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LITERATURE

QUID EST ENIM TEMPUS? TEMPORALITY, CAUSALITY, AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SELECTED WEST INDIAN SELF-PORTRAIT NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this paper is to analyse the plot structure of six selected novels published in the mid-1950s onwards. The paper also seeks to understand the differences that exist between autobiographical fiction that were published in the 20th century and that published in the 21st century.

Research methodology: The paper is grounded on narrative theory and stylistics. The novels under study are V. S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* and *A House for Mr Biswas*, George Lamming's *in the Castle of my Skin*, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equation of the Dread: A Novel in Bass Riddim*.

Findings of the study: The paper found that all of the novels share a similar type of narrative structure, regardless of the date of publication. This structure is characterized by a linear progression of events, with the narrator recounting their childhood and adolescence. The novels also share a focus on the themes of identity, colonialism, and migration.

Conclusion: The paper concludes that the similarities in the narrative structure of these novels suggest that they are part of a shared literary tradition. The paper also suggests that there are differences in the novels, such as the points of view of the narrators, reflect the changing social and cultural landscape of the West Indies.

Recommendations: The paper recommends that further research be conducted on the narrative structure of autobiographical fiction from the West Indies. The paper also recommends that scholars explore the ways in which these novels can be used to understand the experiences of West Indian people.

Keywords: *Causality, Narrative structure, Plot, Self-portrait, Temporality*

INTRODUCTION

According to David Dabydeen and Nana Tagoe (1987), people of the West Indies have always been translocated (p. 80). This aptly summarises why the West Indian archipelagos are peopled by individuals from diverse backgrounds. The unfortunate consequence of this mixing of people is that West Indian people lack a mythology to ground them. C.J. Odhiambo (1991) succinctly captures this lacuna when he argues that:

> *"The subject of Caribbean definition has occupied and engaged almost every writer of the Caribbean region. This is natural because writing in so many respects is a form of self-definition within a certain defined society and culture (p. 1)."*

Moreover, looking at the literary productions from the West Indies, one notes that majority of the writers of the mid-twentieth century chose the self-portrait novel as the main mode of expression; that is, at the core of these novels, there is an adult narrator who appears to be reflecting on their childhood as they grow towards adolescence and finally into early adulthood. This type of writing that deals with the portrayal of the self is called an autobiography. Benson Kamau (2006), however, adds that there is a caveat, and this constraint leads him to advance the proposition that:

> *"In literary discourse, autobiography is never a straightforward concept, its meaning seems to merge with those of other related genres such as memoirs, diaries and personal journals. While all these genres legitimately deal with the subject of the self, they do so from different points of view, style and intention (p. 2)."*

Kamau's argument underscores the fact that writing a self-portrait is never a simple and straightforward process. We add that one must also rely on another key idea in literary production: fiction. This explains why West Indian novels are often referred to as "autobiographical fiction." This, we further surmise, alludes to the idea of the use of the "I-narrator," giving the distinct impression that there is a connection between the narrator and the ideal author. The concept of the ideal author is borrowed from T. S. Eliot's view that there is a

difference between the mind that creates and the man that suffers (Hugh, 1962, p. 30). This distinction underscores the perception that the influences that a writer is subjected to differ, and in a way, this influence percolates into the work of the author.

To be specific, we advance the proposition that in certain situations, there exist striking parallels between the real-life actions of the novelist and the characters involved in the novel. A great example is in Michael Anthony's novel *The Year in San Fernando*, where the experiences of Francis have a real analogue with a year that the novelist himself spent in San Fernando from after Christmas 1943 to just before Christmas 1944 at the age of 12 (Ramchand, 1983, p. 12). From this example, we assert that autobiographical fiction involves the use of materials from the life of an author and blending them into the fictional work that is under production. In this way, the term "autobiographical fiction" marries two concepts that appear to be contradictory: fictionality and reality.

Autobiographical fiction is sometimes referred to as a 'bildungsroman.' And according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the term 'Bildungsroman' has its etymology from the German word 'Bildungsroman' which means a novel of formation; and it defines the term as a "class of novels that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically." In other words, this genre of novels traces the growth of the child character. This growth encompasses both the physical and the mental growth right from childhood into adulthood. In addition, Babacar Dieng' (2013) avers that for the West Indian novelist the bildungsroman is a:

> *"Genre privileged by liberation novels aiming at unmasking the impacts of colonial or hegemonic legacies in African diaspora because it allows authors to encompass a longer story time. (It also) allows the depiction of the child's development from a young age to adulthood (p. 185)."*

From this, we extrapolate that this insistence to unmask the negative psychological effects of colonialism, and by extension slavery is the definitive element that separates the West Indian Bildungsroman from its German origin. Moreover, we add that it offers a succinct explanation on why the West Indian autobiographical fiction tends to be psychological: it is this concentration on the psyche that exposes the negative effects of colonisation and slavery on the child character, and by extension the narrator.

For this paper, the term self-portrait is used in place of 'bildungsroman' and 'autobiographical fiction' because we contend that it encompasses every aspect of the novels that deal with the subject of the formation of the self; be it the ones that are written in the first-person point of view or those of the third person point of view. Borrowing the argument presented in the introduction to the novel *In the Castle of My Skin*, the writer avers that the novel form for the West Indian has always been preoccupied with restoring the lives of men and women who are poor, and that this attention is concerned with a class of people at the lowest strata in the economic ladder (Lamming, 2016, p. XI); we add that our analysis strictly concentrates on characters who are marginalised, not only because of their position in the society, but also due to the colour of their skin as well as their heritage. Lamming's argument somewhat concurs with Babacar Dieng's, and this offers yet another explanation for the distinction between the West Indian Bildungsroman and the European bildungsroman. For the latter, borrowing the argument of David H Miles (1974), this type of novel tends to trace the development of the protagonist where most of the time he or she is constructed as the hero or the heroine (p. 980). This argument – we reiterate – offers a clear-cut distinction on the bildungsroman of the two regions.

This paper also concentrates on two significant terminologies: Causality and Temporality. And these two are analysed with the view of finding out why and/or how literary writers for self-portrait novels use them. Moreover, this paper contends that these narrative elements are key to finding out meaning and relationships underneath the various texts under study.

The theories applied are two: narrative theory and stylistics. According to Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia (2014), narratology is the science of narratives (p. 1). They further add that: a narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events connected in a temporal and causal way (p. 4). The etymology of narratology is from Aristotle when he produced his treatise on *Poetics*. According to Leitch Vincent et al (2018), Aristotelian poetics did a systemic description of the plot, and this laid the groundwork for contemporary narrative theory, and in particular narratology (p. 97). In addition to that, in his analysis of the structure of Greek tragedy, Aristotle advances the argument that plot precedes character (Heath, 1996, p. XVIII). Heath further adds that, according to Aristotle "plot is the source and soul of tragedy (p. 12)."

Looking at the arguments advanced above, one gets the impression that plot is key. Arthur Applebee et al (2006) – in the McDougal Little edition of *The Language of Literature* – aver that: a plot is the sequence of actions and events in a narrative (p. 1345). And according to John

Mugubi (2021), "the backbone of all narrative and dramatic literary genres is the story (p. 77)." He further adds that a story is defined as "the narrative of events in their time sequence (p. 77)." This definition echoes E. M. Forster's who emphasises the fact that time and sequence offer key distinction between plot and story. Forster (1985) defines a plot as "a narrative of events, emphasis falling on causality (p. 86)." Thus, from the arguments advanced by different theoreticians, one thing is quite clear: there appears to be a connection between plot and the flow of time.

This paper also concentrates on anti-mimetic narrative theory. Jan Alber (2013) argues that:

> *"A mimetic fiction… attempt(s) to correspond to experiences in the world; … and an anti-mimetic narrative contains events that are clearly impossible in the real world (p. 102)."*

Worth mentioning is that, *The Marvellous Equation of the Dread: A Novel in Bass Riddim* relies heavily on the latter, and this paper investigates why Marcia Douglas's novel deviates from the tradition set by the novelist who wrote before her. In other words, this paper attempts to understand why Douglas treats time in a non-linear fashion and the efficacies of this treatment in the overall meaning of the text.

Closely related to narrative theory, this paper also grounds itself on stylistics. Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (2007) define stylistics as: the study of styles (p. 11). They allude to the fact that styles in literature are never used as embellishments since they serve a greater purpose – helping the reader to comprehend the overall meaning of the text (p.10). This paper also focuses on foregrounding, metaphor and symbolism.

CAUSALITY AND TEMPORALITY IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

According to the arguments advanced by E. M. Forster, there is a clear distinction between a story and a plot. He avers that: "The King died and then the queen died" is a story; "The King died and then the queen died out of grief" is a plot (Forster, 1985, p. 86). In the first example Forster (1985) adds that time-sequence is dominant, while in the second example, it is causality (p. 86). For this paper, we define temporality as the flow of time. We also define it as the way we humans do perceive time. That is, drawing our illustration from Espen Hammer's (2011) *Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory*, we echo the argument that our understanding of how time works is influenced by the invention of the clock and the calendar; and this explains why we see time to be linear – with it beginning from the Big Bang and

continuing to eternity (p. 17, 13). This argument brings to mind the human division of time into the past that is immutable, the present that is unfolding and the future which is yet to happen. Significantly, self-portrait novels are reflections of the narrators on the experiences of their growth. This shows that these narrators highly depend on the past. Thus, we add that everything that the narrator is telling us has already happened. This argument leads us to posit further that tenses – for the novels under study – are used as markers of time.

In Merle Hodge's novel *Crick Crack, Monkey*, for instance, the narrator begins by saying that:

> *"We posted ourselves at the front window, standing on a chair. Tantie said we were stupid, for they might not come back till next morning or maybe even for days but if we wanted to stand on tiptoe at the window for a week that was all right by her as long as we got down once in a while to bathe (p. 1)."*

The main verbs 'posted' and 'said' are in past tense. And we aver that this usage of tense is used to mark the distinction between the feeling of euphoria that the child character has, and is in the past; and the feeling of nostalgia that is characteristic of the narrator, and is in the present. This shows that the present prompts the narrator to reminisce on the good times that were in the past. Put another way, this distinction could be analysed further as the mark on the difference between the character of Tee who is yet to pass through the psychological turmoil of the adult version of Tee. We further add that these traumatic experiences are typical mark of growing up in the colony and postcolony of the West Indies amongst the Afro-Caribbean community. Thus, we surmise that the narrator is doing this as a way of trying to heal the wound; in the process reconnect with her authentic West Indian heritage that she had been robbed.

To reiterate, the tense markers separate the feeling of the child character and the adult narrator: for the former the child character is happy that their family is at the cusp of adding yet another family member. She is informing everyone, including Mr Henry, of this good news. This euphoria is contrasted with the feeling of nostalgia that the narrator has. Additionally, advancing the argument that the adult version of Tee is in Europe, the narrator yearns for a return of the period before she (the child character) was indoctrinated and corrupted by Auntie Beatrice; this explains why she portrays Tee with an outsider innocence even when her mother and their unborn sibling die. It is important to reiterate that this unborn baby is the cause of the happy mood that Tee is experiencing at the beginning of the text. A critical reading of the portrayal of the child at the end of the chapter reveals that this baby – for the narrator –

symbolises the destruction of their family. This is seen when her father goes away to sea and she reports that she – the child character – concluded that the father had gone to see whether he could find Mammy and the baby (p. 3). This assumption by the child character brings out the innocence of the child; it highlights the perception of the young character of Tee that the sea is place that gives life, ergo a place where the family can find both the missing baby and the mother. From this, we deduce that Tee as a young character fails to register the deaths of both the mother and their unborn sibling at all. In fact, she reports the mourning period objectively with a detachment that the death of significant family members ought not to have. The child character of Tee, at this stage, is quite perceptive and this failure to register the solemnity of the situation could be read as the narrator's emphasis of the detachment she has with her roots. In summary, for Merle Hodge's novel, tense marks the different psychological states of the child character and the narrator. In fact, it contrasts with the happiness and the solemnity of the two.

Another example comes from Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* where the narrator starts her novel by saying that:

> *"They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said (p. 3)."*

In this example, tense usage is not explicit like in Hodge's novel; but underneath the surface, the reader gets the impression that the narrator is talking about the past. The best marker of this is in the speech tag that clearly indicates that the report is in the past tense. Like in Merle Hodge's novel, we conclude that the past tense is used to reminisce or reflect about the past that is immutable especially in the face of hard times that mark the present. This assertion is strengthened by the argument that the narrator of Jean Rhys' novel is Antoinette who is narrating from Thornfield Hall where she is locked after she has been declared mad by her husband who disinherits her of her property and her liberty.

Additionally, Hammer (2011) postulates that had humans invented another way of looking at time, our understanding of time would perhaps be non-linear (p. 17). And Marcia Douglas's novel realises this hypothesis. This particular novel shatters the human perception of time: it reinterprets how time works. In other words, she offers a novel where the past can be affected by the future. The narrator of her novel begins by saying:

> *"A woman stands and looks out at sea. There are three ships on the horizon – they do not surprise her. She has seen them in dreams before: the white man on the deck with his big feet and long boots, his hair the colour stringy papaya. (S)he thinks he has come to take her Xaymaca (p. 9)."*

This part is titled 'RE-MIX.' The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines re-mix as: (the) mak(ing) a new version of a recorded piece of music by using a machine to arrange the separate parts in different ways (Hornby, 2010, p. 1246). From this definition, one gets the distinct impression that the re-working of time is suggested by the titling of the section as 're-mix.' The omniscient narrator reports that:

> *"Far-far in the distance, past the ships and the memories of ships, she sees figures dancing on the water to the music of a man uprising on the waves, revolution on his cheekbones, fantastic dreadfulness in his hair, a lion roaring in his fingers (p. 9)."*

The narrator penetrates deep into the mind of the Taino woman, and through this, a revelation of non-linearity of time is revealed; that is, the Taino woman is able to see the past, the present and the future all at once. The Taino woman had actually prophesied – in her dreams – that the white man would come and take her to Xaymaca, and this represents the past, and the arrival of the white man is the present, and the foretelling of the rise of Bob Marley is the future. Interestingly, Bob Marley has an influence that travels back in time. In other words, he has the power to affect the past. It is also significant to note that this, all viewing eye where the present, the past and the future, can be seen at once is used by the novelist to provide a panoramic history of the West Indian people. This actually fills up the void; we contend that one of the characteristics of the West Indian people is that lack of historical knowledge to not only ground them, but also to give them a sense of direction.

Angel Regus' ledger book reveals that Bob Marley's concert in Jamaica National Stadium in Kingston on 22nd April 1978 travelled back in time to 1766, and it was felt by the boy who was hanged at the Half-way tree (p. 66). Again, like the previous example, this example offers us an insight into the way the future can affect the past. This idea shatters the human understanding of how we human beings have come to look at time. We postulate that this departure from the norm actually helps to create a West Indian mythology. This is occasioned by the tragic history of the West Indies where a whole population was disinherited from their land and heritage and reduced to chattels. Franklin Knight (1997) captures this argument when he says that: nothing exceeds in fundamental importance the twin experiences of slavery and plantation system (p.

1). This we postulate captures the unique West Indian problem where its characters are often asking the question "who am I?" According to C. J. Odhiambo (1994), the West Indian region is quite special. He avers that:

> *"But defining the … (West Indies) has been particularly problematic for the writers (of the region) … This is because the problems of definition have to do with problems of a broken history and a discontinuity in culture (p. 121)."*

Moreover, citing Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming*, C. J. Odhiambo (1994) adds that writers often respond to the challenges of their own society, and in the West Indian case, it is the problem of self-definition (p. 121). The creation of Bob Marley as a mythical figure whose impact transcends time – we posit – partly answers the West Indian problem of self-definition. This is only possible in a self-portrait novel. It offers the writer an ability to create and recreate history as they see it fit. In other words, by reworking human perception of time, Marcia Douglas's novel has managed to fill the void that exists in the definition and creation of a whole community. In the process, she has managed to respond to the question of identity, and grounded the people to a definite mythology around the figures of Bob Marley and Haile Selassie.

Secondary to the arguments advanced above, Marcia Douglas's novel is a bit different if it is juxtaposed with what would pass as the traditional definition of the West Indian self-portrait novels. *Crick Crack, Monkey* meets Babacar Dieng's criteria for what constitutes a West Indian bildungsroman, or, for our case, a self-portrait novel. It covers the psychological effect colonisation had on the psyche of Tee as she is thrust in a world of artificialities and imitation. *The Marvellous Equation of the Dread: A Novel in Bass Riddim* is different in so many ways; firstly, it does not use the 'I narrator' that has been the norm with this genre of novels. Instead, it covers multiple narrators, and traces their growth from childhood to adulthood and even after death. The most prominent characters whose portraits are well covered are Leenah, Bob Marley and His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie; the novel uncovers the psychological effect that the death of the father figure has on characters like Bob Marley and Leenah. For these simple facts, we argue that it fits in the categorisation of this genre despite not using a single narrator but a multiple of narrators giving different perspective of the three characters at the core of the text.

The second concept that we must define is causality. This is the idea that an event in a narrative happens because of what had occurred earlier. That is B happens because of A, and to use E. M. Forster's example the Queen dies because of the death of the King – grief kills her (Forster,

1985, p. 86). We argue that Antoinette's psychological state at the time of the narration is the result of isolation both from her mother and her society. In the case of the latter, Antoinette and her family are isolated from the rest of the society because they are considered as neither black nor white. They inhabit an in-between world where Antoinette – in particular – yearns for a sense of belonging. In fact, the unnamed narrator, Antoinette's husband refers to her as a "Creole of pure descent … (who is neither) English (n)or European… (p. 37). In other words, she is alienated, and she reports that: we were white … (p. 15). Looking at the tense in this confession, one gets the distinct impression that Antoinette and her family ceased being white. This is quite extraordinary because one's race is something one is born with, and one never loses it over time. Moreover, we argue that she yearns to be English which is expressed through the picture of the Miller's daughter. Thus, unable to find her identity, she resorts to that which the dominant class classify as madness.

Structurally, most of the novels selected for this study follow one definite path: the main character will always leave at the novel's end. In fact, this motif is present in all the selected texts. In *In the Castle for My Skin*, for instance, the novel ends with the narrator on the verge of leaving Barbados. The same idea recurs in Naipual's *Miguel Street* where the narrator equally leaves for Europe having gotten a scholarship. Thus, from these two examples we can deduce that there is a causal relationship between the departure of the narrators and the psychological developments of the child character. That is, these narrators are always leaving in search of something. In an interview, Merle Hodge confesses that the idea behind Tee's immigration to England was an attempt at resolving the problem of identity caused by indoctrination by Auntie Beatrice (Balutansky, 1989, p. 654). Obviously, this confession could be read the magic wand that West Indian literary writers use to solve the crisis caused by rootlessness that resulted from being uprooted from their ancestral land. Interestingly, to reiterate, it reveals that the growth of these characters prompts them to relocate most often to Europe in search of a definite identity.

Additionally, for this paper, we use Aristotelian precepts of a plot structure. That is, a good plot must have a beginning, a middle and an end, and that it should neither begin nor end arbitrarily (Puckett, 2016, p. 25). Kent Puckett (2016) further adds that "Plot is informing, intentional a considered process of selection and arrangement that gives events meaning and a structure they would not have on their own (p. 25, 26)." In other words, literary plots should contribute to the overall meaning of the text; the selection of whichever structure should be

geared towards the contribution to the meaning. And, because the selected texts are about the life history of different characters, we postulate that the best plot structure for the different novels would be a linear plot. After all, life, as we understand it using human perception of time, flows in one direction. It begins with at birth and ends at death.

V. S. Naipaul's novel *Miguel Street* employs linearity in its plot. It starts with the arrival of the unnamed narrator in Miguel Street and it does end when he leaves for Europe on a scholarship. Structurally, the novel does not follow a linear arrangement; instead it is divided into different chapters, with each chapter covering a resident of Miguel Street. In fact, the novel could be read as a collection of short stories. We argue that the disjointed nature of the novel could be read as an emphasis of the topsy-turvy nature of characters in the novel. That is, the characters used are often satirised. A good example to illustrate this comes from the chapter titled 'the mechanical genius.' An analysis of the word 'genius' shows that the mechanic ought to exhibit extraordinary feet. He ought to be in a position to repair not only his vehicles, but also other people's cars because of his finesse. However, the contrary is true: he lacks the know-how of the workings of an engine. The narrator introduces him as:

> *"My uncle Bhacku was very nearly a mechanical genius. I cannot remember a time when he was not the owner of a motor-vehicle of some sort. I don't think he always approved of the manufacturer's designs, however, he was always pulling engines to bits (p. 118)."*

Apart from Uncle Bhacku's love to tinker with the car's engine, some of which he was unable to put back, and had to call a real mechanic to do the work for him, this introduction is quite ironical. Plainly put, he is a genius at disassembling car engines which he is unable to reassemble. Secondly, the diction used shows that the narrator has reservation about Uncle Bhacku's ability to repair vehicles. He reports that he was 'nearly' a genius. We opine that ingenuity is something that one either has or does not. There is no middle ground.

Moreover, these instances of irony are innumerable throughout the text. And we opine that this is meant to capture the fact that residents of Miguel Street are quite different. In fact, most of the characters – like Uncle Bhacku – are caricatured. The narrator lampoons a bully who is afraid of dogs, a poet who never finishes writing any poem, and a teacher whose students consistently fail exams to highlight the fact that the West Indian literary character is different. This analysis could be read as a way of showing the reader that the characters they are reading about are different and should not be treated as normal. Thus, we construe this as the novelist's

emphasis of the difference that is characteristic of the West Indian space. Additionally, the fragmented nature of the novel could be read as the novelist's attempt to capture the confusion that is rife in Miguel Street. Things never appear to be the way they ought to be, and as a result the residents are caricatured. This – we reiterate – is done deliberately by the novelist to foreground the fact that they are indeed different.

Naipaul's other novel, *A House for Mr Biswas,* is arranged differently. It starts with what should be the end in a biographical novel. That is:

> *"Ten weeks before he died, Mr Mohun Biswas, a journalist … was sacked. He had been ill for some time. In less than a year he had spent more than nine weeks at the Colonial Hospital and convalesced at home for even longer (p. 5)."*

From the quotation above, death precedes birth; this is a subversion of the normal order of life. We read this subversion as the novelist's attempt at foregrounding the death of Mr Biswas's yearning to have freedom. Running throughout the text is Mr Biswas's dream to have a home; and this, we argue, represents a wish to have independence. In fact, the omniscient narrator describes him as a "wanderer … with no place to call his own … (p. 39)." In the Tulsis's household, he is considered insignificant (p. 97), and he is treated with contempt from the other Tulsis because they see him as a trouble maker. Tragically, his attempts to have a house at Green Vale and in Port of Spain fail. In the former, he builds a house which is destroyed by a storm, and in the latter, he buys a house at night and this hides the defects of the house. The result is a man who is dissatisfied.

Additionally, the novel is told through the lenses of the third person narrator. This is necessitated by the death of the protagonist that comes at the beginning of the novel. We contend that this is done to make the novel plausible. Moreover, the arrangement is not random; it is purposive. By beginning with the death of the protagonist, the novelist foregrounds not only the physical death but also the metaphorical death of the protagonist in his quest to have a house, and by extension a life of his own. That is, throughout the whole text, Mr Biswas is unable to find a home that he feels comfortable and proud to be in. His whole life is spent moving from one place to another, and the resulting effect of this movement is a deep yearning to have a place of his own. Despite his attempts, he fails miserably to achieve his dreams. We emphasise that the novelist wants us to focus on this metaphorical death because the whole novel is about Mr Biswas' dream of having his own house where he would be free from the Tulsis's clutch.

We posit that temporality and causality for the selected novels are intertwined. This assertion is supported by Paul Ricœur's (2014) argument that:

> *"The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world ... time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative; narrative in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of a temporal experience (p. 1)."*

This shows that narratives are modelled according to human perception of time; that is, a narrative often – as stated earlier – relies on recounting of the past, a past which is immutable. Thus, we argue that the self-portrait novel in essence is a novel of time. It traces the psychological as well as the moral growth of a particular character in their various stages of development. In George Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of my Skin,* this starts with the childhood of nine-year-old G right on his ninth birthday to his adolescence when he leaves Barbados for the Mother Country. The celebration of the birthday is symbolic, it represents the birth of G, and this shows that unlike Naipaul's novel, this novel starts at birth. Moreover, every stage of this development is captured and the most striking is the school life of the West Indian child during the colonial era. And there are two striking events that the novelist aptly captures. The first is the speech of the inspector that praises Britain for its supposed role in promoting world peace. The inspector's remarks also highlight the indoctrination of the children by the colonial master that mother country is there to protect them and their interests. The second is the whipping of the boy for his supposed role in mischief during the assembly in the presence of the inspector. These two related events reveal a hierarchical system where the Whiteman is at the top and children are at the lowest strata.

CONCLUSION

The self-portrait novel is a novel of time. It thrives on temporality, that is, the narrator recounts the past – a past that in some novels is immutable. Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a classic example of this. Assuming that the narrator is the mad woman in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre,* then the novel is basically talking about the main characters ascension into what the dominant class describe as 'madness.' This assertion is informed by argument that the dominant class constructs what is deviant from their supposed norm as 'mad' (Ledente et al 7). In addition to that, the narrator traces her psychological growth at the hands of a community that hates and isolates her for being different. In this way, we aver that the novel thrives on recounting the worse times, mostly, when Antoinette is growing up. The same argument can

be extended to Merle Hodge's novel *Crick Crack, Monkey*. It traces the psychological growth of Tee in the hands of a domineering matriarch who is hell bent on miseducating her out of what she terms 'nigerryness' and 'ordinaryness.' The result of this is a fractured character who has a wild imagination. She reports that:

> *"I began to have the impression that I should be thoroughly ashamed; for it seemed to me that my person must represent the rock-bottom of the family's fall from grace. Sometimes when I was alone in the living-room Elizabeth Carter's indistinguishable portrait grew features, a pair of eyes that frowned angrily and a mouth that pursed together with disapproval (p. 82)."*

This reveals the mind of the child who is affected by the indoctrination process of the domineering matriarch, Auntie Beatrice. In a way, this goes to show how for the self-portrait novel there is a link between temporality and causality. Secondly, deep inside these novels there is also a common motif; that of leaving the West Indies. Five out of six of the novels under study have this motif. In Marcia Douglas's novel, it is the reverse; Leenah leaves London for the West Indies. This analysis is an attempt to understand why this happens, and we note that this migration mostly happens as a way of solving key conflicts facing the protagonist. In *Miguel Street,* for instance, the novelist – V. S. Naipaul – takes the unnamed narrator out oversees to study when his mother begins to complain about the influence his friends have on him. In Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*, almost a similar scenario happens when Tee is confused about her identity – she goes to England. In this way, England serves as a place that magically solves key issues that both the novelists and the narrator cannot solve. Thus, we recommend that this motif should be studied to understand the reason why it is recurrent in most West Indian novels.

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