerous occasions throughout *In the Castle of My Skin*: the school boys sing a song about crabs for the school inspector, crab catching is a popular pastime mentioned many times, G. discusses his fascination with crabs but his dislike for eating them, and the young people compare the elders’ slow movement to that of crabs. As it does in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” the image of the crab in *Castle* connotes disconsolation, solitude, and a need for protection from the world external to one’s body. The image of the crab is invoked 27 times in the novel, which would not be so notable if the novel was not, in fact, set in rural Barbados rather than on the seaside. Lamming’s novel also recalls in many ways *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which problematizes Tiffin’s assertion the novel is specifically not a “portrait of the artist as a young man.” Both novels open with scenes of the protagonists as children listening to a parent singing, feature important moments on the beach in which the sight of a mysterious figure partially submerged in water (the bird girl for Stephen, the fisherman for G.) begets a meaningful epiphany crucial to their maturation, collapse into a series of diary entries, and conclude with the young, sensitive man about to leap into the abyss of exile. With these intertextual references to two key modernist texts about the individual and his uneasy relationship with the outer world that ultimately results in his need to retreat from the space he inhabits, Lamming draws attention to the individual consciousness of G.
G.’s maturation is a troubled one. He finds himself without community, unable to relate to friends, put off by the available models of masculinity, and tortured by burgeoning artistic impulses which he fears he will not be able to realize. The development of G.’s consciousness is largely defined by a growing awareness of the hostility of his surroundings. He metamorphosizes from a lonely, sensitive child into a totally disaffected young man who acutely suffers what W.E.B. DuBois calls a “double consciousness,” a psychic split which is fundamentally antithetical to Bildung. Crucial to resolving the problem of a double consciousness is a recognition of its existence and its sources. In Castle, the most immediate threat to self-development is not fragmentation and alienation but complacency and naiveté, as the villager’s faith in the Landlord, who ultimately betrays them, demonstrates. Thus, G.’s Bildung in the novel is the development of a critical awareness of his double consciousness, an awareness that leads to the inevitable conclusion that he must leave his homeland of Barbados in order to feel at home in his own body.

G. is depicted as a melancholy, insightful child who, from an early age, does not quite fit in. The story begins on G.’s ninth birthday, which has been ruined by torrential rains that flood the village. While he weeps with disappointment, he also feels that his birthday was only the “ninth celebration of the consistent lack of an occasion for celebration” (9); the uneventful and depressing circumstances are sharply contrasted with the pageantry at the school in the next chapter celebrating the absent Queen’s birthday. Plagued with a sense of loneliness because his “birth began with an almost total absence of family
relations” (12), G pesters his mother with questions about their lack of family but finds himself unsatisfied by her “vague” answers. His internal orientation and remoteness from his surroundings are suggested through the first section’s emphasis on windows, through which he mournfully watches “the water ride through lanes and alleys that multiplied behind the barracks that neighboured our house” (9) and later observes “the uniform wreckage of a village at night in water” (11). The windows foreshadow the seemingly invisible barrier between G. and his community that will mount over the course of his maturation, as well as the development of G. as an astute observer of village life. Although he cannot fully identify the sources of his discontent, he is already tormented by dark specters, “enormous phantoms with eyes of fire and crowned with bulls’ horns stalking through the dark . . . every night these phantoms that populated my brain came out to frighten me with the freedom which the night had brought them” (14). The description of the phantoms’ eyes and the use of the word “crowned” links the phantoms to the British imperial presence, the text’s first hint at the relationship between the omniscopic gaze of the colonizer and the subjection of the colonized, a theme that runs throughout the text.

Because the text skips around in time and switches narrative points of view, the next time we hear G.’s voice, he is fourteen. His feelings of alienation have become more prominent and a creative spirit has begun to emerge. G. reappears in a scene when he and his friends, Bob, Boy Blue, and Trumper go to the beach where they play in the water and discuss village life. G.’s mother has been pushing him to study so that he might earn an exhibition scholarship to the
local secondary school, and her ambitions for him have already driven a wedge between G. and his friends who do not share his mother’s goals. At one point, he and Bob “looked at each other; but no one spoke, and I knew something was wrong” (105). Throughout the day, the boys split up and wonder alone. While doing so, G. looks up at the sky and begins to create narratives for the pictures he sees the cloud patterns resembling, which intimates at creative and literary aspirations. As Geta LaSeur puts it, G possesses “the questing, sensitive awareness of an artist” (37). He exhibits the burgeoning creative impulse to externally express the artist’s inner feelings and perceptions when he creates a narrative for two clouds that reveals his confusion and loneliness: “The two figures were still, and they looked across at each other hard and steady as if they were involved in a common chaos which neither could understand but both greatly desired to redeem . . . And as they looked the cloud curving over and about their heads made an arc of words that read: ‘Are you not my brother?’” (111). This longing for community is sharpened that day by Bob and the other village boys’ social rejection of G. Again, through most of this section of the book G. is silent and instead observes an extended conversation between Trumper and Boy Blue. Later in the evening, the boys venture onto Creighton’s property to spy on a party, and we see the first hint of G.’s sexual awakening. As he watches a sailor seduce a young women in the woods, he begins to think “what I would do if I had a girl nearby . . . as there was a God in heaven I was going to do something with a girl” (173). G’s role as narrator once again ends that evening as he and the other boys escape the wrath of Creighton’s overseer by joining a prayer circle.
When we flash forward five years, we see that, counter to the aims of *Bildung*, G.’s development has been into a lonely and fragmented young man; the cracks in the relationships that were beginning to emerge in the beach scene have turned into unbridgeable chasms. Moreover, G., given the opportunity, does not “do something” with a girl and has begun to grapple with the problem of masculinity for the colonized man; we see his *Bildung* hindered by his inability to locate a masculinity he wants to embody. He recalls an evening when he was intercepted by a prostitute, and together they retreated to her room. However, once there, he is ambiguous about the sight of the woman’s body and hesitates until the woman finally “shouted that I could go if I didn’t want to do it. I said I didn’t want to do it, but I would pay her nevertheless and tell her a story” (261). The story is one of a childhood friend who often played a prank that involved painting a stick with bird feces and passing the stick into the outreached hand of another before deftly sliding the stick out, leaving the other’s hand covered in dung. Clearly intended as a metaphor for the sorts of sexual encounters the prostitute has, G.’s story amuses but befuddles the woman: “she said it was very funny, but she didn’t understand why I told her. I couldn’t wait to explain” (261).

Joyce Jonas reads this moment as G.’s refusal to engage in the process of asserting masculinity through “projecting one’s darkness onto another, to use another’s shame and humiliation to prove one’s own manhood”(358) and revealing how “unwittingly the prostitute is acquiescing in this process, allowing her body to become a ‘hide of darkness’ (to use Brathwaite’s phrase) for another’s guilt” (358). This interlude points to G.’s refusal to accept one model of
masculinity available to him, one based on promiscuity and sexual vigor, as seeks to develop into a man.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, the performance of masculinity is difficult for the colonized man; critical consensus holds that colonized men “were not allowed to enjoy the same benefits of masculinity as did their European masters” (Lewis 103). Moreover, while masculinity is not a static, monolithic entity, what is of central importance to masculinity “remains the exercise of power and the issue of control. Masculinity is predicated on the presumption of power, whether real or imagined . . . Masculinity therefore is often associated with access to and control over resources, privilege and status” (97). However, because of the circumstances of “high unemployment, dehumanizing poverty and persistent white male promiscuity with black women” (Barrows xiv), as well as the truth that to live under a colonizing power is to immediately have one’s access to “resources, privilege, and status” curtailed, the performance of masculinity takes on difficulties for colonized men, especially poor colonized men whose poverty further removes them from channels of power. This emasculation is figured in Castle through frequent allusions to symbolic castration. A group of boys are kicked out of a public shower by a civil administrator for openly brandishing their penises and must immediately cover themselves and walk out “single file, tense, silent, humiliated” (30). G. feels that his future is one that he is “impotent to wrest” and often feels “castrated” by his mother’s eye. When a male teacher is humiliated at his wife’s hands, an observer says she “cut his tail” (52), and Trumper later compares a man without political conviction to a monk ““with
a rotten cock who ain’t know how he come by the said infirmity’” (293). In each instance, the condition of men being cut off from power is expressed through the symbolic cutting of the penis; from this metaphor it follows that power is not only inherently masculine and located in the phallus but is also violent. Masculinity is cast as a zero-sum calculus, in which one obtains power (and masculinity) by cruelly exercising it over the body of another.

A textual pattern emerges whereby colonized boys and men try to reclaim their masculinity through brutality that reinforces this conception. The boys who are shamed at the public showers later in the afternoon put blades along the train tracks in an order to make sharp knives; Lamming, however, indicates the futility of this activity: “it would be a long time before their pins would become nails, a long time before they could brandish big blades” (31). The metaphor is notable not only because it locates a fully realized masculinity in the distant future but also because the phallic symbol is a weapon; masculinity is a knife which can castrate. When the teacher at the school is embarrassed by the snickering of one of his students in front of the British inspector, he savagely beats the suspected offender with a long whip, binding his hands and feet and stretching him “flat over a bench”:

The first blow rent the pants and left the black buttocks exposed.

The boy made a brief howl like an animal that had had its throat cut. No one could say how long he was beaten or how many strokes he received. But when he stood supported by the four boys
who had held him down he was weak. The knees tottered and the
filth slithered down his legs. (43)

We learn later that there are two gender-related issues motivating the teacher.

First, the boy’s antics challenge the black teacher’s carefully cultivated image as a
gentleman in front of the white inspector – an actual English gentleman. The
teacher fears that the inspector, the model of masculinity by which the teacher
measures his own, will see the student’s behavior as indicative of the teacher’s
inability to truly embody this role because he does not have control of his
students. The boy’s mother also happens to be the teacher’s servant who was
present on the aforementioned occasion when his wife “take off [the teacher’s]
pants, an’ cut his tail . . . [she] beat him like a school boy” (52). Because the
teacher correctly assumes that the boy will have overheard the servant recounting
this symbolic castration, he seeks to recover from his embarrassment by yielding
a whip to exercise power over someone else – indeed, a “school boy.” This
dynamic is echoed in the relationship between Bambi and Bots and Bambina, a
man and his two lovers, with whom he has several children. When a female
British anthropologist arrives in the village, she forces Bambi to choose one of the
women to marry through the threat of hellfire for his sins. Left without choice
over his romantic destiny, Bambi flips a coin and marries Bots, whom, after living
together peacefully for years, he begins to “beat the life out of” (137). He soon
takes “to the habit of beating them [Bots and Bambina] time an’ again. Every
Saturday night he went for them an’ he beat them like you beat a snake, Bots an’
Bambina, all two of them both, one after the other. People say he beat them till
they piss, poor things. He din’t have mercy on them” (138). Again, we see an emasculated man seek to reclaim that masculinity through the physical domination of a weaker person’s body vis à vis violence. However, just as the masculinity inherent in the interaction with the prostitute does not appeal to G., neither does this violence.

By the time G. is nineteen, he feels totally alone and fragmented. A few years prior, Bob and Boy Blue had told him “that he wasn’t one of them.” Thus, the loneliness and sense of difference that plagued G. at nine and fourteen have transformed into outright anguish at nineteen; he has become a young man who has no sense of anything but his own internal pain and alienation, which he describes as a sort of existential illness: “I didn’t know myself what my intentions were but this feeling, no longer new, had grown on me like a sickness . . . I tried to recall when this feeling had started, but that seemed useless. I could only think of it as a sickness which had spread through the system, gradual and unexpected” (213). This sickness is primarily described in terms of having two selves which G. cannot reconcile; in reflecting on his life thus far, he feels that “I have always been here on this side and the other person on that side and we have both tried to make the sides meet in their needs, desires, and ambitions” – the person he is and the person the outer world sees him as (261). Although G. cannot offer a name for his psychic state, it is precisely that of which DuBois speaks in describing the double consciousness.

Double consciousness is a term coined by African-American writer DuBois in his extended essay, The Souls of Black Folks (1903). Though primarily
a treatise on the sufferings and strivings of African-Americans, we can also read
the text, with its emphasis on the development of one’s highest powers and
abilities in a harmonious dialectical relationship with the external world, as a
meditation on Bildung for the black marginalized subject. DuBois speaks
specifically of black Americans, but his observations prove also to be prescient
when considering G.’s plight in Castle. The black subject, DuBois writes, “longs
to attain self-conscious manhood” (9) and strives to be “a co-worker in the
kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his
best powers and his latent genius” (9). These aims are strikingly similar to those
of the ideal Bildung outlined by Wilhelm von Humboldt in “The Limits of State
Action”:

The true end of Man or that which is prescribed by the eternal and
immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and
transient desires is the highest and most harmonious development
of his powers to a complete and consistent whole . . . what is
achieved, in the case of the individual, by the union of the past and
future with the present, is produced in society by mutual
cooperation of its different members . . . It is through a social
union, therefore, based on the internal wants and capacities of its
members that each is enabled to participate in the rich collective
resources of all the others. (64)

DuBois and von Humboldt stress both the cultivation of one’s unique gifts and
abilities and social communion in order to synergistically cooperate in building
culture. However, due to the unique social plight of black citizens, both the means for self-development and a welcoming social realm are absent.

These absences hint at the obstacles and travails particular to the black man’s Bildung, for his dialectical relationship with the social realm is not only unharmonious – it is unambiguously combative and oppressive. Rather than perpetuating the discovery and realization of his highest potential, the outer world instead reflects back a vision of the black man as unhuman, unworthy, and unequal. The result is what DuBois refers to as “double consciousness,” a painfully disorienting feeling of seeing one’s self both through one’s own eyes and the eyes of another, which causes one to “measur[e] one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (8) so that “one ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (8). This double vision produces a discrepancy between the subject’s sense of himself and the world’s; the black man is not only deprived of the ability to foster his own identity but is also confronted with inimical, predetermined adventient ideas of who he is and what he can be.

This condition is followed by a sense of inner strife; indeed, DuBois believes that the history of the black individual is a history of this strife that hinders Bildung. Unable to “attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (8), the subject risks wasting his life “seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideas” (8). The subject is tormented by “two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (8) and senses the shades of the prison house closing “round about us
all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above” (8). Of particular interest here is DuBois’s ascription of distinctly material qualities to the corporal body; the body is a container, a structure that can be “torn asunder” or transformed into a “prison house.” The body becomes a dwelling in which the real self resides, a fate which leads to a disorienting awareness of the mind-body duality, for the body’s aesthetic appearance betrays its inner life. The black man’s visible body, his black skin, is the sole signifier to the outside world by which he is identified, and thus that home that cases the self becomes an inescapable prison. So long as he lives in a society that engenders in him a double consciousness, the black man cannot be at home in his own body. One result, then, of the reconstruction of the fragmented self that is entailed in the black man’s Bildung is transforming the skin from a prison to a castle. However, necessary for this reconstitution is an escape from the culture which reflects back a divided image of himself.

For his internal torment, G. largely squares the blame on his education at the colonial high school, for it is when he goes on to win an exhibition scholarship to the secondary school that disruptions to his social relations most become keenly felt. Rather than furthering his Bildung, his education, G. feels, has in fact stunted it, in contradiction to G.s mother’s statement that “if you had a mind you would be what you wanted to be and not what the world would have you” (220). Part of G.’s colonial Bildung is his discovery that his mother is totally incorrect;
in fact, it is precisely because the colonial man can only be what “the world would have you” that Bildung is impossible in the colonized Caribbean. Much of the scholarship on Castle has commented on the portrayal of colonial education. Pouquet, Tapping, Tiffin, Christine Prentice, and Gareth Griffiths have all explored how, as Booker and Jaraga puts it “G. is faced early on with a central dilemma of the colonial subject: to succeed and to receive recognition of this success from official authority, he must learn to master discourses that are designed to demonstrate his own fundamental inferiority” (28). Indeed, colonial schooling, both at the primary and secondary levels, is a traumatic experience meant to discourage any impulses towards challenges to the colonial authorities. At the village elementary school, “the head teacher and all the assistants carried their canes as though they were in danger of attack from the boys, and they used them on all occasions and for all sorts of reasons” (46); here, masculine authority is suggested through a phallic image capable of violence. Moreover, rather than educating the children, the curriculum serves to actually confuse them and direct their attention away from any topic which might cast England in an unflattering light. When an elderly woman praises Queen Victoria for “freeing” the black slaves of Barbados, the students do not understand what she means when she says they were “freed.” They inquire their teacher about it who tells them, “no one there [in Barbados] was ever a slave. It was in another part of the world that those things happen” (57). Relieved and convinced of the veracity of the instructor’s reassurance that “their fathers, nor their father’s fathers were ever slaves” (57),
the kids then begin to speculate on what being “freed” might be, coming up with a variety of far-fetched scenarios based on Biblical allegories.

At the High School, which neither his friends nor the vast majority of village children attend and which G. refers to as “the instrument which tore us asunder,” G.’s feelings of a dual displacement become most apparent to him. Although he enters the school “alert and energetic,” he spends most of his six years there wavering between “boyish indifference and tolerant misery” (225). At the high school, G. finds that he cannot escape his roots as a village boy but also no longer fits in with the other village boys. Lamming frequently relies on space as a metaphor for G.’s fragmentation during these years. Of the village boys who won scholarships “there weren’t many, and it wasn’t easy for them to cope with the two worlds” (219; italics mine), and G finds himself living “on the circumference of two worlds” (220). G. believes his experience at the school would have been easier had he lived in a more affluent village, but because of the villagers’ admiration for the learned which also results in their seeing G. with a degree of suspicion, G. finds he has no community. He cannot fit into the village anymore, but he also does not fit in at the high school. His education has left him, in the words of Maria Helena Lima, “conscripted into a permanent middle passage” (444).

Certainly, the text presents colonial education as a deleterious experience, one G. suspects he would have been better off not enduring. However, I argue that education also provides G. with some unacknowledged boons. It provides him with the basic skills to educate himself and cultivate his own aesthetic ambitions,
ambitions encouraged by a teacher who inspires him and helps to bring out G’s artistic side by providing him with an aesthetic education. The teacher is

A poet and actor who could scarcely have been a finer actor, but who might have been a better poet if he weren’t an actor . . . He was versatile, sensitive, and cultured. He had a large and carefully chosen library which he had invited me to use. He was always making suggestions for my reading, and he talked about the way people painted and what had to happen before he could write a poem. When visitors called who didn’t know me and who might have made me feel uneasy he gave me a large album which I fingered till they had done. (226)

However, the world the teacher exposes G. to through literature and art is one that G. knows he does not have access to and soon the high school dissolves into “one man who represented for me what the school might have been. It was two years since I had known him well and the keenest result of that attachment was the feeling that somewhere deep within myself or far beyond the limits of this land was a world whose features I did not know” (227). Again, he finds the Bildung he seeks located elsewhere. As a poor, black village boy, G. lacks the opportunity to become the sort of man embodied by the teacher, nor is the school interested in providing him with it, for when the school headmaster tells G. that they are trying to make “gentlemen” out of the students, what he really means is that they are trying to make men who mimic and fetishize British imperial masculinity and who, in turn, will not challenge British authority. To recall Aviston Downes once
again, “the education system of Barbados, with its imperial dictates, and its functional linkages with Euro-Christianity” was meant to create colonized men who performed “a version of masculinity intended to sustain the dominance of white ruling-class men,” (107)  

13 Downes argues that this masculinity “exercised by old boys of elite schools of Barbados in protecting imperial and colonial interests did nothing to redress the social, political and economic inequities which faced blacks in the empire” (130). Downes’ use of “old boys” recalls G.’s own description of himself as an “old boy” at school: “It wasn’t long before I relaxed into an old boy at the High School. I grew as callous as most of the others, and played the role which the old boys played” (218). The old boys tended to enter the civil service or become lawyers or doctors who were “smartly dressed, well groomed, and on the whole quite imposing. When you saw them you didn’t think the High School had done so badly after all” (219). G., as one of the very few poor village boys attending the high school, knows, though, that he cannot and will not ever truly be one of the old boys, for his memory of the village “excluded me from the world of the High School” (220). However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, for it is the “old boys” of Barbados, the Mr. Slimes, who betray the villagers. G.’s education allows him to see through the shroud of specialness the surrounds those with education and inspires the villagers’ confidence, for the villager’s confidence in Mr. Slime, a former teacher, that in part allows them to be taken easily advantage of by his Penny Bank scheme. G. knows what education

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13 Although Downes limits his examination to the years between 1875 and 1920, his conclusions are affirmed in scholarship examining education later than 1920.
can and cannot offer him, a position that renders him open to Trumper’s statement that “barring learning to count an’ write your name there ain’t much in these schools that will help you not to make a blasted mess o’ your life when you get out in the world” (288). Moreover, G.’s education makes the sense of fragmentation and displacement that prevents Bildung intense enough that he fully realizes it and is able to address it. Finally, it provides him with the means to leave Barbados, which, I will argue, is necessary for his Bildung, by providing him with the credentials to teach at a High School in neighboring Trinidad.

Again, DuBois’s work can help to make sense of why G.’s education is both harmful to and necessary for his Bildung. DuBois points out that book learning is a step out of the dark veil, albeit an arduous step, which he emphasizes through diction connoting enervating labor:

> Up the new path the advance guard toiled, slowly, heavily, doggedly; only those who have watched and guided the faltering feet, the misty minds, the dull understandings, of the dark pupils of these schools know how faithfully, how piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work. (9)

DuBois acknowledges here that education in the “white” tradition is a traumatic, exhausting process for the black subject. However, DuBois also acknowledges what most scholars do not when discussing colonial education and what is critical to understanding its role in G.’s Bildung; though it is hard,

> the journey at least gave one leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth.
with dawning self-consciousness, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself,—darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem.

(12)

DuBois here offers an alternative view on the role of education in the Bildung of black men. It provides the means, through its grueling and disorienting process, by which the student can begin to see his own plight, can begin to feel and name the double consciousness. Though this sight is “faint”, the feeling “dim,” the awareness catalyzed by education it the first step in the black man’s Bildung “from the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness.” Important to note is that the transition is from ignorance to the beginnings of a new consciousness, from a child to a youth – not a man. In this respect, education and the seeds of self-awareness it plants are only the beginning of the black man’s Bildung, albeit a crucial beginning, for the individual must have self-consciousness before he can begin to work towards resolving his double consciousness. This idea further suggests that G.’s state at the end of the novel is not evidence of a failure to achieve Bildung but rather of a lengthening of developmental time. It is worth nothing in regards to Castle that the only person
besides G. (and Trumper at the end of the novel who has already left the island) who has any sense that something is wrong in the village and that the colonizer might not be the benevolent protector the other villagers believe him to be is the Shoemaker. While the other villagers believe that “the landlord couldn’t do without the village any more than they could,” (99) the shoemaker is “suspicious of that attachment. While the others thought of Little England the shoemaker thought there was something suspect in the Englishman’s attachment. That is what reading had done for him. He always read the papers, and whenever he got a chance he read a book” (99). His justified skepticism is motivated by reading a disparaging account of colonial administrators; reading about history also allows him to prophecy, in contrast to the other villager’s claims that nothing will change in the village, that “big British Empire goin’ to change too, ‘cause time ain’t got nothin’ to do with these empires. God don’t like ugly, an’ whenever these big great empires starts to get ugly with the thing they does the Almighty puts His hands down once an’ for all” (103). For the colonized subject, education is a double-edged sword; he must have an education so that he can confront and understand those discourses and structures which shape his world in order to challenge them. In addition to distancing him from his native community because of the privilege with which education enthrones him, understanding those discourses brings about a painful realization of his own marginalization. However, because education perpetuates a heightened awareness of the subject’s marginalization, the subject begins to critically evaluate its causes, a line of
thinking which, G. demonstrates, if taken far enough, leads the subject to realize that the only escape from his liminality is through escape from the colony.

II. The Village

Thus, exile is a necessary pre-condition for Bildung, in part, Castle suggests, because to live in a colonized space is to live in someone else’s home: the House of Empire. The novel constructs the island space of Barbados as an allegorical home for two parental authorities, plantation owner Creighton and Mother England, who keep a watchful eye over their colonized children and whose identity is in part derived from their authority over and superiority to the colonized. The only real home, we see, is the colonized homeland, a point affirmed by the eventual destruction of the villagers’ houses. Because Barbados is the home of the colonizer, it becomes what Homi Bhabha calls an “unhomely” space for the colonized who reside in it.

The importance of having a house and the relationship between houses and subjectivity are reiterated throughout In the Castle of My Skin by multiple characters. The villagers make few demands of life except for shelter because “life was always easier if you had certain shelter” (95). As Mr. Foster at one point says, “If there’s one golden rule we all on this land got, ‘tis this: . . . work till you can get yuself shelter over yuh head by day, and a corner to rest yuh bones on at night. You can do what you please, but I tell you to let you know what a house mean to some people in this corner of God’s earth” (240). And what does a house mean to the poor villagers? In a place of penury, lack of opportunity, and vulnerability, a house represents stability, permanence, presence, and identity –
things we normally associate with a mature identity, which is in large part what makes houses such a useful symbol in coming-of-age narratives. In Barbados, “the land was the land, priceless, perennial and a symbol of some inexplicable power” (241) which the colonized cannot own but by “root[ing] themselves into” (241) can make some claim to. The walls of a house delineate a boundary in which they can define themselves. The personalization of a space, as J. Douglas Porteous reminds us,

...is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation . . . Thus personalization provides both security and identity. Identity includes not only one’s self-knowledge but also one’s persona as recognized by one’s fellows. Identity and the individualism it implies are valued because of the implication of freedom of self-determination. (383-4)

In other words, a home is a dialectical signifier of individualism between its occupant and his community; in recognizing and respecting domestic boundaries, we implicitly affirm the subjectivity and authority of the home owner. Before her death Ma extracts a promise from Pa will keep their house in her memory no matter what happens, and after her death, he recalls of her, “‘She din’t have no liking for the things o’ this world, but there wus something that sort of tell her always stick to yuh house’” (251). For Ma, the house becomes an enduring symbol of her existence, its structure a living embodiment of her presence. This notion of a house as a symbol of the self is echoed by Pa; thinking about the Landlord’s power over the land, he refers not to Landlord but rather to his house:
“I looked up over yonder there at the house on the hill, an’ I wonder what it feel like to be big an’ great” (85). Even the novel’s title *In the Castle of My Skin* suggests an intimate connection between selfhood and domestic structure.

The ownership of a home is also seen by various characters as an expression and entitlement of masculinity, and by claiming space colonized men can exercise power. Thus, home ownership takes on a paramount importance for men in the text – it is a small but significant way of embodying an adult, masculine role. Historically, Caribbean men were “infantilized . . . [and] unable to exercise autonomy in any sphere of life, particularly with respect to the type or form of family they were allowed to establish” (Lewis 103). This, of course, was affirmed by colonial discourses which cast colonized men as “boys.” For the colonized man, owning a home is exercising autonomy, announcing him as a man able to exert power by establishing boundaries around a domestic sphere. As Pa says, it is only right “that every man should own his piece o’ land at some time or other” (87). Owning a home allows a colonized man to announce his manhood; Mr. Foster explains, “A man ain’t a man till he can call the house he live in his own” (240), and the children believe that a man’s role is to be in charge of a household, a “watchman for the house” (45). One boy enthuses, “if there ain’t no father in the house, you get the feeling you is the man in the place. It’s a good feeling. When anybody like the sanitary inspector or the police come in an’ ask who is the man round here, an’ you can say, well there’s only one man round here, an’ ‘tis me” (47). Maturity, then, the difference between being a man and a boy, is signaled by authority over a domestic space; for men, a house becomes not
just a symbol of adulthood but a symbol of masculine adulthood – manhood.

Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* offers insight into why colonized men might look at owning a home as a sign of manhood. McClintock’s book delves into the relationship between civilization, undiscovered land, and gender. She writes:

> Knowledge of the unknown world was mapped as a metaphysics of gender violence – not as the expanded recognition of cultural difference – and was validated by the new Enlightenment logic of private property and possessive individualism. In these fantasies, the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, thenreassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power. (23-24)

In other words, domination of a land, and, by extension, a people, is figured as the right and natural dominance of masculinity over femininity. To be conquered and lose authority over the space one inhabits is to be feminized and metaphorically raped. Thus, the reclamation of space entailed in home ownership becomes an attempt to reclaim masculinity through that “logic of private property and possessive individualism” of which McClintock speaks.

The colonized villagers are not incorrect in their faith that homes do represent maturity, autonomy, and masculinity; what they do not realize is that by virtue of living in a colonized place, they are living in a space that functions as a home for the colonizer. To put it another way, the colonized can never be at home because they live in a colonized homeland that is, in fact, an expression of the maturity, autonomy, and masculinity of the British Empire; moreover, these traits
are demonstrated through the domination and infantilization of the colonized. Indeed, this home even has parents – the King (represented by Creighton in the text) and the Queen of England. With Creighton Village disintegrating and disbanding, we see that the power of home ownership is void if one does not govern the land, and in a colonized island, the colonized never govern the land and can thus never truly have a home, for it is dominion over the land that imparts authority. As Pa says, important people want to own land; Mr. Slime has taught him “a sort o’inside history o’some o’ the nations, how they all make it they business before anything else to own the land they love or nearest to them” (82). However, ownership of the land is an impossibility for the poor black colonized subject, for until the final sale of the village, it is always passed down through primogeniture: “An English landowner, Mr. Creighton, had died, and the estate fell to his son through whom it passed to another son, who in his turn died, surrendering it yet to another” (25). However, in Castle most of the children are fatherless, which serves to further emphasize their powerlessness. The absence of fathers is filled by the presence of a bigger father: the Father Country.

Missing fathers are consistently alluded to in the text. As Booker and Jaraga note, “absent fathers are, indeed, a recurrence in the book . . . Indeed, the only paternal figure is Creighton Village is Creighton” (28), whom the novel figures as a symbol of Father England. Although Imperial England is referred to as the Mother Country not only in Castle but in most discourse about colonialism, as Mary Donnelly points out, it is also appropriate to call England the “father country.” She writes:
The state has long modeled its powers on a social structure that seems ‘natural’: the traditional nuclear family. In many cultures, men hold a cultural position that would be the envy of any ambitious politician. Filial responsibility transfers more or less seamlessly to social responsibility. In the colonial situation, however, obedience is required to a king far removed from the daily life of his subjects. (8)

When we recall McClintock’s assertions about the construction of colonialism as the natural domination of masculinity over femininity, Donnelly’s argument is strengthened: the king assumes the figure of the father in the nation’s social structure. Donnelly’s observation bears out in the conversations among the children, who are confused about the King’s role in their life: “What we saw was the shadow. That’s why the children referred to him in the company of others as His Majesty. They couldn’t call him daddy like you and me. It wasn’t the right thing to say . . . But they were his children? one boy asked. Yes and no, the boy said. They were and they were not” (55). This notion of the villagers as children of the King and Queen of England is reinforced through colonial discourses and histories suggesting the infantilization of the colonized. Both the colonizers and the colonized refer to the island as “Little England” throughout the novel, and Barbados is described as “the oldest and purest of England’s children” (37). The colonial conquest is represented as a meting out of parental care to a grateful child: “Three hundred years, more than the memory could hold, Big England had
met and held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted” (37).

The natural consequence of this parent-child relationship is that the villagers, the imperial subjects, are infantilized and dependent as long as they live in the imperial house. These conditions, of course, present insurmountable obstacles to the self-invention and development that is at the heart of Bildung and result in an underdeveloped population that does not question these power relations for the most part. Passivity ensures the continuation of the colonized’s underdevelopment and lack of progress. The text affirms this position by casting the villagers as people who suffer tremendous poverty and oppression but lack any awareness of how they are kept down; rather than demanding equality or challenging colonial authority, they are “peaceful. They asked for nothing but a tolerable existence, more bread, better shelter, and peace of mind to worship their God” (101). This docility creates in them an unwavering faith in the stability of their lives: “they couldn’t conceive for a moment the land as being other than the village, and on careful reflection the threat of notice to a whole village seemed ridiculous. It would have been a threat to the landlord himself. His happiness seemed to depend on it as much as theirs” (98). Indeed counter to the hope for progress inherent in Bildung, they seem to value the lack of change that occurs in the village, in spite of the fact that they live lives of penury without opportunity, a confusing position on which Lamming comments in “The Occasion for Speaking”: “the West Indies is, perhaps, the only modern community in the world where the desire to be free, the ambition to make their own laws and regulate life
according to their own impulses, is dormant” (35). The villagers idolize the landlord, viewing him as a kind, benevolent leader, one whose house they look to determine when to turn their own lights off and go to bed.

More insidiously, their underdevelopment allows them to internalize colonial belief systems that encourage them to misplace their distrust on each other, which further problematizes Bildung by precluding social communion. For instance, when Miss Foster pays the Landlord a visit to discuss damages from the flood, she is so excited by his reception that “I couldn’t talk . . . I couldn’t believe my ears, for I never all my born days associated white people with God. But he was the essence of niceness” (34). After he gives her tea and sixty cents, she supplicates herself in gratitude, whereas on the way out when she sees the “bad-minded black son-of-a-bitch we call the overseer, I shake my backside (God forgive me) at him” (34). Her gesture towards the overseer is indicative of an image that had “eaten through their consciousness like moths through the pages of ageing documents” (27) – “the image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People” (27). The villagers resent the overseers and other black people in positions of power (aside from teachers, who command respect) in the ways they should resent the landlord; conversely, colonized subjects in power see the villagers as “low-down nigger people [who] don’t like to see their people get on” (27). However, the villagers learn all too late that their faith in the Landlord has been misplaced. Their willingness to blindly accept the colonizer’s casting of itself as a paternal protector leads to their total displacement at the end of the
novel, when Creighton sells the village. Their reaction to Creighton’s sale is not
one of rage but of puzzlement. They see the sale as a parental betrayal. Pa says,

An why the landlord go an’ sell without telling us? . . . Why he do that? ‘Twasn’t right for him to leave us like stray dogs without a
owner. He always say he was responsible for the village; that’s
what he always say. He had a responsibility which mayn’t quite
understand. An now look, look what he do. (256)

Here we see how the villagers uncritically and wholeheartedly accepted their role
as the child-like wards of the colonizer. The lack of critical consciousness and
skepticism towards authority leads to the entire village’s undoing, and the dangers
of their complacency are forced upon them when their world literally comes
crumbling down. However, as Albert Memmi points out, the acceptance of
colonial power relations should not be seen as a symptom of the colonized’s
stupidity or pleasure in being colonized. Instead, it is a natural result of being
excluded from history and public life: “the fact is that the colonized does not
govern. Being kept away from power, he ends up losing both interest and feeling
for control. How could he be interested in something from which he is so
resolutely excluded?” (95). Given how little power or opportunity the colonized
subject has to participate in civic life, he “falls back on traditional values . . . The
colonial superstructure has real value as a refuge” (99).

However, the colonial superstructure, figured as a home led by the King
and Queen, turns out not to be a refuge. The parental rhetoric of colonialism is a
ruse; as David Spurr has written, colonial discourse “naturalizes the process of
domination; it finds a natural justification for the conquest of nature and of primitive people, those children of nature” (156) by casting its ruthless and avaricious conquering of lands and peoples as part of a civilizing mission; consequently, colonialism becomes a strategy of assisting the colonized through transforming them from children into adults through imperial Enlightenment. Lamming writes in the introduction to the book, that it makes him “shudder to think how a country so foreign to our own instincts could have achieved the miracle of being called mother” (xxxviii).

Lamming uses the decay and destruction of houses to represent the villagers’ lack of underdevelopment at the hands of the paternalistic colonizer. The novel both begins and ends with images of the village in dissolution. Castle opens with the villagers in despair, as a flood has covered the town with water and left it in “uniform wreckage,” (11), a “marvel of small, heaped houses raised jauntily on groundsel of limestone”(10); as Jan Cartey notes, the novel largely relies on the motif of disintegration to reveal how defenseless the colonized are (148). The village recovers from the flood, but when the story concludes, nine years later, the houses are crumbling to the ground as the villagers try to move them off the village land, from which they have been evicted. Lamming emphasizes housing as an extension of the self early in the text, writing that the villagers’ prayers for a future “seemed as precariously adequate as the houses hoisted on water” (10), as Mr. Foster’s house goes sailing down the river while he clings desperately to the roof. In his own house, G. looks up at “the crevices of our wasted roof where the colour of the shingles had turned to mourning black”
and the water comes “through the crease of the door, and expanded across the uncarpeted borders of the floor” (12); the insufficient protection from the elements provided to G. and his mother by the house suggest their vulnerability to all outside forces. Moreover, the cheap galvanized iron and limestone used to tenuously cobble the houses together symbolize the lack of resources available to the colonized for self-cultivation. Unlike the village “hovels” with metal roofs, the Landlord’s house is “a large brick building surrounded by a wood and a high stone wall that bore bits of bottles along the top” (25), its roof sturdy enough that he and his wife sometimes take tea on it. Just as the villagers’ flimsy houses are indicative of their marginalization, the solid house of the Landlord suggests his unassailable authority.

In contrast to that boundary of woods and wall covered with glass (a detail ominous in its threat of physical harm), the unsound boundaries protecting the colonized suggest their vulnerability. As Joyce Jonas notes in her fascinating study of the trickster figure in Castle, the villagers “experience invasion of their fragile defining boundaries at every point” (348). The crossing and collapsing of boundaries is a recurring motif in the novel. When the village roads’ conditions get too bad, “the houses advanced across their boundaries to meet those on the opposite side in an embrace of board and shingle and cactus fence” (10). At each corner of the village, “the white marl roads made four . . . except where the road narrowed to a lane or alley that led into a tenant’s backyard” (10), and the second chapter of the book is set in the yard after the fence between G. and his neighbor’s yard comes toppling down, leaving the naked G. open to the ridicule of the
children on the other side. The inability of the villagers to maintain the integrity of their domestic borders suggests a subversion of the traditional public-private dyad into one based on a colonized-colonizer binary, for above all the colliding houses sits the only unshakably private domestic space in the novel: the Landlord’s house. While Creighton’s residence sits, august and distinct on the hills, “the village was a marvel of small, heaped houses . . . across boundaries the spectacle repeated itself” (7). The description symbolizes the villagers’ depersonalization as colonized subjects. From the Landlord’s vantage point, the villagers are what Frantz Fanon describes as an “indigenous population . . . discerned only as a mass” (Wretched 44). Moreover, the use of the word “spectacle” serves to suggest that the villagers, lacking any privacy, are on display for the Landlord. As Homi Bhabha notes, challenges to privacy are endemic to colonial situations:

The recesses of domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other . . . Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. (19)
What Bhabha describes here is evident in Lamming’s novel, for even the seemingly private boundaries of the villager’s homes fail to delineate personal space in the broader social sphere of the colonized island; the fraught nature of the border between “home and world” Bhabha refers to is brought into acute focus when a home is perched on colonized land belonging to another world. Moreover, this lack of privacy also reflects those historical conditions of which Bhabha speaks insofar as it serves as a reminder of the events which rendered the colonized subject to the power of the colonizer. The vulnerability of the colonized villagers is echoed in their lack of privacy; they bathe at public bathrooms, supervised by administrators working for the Landlord, where they are not individuals but a collection of “raw, naked bodies” (Fanon, *Wretched* 29). The civil sanitary inspectors enter village houses without warning or welcome to check that the villagers are keeping their water clean, and the overseers report back the village’s going-ons to the Landlord. The private worlds of the colonized are always in danger of violation and surveillance by the outside world.

Lamming uses the spatial configurations of the island to reveal the hypocrisy behind the colonizer’s claims of parental benevolence and further emphasize the unhomeliness of the space; far from being a homeland under the tutelage of a loving mother and father, Barbados becomes a prison which traps, disciplines, authorizes, forbids, and punishes. Crucial to understanding why G. must escape the “prison” of Barbados to transform his skin from a “prison” to a “castle” and ameliorate his double consciousness, is the spatial configuration of
Creighton’s Village, which the text suggests, is a stand-in for all the villages in Barbados:

An estate where fields of sugar cane had once crept like an open secret across the land had been converted into a village that absorbed some three thousand people . . . to the East where the land rose gently to a hill, there was a large brick building . . . The landlords lived there amidst the trees within the wall. Below and around it the land spread out into a flat unbroken monotony of small houses and white marl roads. (25)

The colonizer’s superior political position is represented by his house’s vertical elevation. His home is surrounded by walls covered with glass and trees that distinguish it from the rest of the land and provide it protection, whereas the indistinct homes of the colonized blend into each other below, always visible from the vantage point of the Landlord. This spatial relationship also parallels the colonizer-colonized relationship in which the governance of many is conducted by the oversight of few. Village overseers are entrusted with patrolling the land at “all hours of the day” (26) in order to ensure that none of the villagers trespass this sacred boundary in order to trap animals, pick fruit, or steal eggs from anywhere on the Landlord’s land. Although the villagers can see “from any point on the land . . . the large brick house on the hill” (27), they cannot see the Landlord himself, protected as he is, unless he is on his roof with guests, explaining to them “the layout of the land, the customs of the villagers, and the duties which he performed as caretaker of this estate” (25-26). This use of
verticality to symbolize power relations is replicated at the village school, where the school yard is cornered and overlooked by the two story school itself, the church “which seemed three times the size of the school” (35), and the headmaster’s house. Cumulatively, the yard is overseen by “three shrines of enlightenment that looked over the wall and across a benighted wooden tenantry” (35), which recalls an earlier description of light pouring down from the landlord’s house at night across the village. In both the village at large and the schoolyard, colonial power is represented as looking down upon the colonized.

The structural configurations of the village and the school yard are distinctly reminiscent of the Panopticon, a type of prison envisioned by 17th century philosopher Jeremy Bentham and discussed at length by Michael Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Bentham’s Panopticon was intended to be a symbol of progress, a move away from the pre-Enlightenment dungeons in which punishment was doled out through isolation and physical torture towards a more humane, rationale system in which prisoners self-policing under the threat of punishment. Power is defined almost solely in terms of who can and cannot see in the Panopticon. The Panopticon is designed so that the prisoner is always aware of his visibility but is never sure when he is actually being watched since he himself cannot see the prison guard and consequently derives its power not from the presence of authority but rather the *possibility* of the authority’s presence.

Foucault goes on to use the Panopticon as a metaphor to describe “a generalized model of functioning, a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of man” (205) which offers a “diagram of a mechanism of power
reduced to its ideal form” (205). The basic principle of the Panopticon can be utilized outside of an actual prison so that it comes to be “A type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power” (205). The ultimate result is that subjects discipline themselves, for “he is who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles. He becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-3). In this way, power operates on its subjects without any physical coercion, for the subject internalizes its dictates and self-governs his behavior according to those dictates.

An emphasis on sight and visibility reveals Foucault’s theories at work in Castle, as well as how the panoptic configuration of the island further creates the sense of unhomeliness that divides the subject and hinders Bildung. Vision becomes a central trope for conveying power relations throughout the text. The ability to see and survey is constructed as the privilege of the colonizer or his stand-in; conversely, to be seen is to defined by the other. The Landlord on the hill can see all the land beneath him from the house on the hill. When the Landlord’s family descends into the village, they come to “survey” while his daughter “looked down haughty and contemptuous” on the villagers (28). Because the Landlord cannot be bothered to protect his land, he hires “overseers” to patrol his land for him. The villagers simultaneously detest and fear the
overseers, for “if the overseer see, the landlord is bound to know . . . The obedient lived in the hope that the Great might not be offended, the uncertain in the fear it might have been,” which is exactly the effect that the Panopticon is supposed to induce in its subjects (29). The village men recognize the connection between power and sight in a conversation in which they acknowledge “the privilege of the spectator seemed such a great luxury” (29).

If seeing is power, then so is invisibility, the condition of not being seen, and, thus, spaces which evade the dividing panoptic gaze of the colonizer become joyful respites. The cinema can become an idyllic space because one cannot be discerned in the darkness and becomes “a black shape among black shapes. The feeling was good. There was something wonderful about not being seen” (74). Ironically, even the bathroom becomes a lovely, sacred space where “the little cubicle became a black patch . . . No one could see or hear you, and you mumbled your freedom away. The things you would say and do. The things you could say and do!” (74). The Landlord himself, like the prison guard, is rarely seen; his appearances in the village are carefully orchestrated events meant as symbolic acts of concern. Indeed, the one time he is seen without premeditation is when the villagers are rioting after labor dispute and the Landlord is found in the streets trying to escape their wrath; his vulnerability at this moment is excruciating, for he knows that his life is in the hands of the violently enraged villagers, who ultimately let him go. In the scene, his inability to hide from the villagers’ sight is linked to the reversal of power. Additionally, when G. is fourteen, he and his friends creep through the woods surrounding the Landlord’s house to spy on a
party. The triumph in this transgression is that the boys get to watch the Landlord and his friends, unbeknownst to partygoers; the colonized boys are now the invisible watchers. However, later, this moment of boyish mischief is revised by the landlord into a story far more ominous, one in which the sacred boundaries the boys cross are not those of the property but of the Landlord’s daughter, whom he claims the boys tried to rape. The relationship between invisibility and power is nowhere more clearly established than in the schoolboys’ discussion of the King of England, whom they deem the “Shadow King.” Puzzled over the imprint of the King’s face on the copper pennies distributed to them on school inspection day, the students get into arguments because “one boy had it from good authority that the King was never seen. When he became King, no one ever saw him” (55); the King they see in the newspapers, one argues, is “a shadow king who did whatever a king should do. It was the shadow king who went to parades, took the salute and did those things with which we associated the king. The shadow king was a part of the English tradition. The English, the boy said, were fond of shadows. They never did anything in the open. Everything was done in shadow, and even the king, the greatest of them, worked through his shadow” (55). The boys’ ideas are more accurate than they know; the image of the King as a Shadow King is particularly striking not only for identifying total invisibility as a sign of the King’s power but also because the kids intuit that the King’s power over them is indirectly exercised over them through his shadow, which in their case is embodied by Creighton.
Just as seeing and invisibility are markers of power in the novel, to be seen is to be at the mercy of another. Schoolboys in the classroom do not want to be seen because sometimes, by virtue only of having caught the eye of the teacher, the student could arouse the teacher’s rage and be submitted to a beating. When someone else sees you, he or she can then define you in some respect; a teacher at the school becomes frantic because he realizes that “he was seen by another. He had become part of the other’s world and therefore no longer in complete control” (As Spurr puts it, “to look at... not only implies a position of authority; it also constitutes a commanding act” (14). The imprisoning nature of another’s gaze is reified throughout the novel through frequent allusions to cages and enclosures, for “the eye of another was a kind of cage; when it saw you, the lid came down and trapped you” (74). When a student looks up to realize he is being watched by a teacher as he harmlessly does his work, he feels “captured” (73); even in the anonymity of the public square one feels as though the space “had turned into one enormous eye that saw you. A big cage whose lid came down and caught you” (74). Part of the reason darkness is so privileged by several characters is because in the darkness, when one cannot be seen, “you get a chance to leave the cage. You would be free” (54). What these allusions suggest is that colonized people are, in fact, in a cage – trapped and limited, always on display for the powers which have put them there. The colonized villagers live in a panoptic prison but do not realize it, even though authority is always at their consciousness. The villagers’ ultimate powerlessness is revealed in tragic fashion at the end of the novel when they learn that the village land has been sold by Creighton
to buyers who proceed to evict all of the residents. The text emphasizes the
ingland villagers’ precarious place in the dominant social order through dividing the
chapter portraying the evictions into three sections: morning, noon, and evening.
In the course of one day, the villagers, who have resided on the land for
generations, are displaced and made homeless by the financial transactions of
colonial powers, a dynamic that recalls the extraordinary displacement entailed in
the slave trade. Contrary to the villagers’ beliefs, their houses are not symbols of
autonomy or individuality because, as the village sale reveals, the poor colonized
simply can never have those things. The villagers are not even told of the
impending sale in advance because “it was known by all who really mattered that
it was sold . . . it might have seemed decent or even human or whatever one liked
to say if they had been informed and offered the first chance of purchasing spots.
But that was unnecessary. They were poor” (241). The villagers’ ultimate
powerlessness and vulnerability to external powers is affirmed by two tragedies.
The first is the collapse of the Shoemaker’s house, a frequent village gathering
spot, as he tries to actually move it from the land; like the village itself, the house
is disintegrated, scattered, and unable to be reconstructed. The second is the
sending of Pa to the Alms House. Pa, who is constructed throughout the novel as
a father-figure both to the village and many of the fatherless children, and is the
oldest person in the village, is consigned to what is essentially a tuberculosis
asylum that also houses the mentally ill, a place of horrors where he will be
allowed no dignity at the end of his life. Humiliatingly, the most revered figure in
the village is given no choice as to where he will be spend his last days.
Thus, at the end of the novel, the villagers are forced to understand that
despite having been freed from slavery over one hundred years prior, they are not
free. Their unhoming causes the villagers to reckon with the truth that the things
they believed their homes represented – maturity, autonomy, masculinity – are not
accessible to them as poor colonized subjects. To remain in the colonized
homeland, under the oversight of Mother (and Father) England is to remain
imprisoned in a calcifying society which keeps the colonized in a dependent,
childlike state in which they are never really at home. Bildung becomes
impossible because the colonized man can only grow, self-determine, and self-
cultivate himself to the extent the colonizer authorizes. Development of the
colonized must be strictly contained, for to empower them would pose a direct
challenge to colonial authority. It is through the character of G. that Lamming
reveals the one strategy for Bildung available to colonized people: exile. The
colonized subject must leave his homeland in order to obtain those things which
being “at home” suggests; however, before he can reach that conclusion, he must
develop that critical consciousness we see budding in G., a process that is
traumatic and painful.

**III. Beyond the Limits of the Land**

As I mentioned, one benefit of G.’s education is that is allows him to leave
the prison-like space of Barbados, a departure which Trumper, who serves as a
mentor to G., deems necessary to G.’s growth. Little has been written about the
character of Trumper, one of G.’s childhood friends. However, I believe him to be
a key figure in G.’s development, one of two teachers who ushers G along in his
maturation, the other being the teacher who encourages G.’s literary aspirations, dreams which initially discourage G. in their seeming unavailability. From the beginning of the novel, Trumper is, like G., presented as an outsider, a thinker. His face is marked by a missing eyebrow, one allegedly shaved off for his truculent behavior while in a juvenile detention center, where his rebellious spirit had already landed him by the time he was nine years old. At fourteen, he articulates over the course of a long conversation with Boy Blue many of the feelings that G. comes to struggle with, and it is Trumper who leads the boys on the mission to spy on the Landlord’s party. He also intuits how resistant the villagers are to change, something he finds unappealing and which fuels his desire to escape to America from a young age, which he does before returning to Trinidad on the eve of G.’s departure for the most meaningful conversation of the novel. Trumper seems to see in G. a kindred soul, a pupil open to the lessons he himself has learned; even before his return to Trinidad, he writes a letter to G. from America informing him that “You don’t understand what life is, but I’ll tell you when I come and I am coming soon” (237). Trumper’s lessons to G. on that final evening at the end of the novel put G.’s exile in a hopeful light.

As much as G. is tormented by his feelings of fragmentation and not belonging, he is equally tormented by the thought of leaving Trinidad. Trumper affirms through his own experience what G. is growing to sense and what the novel has revealed: the colonized subject can never be free, can never discover himself, can never truly know his community, can never be at home in a colonized homeland. However, these realizations have come to Trumper only
through his exile in America. As he says, “‘I like to be free . . . America make you feel . . . it make you feel that where you been livin’ before is a kind of cage” (284). His use of cage hearkens back to the frequent mentions of cages in the novel to identify the feeling of being seen. The lesson that Trumper comes to teach G. is about racial solidarity, about the existence of a Black brotherhood that transcends national boundaries; he tells G. that he is a

Negro like me an’ all the rest in the States’ an all over the world, ‘cause it ain’t have nothin’ to do with where you born. ‘Tis what you is, a different kind o’ creature. An’ when you see what I tellin’ you an’ you become a negro, act as you should an’ don’t ask Hist’ry why you is what you then see yourself to be, ‘cause Hist’ry ain’t got no answers. You ain’t a thing till you know it, an’ that’s why you an’ none o’ you on this island is a Negro yet. (297-298)

This message fills G. with terror and awe. He is terrified at the thought of not finding that which is he supposedly a part of. He reflects, “it was difficult to think. To be a part of something which you didn’t know and which if Trumper was right it was my duty to discover . . . a new thought registered. Suppose I didn’t find it. This was worse, the thought of being a part of what you could not become” (299). However, “Trumper’s assurance made it seem less frightening than it might have been” (300). G. is awed by the vision of solidarity and community that Trumper offers him; when G. asks Trumper if he ever feels alone in the world like he used to as a child, Trumper responds, “‘A man who know his people won’t ever feel like that’” (301). Crucial to the racial awakening that is entailed in knowing one’s
people, Trumper emphasizes, is leaving Barbados and, more broadly, the colonized Caribbean. He repeatedly tells G. that this knowledge will always be an impossibility at home because “‘None o’ you here on this islan’ known what it mean to fin’ race. An the white people you have to deal with won’t ever let you know’,” (295), alluding to the indirect ways in which power is exercised in the colony. Trumper admits to G. that he, too, did not know what race meant until reached the United States because “‘you can’t understan’ it here. Not here. But’,” he encourages G., “‘the day you leave an’ perhaps if you go further than Trinidad, you’ll learn’” (296). As Trumper preaches to G., G. begins to think of what community means to him: “I understood the village, the High School, my mother, the first assistant. There was a sense in which I would have called all these mine. I understood my island . . . I spoke of my island. But this new entity was different. The race. The people” (296). The text has revealed, however, through the displacement and ultimate disempowerment of the villagers is that Barbados is not his island, the village not his village. What Trumper offers G. is the possibility of a different type of home, a home in one’s own body and among one’s own people – a castle made of skin. Although G. is first going to Trinidad, the knowing Trumper tells him, “if my mind tell me right, you goin’ to go much further than Trinidad, an that’s why I bring you here for this talk” (298), which suggests that G.’s sojourn is the just beginning of a long journey. The novel ends with G. walking home, his departure a few hours off. With Trumper’s promises of enlightenment to be found far from home ringing in his ears, G. realizes that “in a
sense more deep than simple departure I had said farewell, farewell to the land” (303).

It is this farewell which leads me to the belief with which I opened this chapter: *In the Castle of My Skin* is a novel that is, if not optimistic, cautiously hopeful about the possibility of *Bildung* for the colonized subject. Although we might read *In the Castle of My Skin* as an anti-Bildungsroman, I believe the ending suggests *Bildung* in process. That G. is leaving Barbados, a space which the text paints as an invisible prison in which subjects are denied maturity and autonomy by powers acting under the guise of parental benevolence, bodes well for his development; Trumper’s experiences and encouragement further suggest that the loneliness and self-alienation that plague G. might be resolved through exile. G. has realized that the life, identity, and community he seeks cannot be found in Barbados, a realization which suggests that his departure is just the beginning.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITY BILDUNG FOR THE CARIBBEAN

“For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.”

Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which C.L.R. James, V.S. Naipaul, and George Lamming have used the Bildungsroman genre as a vehicle for criticizing colonialism’s devastating developmental effects on its subjects and, in doing so, undermine the moral rationale offered for the imperial mission. These writers depict the colonized Caribbean as a space unconducive to Bildung. Colonialism, I have argued prevents Bildung for the colonized, educated man in a number of ways. First, the simple political fact of his colonization problematizes his development through depriving him of access to the material resources and opportunities that would catalyze self-development. Second, a necessary pre-condition for Bildung is freedom, which is inherently lacking in a colonized state. Third, colonized subjects were designated children by colonial discourses which relied on this designation for their self-legitimation, discourses which make it impossible for the colonized to “grow up” because their very existence is predicated on the underdevelopment of the colonized. For the colonized man, colonialism particularly stymies Bildung by emasculating him and denying him access to appealing, sustainable models of masculinity, a circumstance which frustrates his attempt to establish an adult gender identity. Finally, for the colonized, educated
man, _Bildung_ is further complicated by an exposure to and immersion in colonial curricula which engender alienation by privileging social relations he is excluded from while simultaneously educating him away from the native communities he _does_ have access to. Taken together, these conditions preclude the educated male subject’s _Bildung_ at home in the Caribbean by depriving him of the means to self-cultivate and transition from boy to man and by refusing him a participatory role in any community. Subsequently, the subject persists in sort of “in-betweeness,” in which he is neither adult nor child, man nor boy, at home or homeless, a liminal state which is antithetical to the aims of _Bildung_. I have also tried to show that by constructing a parallel between a mature, autonomous self and a home of one’s own, these texts suggest that _Bildung_ is, in part, a condition of being at home in the world. However, as the elusiveness of stable, hospitable domestic space in the novels suggests, this condition is not available to the colonized subject in a colonized space.

I believe that my investigation yields a few interesting insights. First, I believe the critical reception of all three novels points to the unreliability of writers’ professions of intent. James said he had no anti-colonial aims when writing _Minty Alley_. Naipaul, too, denies any political or ideological agendas in _A House for Mr. Biswas_, or in any other of his work, for that matter. Lamming writes in his introduction to the book that _In the Castle of My Skin_ is not interested in any individual consciousness and should essentially be read as a national allegory. Critics have generally taken these writers at their word and used those views proffered by the writers as starting points for analysis. However, close
examination of these texts reveals a contradiction between the authors’ words and the texts themselves. Through mimicking the Bildungsroman, James clearly offers a pointed commentary on the paralysis engendered by colonialism on colonized males. For a man who claims to not have any ideological agenda in his writing, Naipaul goes to great lengths to offer a scathing criticism of the material and spiritual effects of colonialism through depicting Biswas’s unyielding but constantly thwarted attempts simply to have a degree of dignity in this world. Further, while Lamming does focus on the life of the villagers, it is G., the character who will not, in fact, remain in the village and whose fate will take a distinctly different course from those of the villagers, who functions as the novel’s narrative heart. In each instance, the novels suggest the dangers in putting too much stock in writers’ own views of their work.

Additionally, it is my hope that this project further affirms the need to consider the male experience when engaging in the study of gender. Although colonized women faced a double marginalization as subjects both female and colonized, I believe that the experiences of the men under examination in the previous chapters demonstrate that colonized men were also doubly marginalized by colonial patriarchies that oppressed them not only through colonization but through emasculation. If we are to work towards a fuller understanding of the dynamics of gender and its role in determining subject positions, we cannot slight the experience of one entire gender.

The third conclusion I want to suggest my project leads to is an affirmation of the importance of generic classifications and the ongoing vitality of
the Bildungsroman genre. To return to Jeffrey Sammon’s question posed in the first chapter as to why we should continue to use the term Bildungsroman at all when its definition has become so widely-encompassing, I contend that examining texts through the lens of genre and considering how they adhere to, stray from, or subvert generic norms provides a far richer and catholic range of potential interpretations. Although none of the novels examined in this project fit the mold of the classical Bildungsroman and would thus not be considered as such by Sammons and critics who assume positions similar to his, it is only through investigating these writers’ appropriations of and deviations from the genre’s norms that the full extent of their colonial critiques is made evident.

Finally, I believe these novels, along with the autobiographical non-fiction of James, Naipaul, and Lamming, suggest that while Bildung is impossible in the colonized Caribbean, it is not impossible for a colonized Caribbean. Of the protagonists discussed in this manuscript, the only one for whom there seems to be a future is G., and it is precisely because he is leaving the island. Interestingly, all three writers themselves departed their respective islands at a young age, and, while each returned for periods of time, none returned permanently. Lamming has spent most of his adult life living in England and the United States, and Naipaul has long resided in England. Before his death, C.L.R. James lived in both England and the United States; indeed, so fervent was his desire to remain in the USA that while detained at Ellis Island, he wrote a book-length study of Moby Dick and sent it to every member of the United States Congress in an effort to persuade them of his patriotism. Alas, political concerns over James’s political views led to
his eventual deportation to England. That James, Naipaul, and Lamming all made their homes outside of their homeland further supports the implications made in their novels that there is no role, no home, for the autonomous, educated male in a colonized region.

I posit that in depicting the subject’s inability to be “at home” in the colonized space, the writers revalue exile and imply that it is a necessary stage in colonial Bildung. What Castle implies and the lives of James, Naipaul, and Lamming confirm is that coupled with a man’s awakening to the reality of his colonial circumstances is a recognition of the necessity of escape from those circumstances. This realization in mind, the subject must leave the homeland if he is to save himself from eternal developmental paralysis, for “dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. The traditional residences we have grown up in have become intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge” (Adorno qtd. in Said, “Intellectual Exile” 376). Though Adorno is reflecting on the modern intellectual’s exilic existence here, he also inadvertently describes with economy and precision the dilemma faced by the colonized subject who fathoms that the colonized homeland that seems to nourish him with its familiar comfort actually destroys him. Thus, exile becomes a refusal to adjust to or accommodate a world that would inhibit him from discovering and actualizing his self-identity.
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