

Der Philosophischen Fakultät und Fachbereich Theologie
der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität
Erlangen-Nürnberg

zur
Erlangung des Doktorgrades Dr. phil.

vorgelegt von
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Als Dissertation genehmigt
von der Philosophischen Fakultät und Fachbereich Theologie
der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg
Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 31.03.2023

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on artistic self-fashioning in light of difference in the Anglo-Caribbean novel in Britain between 1954 and 1991. It enquires into the influence of a specific generic tradition on the Caribbean novel: the Künstlerroman, or artist novel. I posit that in the mid-twentieth century, a new type of text emerged which set the – often hindered – artist, most often an author, centre stage as a category for negotiating ontological and epistemological questions. I illustrate this by drawing on five exemplary case studies: these are George Lamming’s The Emigrants (1954), Wilson Harris’s The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), Samuel Selvon’s ‘London Trilogy’, comprising The Lonely Londoners (1956), Moses Ascending (1975), and Moses Migrating (1983), with a particular focus on the second novel in this trilogy, V.S. Naipaul’s The Enigma of Arrival (1987), and David Dabydeen’s The Intended (1991). This study emerges from the observation that male-authored novels in the decades after Windrush foreground questions of writing, gender, and sexuality and interconnect these themes in staging processes of artistic self-fashioning and position-taking. My central thesis is that the Anglo-Caribbean novel draws on the tradition and generic framework of the Künstlerroman, self-reflexively stages and refracts its structural items and myths, and thereby explores and participates in the formation of artistic subjectivity and literary authority under the premises of difference. In articulating the complexities and pitfalls of specifically writerly activity in the context of diaspora, the texts negotiate the Caribbean writer’s positionality in the cultural field and the demands levelled on artists by drawing on a genre that has historically always served to elucidate writerly subject formation and the writer’s relation to matters of aesthetics and politics. The artist figure as interconnecting discourses of authorship, masculinity, race, and ethnicity serves authors to negotiate the epistemologies of a European literary tradition and matters of canon formation, to expose the myths that underlie artistry and authority, and to develop strategies of self-positioning and -authorisation as ‘other’ vis-à-vis this tradition and within the public sphere.
“You must understand that he [the artist] is first of all a creator, that man, whoever he is. He’s like God […]” (Roger Mais, *Black Lightning* 122)

“I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me. […] I am the sole author”

(Zadie Smith, *N-W 3*)

1 *Introduction: The Artist, that Decrepit Deity*¹

This study examines portrayals of artistic self-fashioning in the Anglo-Caribbean novel between the 1950s and the 1990s. More precisely, it explores the refraction of the artist narrative, or *Künstlerroman*, and the insights this yields into processes of social differentiation, cultural politics, artistic distinction, as well as into the commercialisation and instrumentalisation underlying (postcolonial) literature. In the wake of *Windrush*, which initiated large-scale migration from the Caribbean islands to Great Britain and saw the subsequent establishment and institutionalisation of a Caribbean literary tradition, a variety of – by now more or lesser canonised – Caribbean writers have published texts that make use of the framework of the artist novel and feature protagonists who are or want to be artists, particularly authors, or write or participate in different forms of artistic production, a trend that has escaped critical attention so far.² I posit that the self-reflexive negotiation of art and artistic production in Anglophone Caribbean literature in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century leads to the emergence of a distinctive literary mode that engages with and sheds a critical light on the artist’s role and status as well as the literary-historical conception of the same, a fact that renders this period and literature unique.

Specifically, fictional treatments of the artist theme here often centre on the hindered writer as a frequently referenced model to express concerns regarding the artist’s positionality in the public sphere, debates surrounding Britishness and its ‘others’, shifting notions of masculinity, and changes within the cultural sector at large. Peter Kalliney, one of the few scholars to have noticed this tendency, succinctly summarises this conspicuousness: “In a curious development, portraits of failed, frustrated, or thwarted artists overrun representations of even moderately successful writers. […] [P]ostwar West Indian writers, even the most accomplished among them, brood over the problem of artistic futility with remarkable determination” (*Commonwealth* 133–134). Curiously, despite the fact that the post-*Windrush* period is well researched, there is to date no comprehensive study of the artist theme and the

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¹ I borrow my title here from Roland Barthes’s humorous description of the author in *S/Z*: “The Author, that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism, can or could some day become a text like any other” (211).

² As this indicates, I apply a rather broad definition of ‘artist’ as well as ‘*Künstlerroman*’ in this study. A more detailed discussion of terminologies in this regard will take place in chapter 2.
genre of the *Künstlerroman* and its functions in Caribbean writing, the latter’s engagement with the genre’s literary history, and the fictionalisation of the desire to write, and only one work that considers the artist theme in the broader context of postcolonial writing. Jean-Pierre Durix’s *The Writer Written* (1987). This study takes its cue from the conspicuous proliferation of this generic framework and the figure of the (struggling) artist in Caribbean literature and enquires into the popularity of this trope and the connected aesthetic and socio-cultural paradigms, a field saliently neglected in research.\(^3\) It also emerges from the observation that male-authored novels in the decades after Windrush often interlink artistic production and sexual desire in their staging of artistic self-fashioning, which is why a look at self-fashioning processes in light of masculinity and sexuality constitutes a further crucial point of analysis. I am thus particularly interested in how the endeavour to come into art and to gain access to the British literary canon is narrated under the premises of difference, i.e. with regard to aspects of race and ethnicity, and sameness, as continuing a patrilineal literary tradition. As such, my study does not offer an overview over the motif of the artist, but emerges from this figure as a heuristic category.

Based on these observations, my thesis pursues the following questions: why is the *Künstlerroman*, typically seen as a rather conventional and rigid genre, so frequently cited and adapted in Caribbean novels after 1948, especially in its sub-category focusing on an author? What structural items of the framework do writers frequently resort to, how do they adopt and refract these, and what is their specific function? How do writers envision themselves and their work in the context of the canon, also with regard to the formation of a canon of West Indian or black British literature? How does the Anglo-Caribbean *Künstlerroman* conceive writerly subjectivity in the nexus of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, factors central for subject formation and which have, in the case of gender and sexuality, constituted the mythic

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\(^3\) The number of novels that employ this figure in some variety is vast: earlier instances include, for example, the work of George Lamming, which centres on artist figures in a variety of novels, among those *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), *Of Age and Innocence* (1958), *Seasons of Adventure* (1960), and also the later *Water with Berries* (1971) or *Natives of my Person* (1972). Lamming’s contemporary Edgar Mittelholzer draws on the artist theme in *The Life and Death of Sylvia* (1954) and in his gothic novel *My Bones and My Flute* (1955). Jamaican writer Roger Mais’s novels *Brother Man* (1954) and *Black Lightning* (1955) and his story “Listen, the Wind”, which opens his short story collection by the same name (1986), also foreground artist protagonists. The Trinidadian Samuel Selvon centres on artistic production in his novels *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island is a World* (1955), *Turn Again, Tiger* (1958), and *Moses Ascending* (1975). The 1960s witness, among others, Neville Dawes’s *The Last Enchantment* (1960), Jan Carew’s *The Last Barbarian* (1961), V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) – in the latter’s work, the theme was already present in his first novel *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) – Orlando Patterson’s *An Absence of Ruins* (1967), or Andrew Salkey’s *The Adventures of Catullus Kelly* (1969), which similarly employ different forms of artist figures. Wilson Harris’s work frequently resorts to this figure, from his speculative narratives in the 1960s, such as *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1964) or *Ascent to Omari* (1968), up to his second-to-last novel, *The Mask of the Beggar* (2003). While the theme somewhat recedes after the first two decades after Windrush, works such as V.S. Naipaul’s semi-autobiographical narrative *Finding the Centre* (1984) and his novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), David Dabydeen’s *The Intended* (1991) and *Our Lady of Demerara* (2004), E.A. Markham’s *Marking Time* (1999), Derek Walcott’s epic poem *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000), Kei Miller’s *The Last Warner Woman* (2010), or Lawrence Scott’s *Light Falling on Bamboo* (2012) also show that the popularity of this trope continues until and past the turn of the millennium.
foundation of the genre through the association of artistic creation with male procreation in the history of ideas? What ‘new’ subjectivities does it envision here? How does it engage discursive and theoretical shifts and the demands levelled at the artist in cultural politics? How, seeing that cultural theory has pronounced the ‘death’ of a work’s creator and envisioned the ‘birth of the reader’, does it engage readers in the meaning making progress? What can be abstracted regarding notions of ‘Britishness’ in light of diasporic subject formation and with regard to the overall reframing of this concept from the post-war years onwards? And finally, what added value to literary criticism does a rereading of these novels in light of genre – the artist novel – then constitute?

Along these lines, this is now the first study that provides a more comprehensive account of fictional negotiations of authorship, art, and the artist’s function in a Caribbean-British, i.e. a diasporic context. In attending to the Anglo-Caribbean Künstlerroman, this thesis seeks to remedy two gaps hitherto not addressed: it takes this genre seriously as a framework that provides insights into intersectional processes of subject formation and extends the scope of the British Künstlerroman by enquiring into novels that are written by and feature immigrants. Rather than considering the artist theme and the generic reference as coincidental, as a mere parody of its European predecessors, or as simply an autobiographical gesture, I see it as central category via which larger cultural concerns, paradigm shifts, and changed conceptions of the artist as well as their ascribed function in the second half of the twentieth century are interrogated and reflected. I consider the Caribbean novel’s drawing on structural patterns and generic conventions of the Künstlerroman and “their – problematic – assumptions about autonomous and implicitly gendered subjectivity” (Sarkowsky 92) as a conscious strategy to voice ideas and concerns regarding the individual artist’s relation to ‘his’ community, notions of representability and representativeness with regard to that community, socio-cultural and political shifts, and perceptions of agency.

The urgency with which writing and the artist problematic is contemplated in the Anglo-Caribbean novel and the ensuing emergence of a distinctive mode is to be situated within both its specific context and literary history at large. While well researched for earlier epochs, most notably as regards its heyday in Romanticism and Modernism, critical interest in the artist theme and the genre of the Künstlerroman has, in a British context, fallen somewhat out of fashion. This might be due to democratisation processes within the cultural sector itself: art has lost its status as substitute religion and became increasingly intertwined with popular culture and the commercial in the second half of the twentieth century (Schrödl 194), which has led

4 Although the artist theme is not to be understood as restricted to the field of literary studies in general, as it has also been of interest to sociological enquiries, as Dagmar Flinspach points out (3).
critics to denounce the possibility of the genre altogether. Peter Zima in Der Europäische Künstlerroman (2008), for instance, states that due to shifts in aesthetic and social conditions, the Künstlerroman is, in postmodernity, no longer possible at all (xiii). This claim is to be disputed, and it strikes me as emblematic of a still prevailing, narrow idea of the artist as original genius and of the genre’s Eurocentric conception in declaring it as having exhausted its possibilities in this context. It is a further aim of this study to explore how the Künstlerroman, if moving beyond its original definition as a ‘story of vocation’ (xiii) or its reception according to its faithfulness to famous archetypes, most prominently the ubiquitous novels A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) by James Joyce and A la recherche du temps perdu (1913–1927) by Marcel Proust, is especially apt to enquire into shifts in socio-economic, political, aesthetic, and literary-theoretical discourses, even more so in the context of diasporic writing, and into how Caribbean novels here critically engage a “genre that seems to have become obsolete” (Rivera Godoy-Benesch 67).

In attending to the artist novel in its various manifestations, I wish to elucidate its cultural function and aim to broaden the horizon of Caribbean literary criticism. Based on five exemplary case studies, my thesis provides a substantiated analysis of the genre’s employment from the most intensively researched period in Anglophone Caribbean literature, i.e. the post-war decades, to the outgoing millennium as well as a reappraisal of the history of Caribbean literature in Britain. By addressing literary negotiations of the artist’s relation to the public sphere, my study offers a concise overview over roughly forty years of Caribbean writing in Britain and traces dominant trends and paradigm shifts. I focus solely on the period from the 1950s until the early 1990s, because this comprises the ‘origin’ of the Anglo-Caribbean novel in Britain after Windrush and its establishment and canonisation in the British literary field. This enables me to look at both first- and, with David Dabydeen, second-generation Caribbean writers. The novels chosen illustrate the predominance, versatility, and importance of the genre in and for the Anglo-Caribbean novel since the 1950s. Here, I employ a rather broad notion of the terms Künstlerroman or artist novel that transcends its narrow literary-historical categorisation, as I will also specify in more detail in this study. I consider this apt to respond to the changed conceptions of art and the artist in the twentieth century, where strict generic conventions no longer hold and need reconfiguration. Further, as I am arguing that the Caribbean artist novel draws on myths and mythemes inherent to the genre and self-reflexively contemplates and refracts these in the context of diaspora, I will rather speak of a Künstlerroman mode or pattern of representation in the following. The mode as conceived in

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5 To this end, I exclude the few Caribbean artist novels written before the watershed of Windrush. A prominent early example here is, for instance, Claude McKay’s Banjo (1929).
this thesis is also by no means exhaustive and not to be understood as a strict categorisation, and neither does my study in attesting to it provide a conclusive overview over all novels from this cultural region that fit this description. Rather, my study considers novels I deem exemplary of this pattern and the latter’s employment to formulate poetological statements and participate in cultural politics.

This provides me with an opportunity to revisit some of the more well-known texts from Windrush novelists in conjunction with texts that are less popular or texts not immediately discernible as artist novels to enquire into the commentary they provide on their respective period’s specific socio-cultural formations, to excavate hitherto neglected facets, and to shed a new light on Anglophone Caribbean literature. The novels I focus on have partly already attracted profound scholarly attention, some are by now seen as canonical, while others lack substantiated critical engagement, and some of them have already been read together as regards matters of migration and exile, their innovative use of language, or their potential to create a new vision of a pan-Caribbean nation state after the Second World War. A further starting point and aim of my study is thus also to reread the now canonical and themselves quasi-mythical ‘founding fathers’ of Anglophone Caribbean literature with a focus on the self-reflexive staging of precisely the artistic and critical paradigms that interpellated authors into these positionalities and the regimes of representation associated with them. In this vein, I also aim to critically assess the scholarly engagement with these novels: Caribbean literature has been subject to being read with, as Kate Houlden has termed it for the realm of gender and sexuality, a certain “neatness” (2), and despite more recent attempts to shift critical concerns, essentialisms in analyses and the restriction to only a few, seemingly ‘typical’ postcolonial concerns prevail. These involve first and foremost the “creation of an authentic Caribbean identity through literature” in order to claim “political legitimacy for people whose heritage included a history of conquest, genocide, slavery, and colonialism” (Rosenberg 5). The analyses in this thesis not only illustrate the emergence of a new generic mode, but allow for conceiving of Caribbean-British literature as more complex, fractured, and, most of all, more aware and critical of discursive and theoretical influences as has hitherto been acknowledged, and critically scrutinise a tendency in academic criticism to constrain and normalise texts in order to fashion convenient postcolonial subjects.

My attending to the Künstlerroman genre in its refraction in a Caribbean-British context, as reflective of and engaging with a changing British cultural landscape, also seems to strike a contemporary chord: recently, genre-oriented approaches in general and the Künstlerroman genre in particular seem to make a comeback in research interest, as various international
studies have shown. Moreover, in the last years, several monographs and collections which consider the institutional factors that shaped cultural production and the underlying aesthetic, social, political, and economic factors in Britain in the twentieth century have emerged. With regard to specific institutions, these include e.g. Glyne Griffith’s 2016 study on the influence of the BBC on Anglophone Caribbean literature as well as, most recently, Asha Roger’s monograph *State Sponsored Literature* (2020) on the role of the British state in shaping literary production and the canon in the post-war years. Raphael Dalleo’s *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (2011) or Sandra Ponzanesi’s *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* (2014) have attested to the relation of Caribbean or postcolonial literature to the cultural industry. Here, my approach is also indebted to the ground-breaking work done in the area of marketing and consumption of postcolonial literatures, especially by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) and in Sarah Brouillette’s *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007), which have outlined forms of domesticating these literatures for Western audiences and writers’ reactions to these tendencies. Regarding the tension between aesthetics and politics that is inherent to the mode of the artist novel, studies such as J. Dillon Brown’s *Migrant Modernism* (2013) and Peter Kalliney’s *Commonwealth of Letters* (2013), who, following Simon Gikandi’s seminal study *Writing in Limbo* (1992), have addressed the politics of form in Anglophone Caribbean literature in the context of a modernist ideal and aesthetics, are relevant for my analyses. This body of work provides an incentive to look at the fictionalisation of self-fashioning processes in a decidedly Caribbean-British context, for rethinking the artist novel as a strategic choice to manoeuvre between the various actors and demands in the public sphere, and for expanding the focus beyond a modernist framework and the more immediate *Windrush* years, points which distinguish my study.

In complementing these younger trends, I seek to contribute to the field of post-war British literary and cultural studies in a twofold manner: for one, I supplement and reconceive criticism of Anglo-Caribbean literature, to date still dominated by the “enduring […] idea of ‘exile’ as an organizing logic” (Dalleo viii), through an emphasis on as of yet neglected aspects, such as the reflection of developments in the area of cultural politics or the mediation of cultural participation through erotic structures. Secondly, my study also provides insights into ideas of authorship and authority as they emerge from the Caribbean novel, e.g. with regard to artistic

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6 I will take recourse to these in chapter 2. This resurgence in popularity corresponds to an incipient renewed trend towards genre-related studies in Anglophone literature in general. Recent generic studies include, for instance, Sarah Ilott’s enquiry into *New Postcolonial British Genres*, which centres on refractions of the *Bildungsroman*, the gothic novel, the urban novel, and the comedy (2015), or Rebekka Schuh’s study on epistolary fiction in Anglophone Canadian writing (2021).
autonomy versus art as *fait social* or the market value of marginality, and thus how Anglophone literature took itself part in shaping ‘portraits of the artist’.

The proliferation of the artist theme and the employment of the *Künstlerroman* as distinctive generic mode, so salient in Anglo-Caribbean literature, indicate that this body of work, which is also often discussed in a more general context of black British writing, exhibits a certain coherence, and there are various reasons for this fact. For once, next to the often rather simultaneous migration to Britain – George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, for instance, arrived on the same boat in 1950 – Anglo-Caribbean writers in Britain formed a more or less tight-knit community, fostered exchange, and were brought together by programmes and movements such as the BBC *Caribbean Voices* (1943–1958) or the later Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM; 1966–1972). As Gail Low terms it, metropolitan Caribbean authors were retrospectively constructed as “a distinctive cluster of writers and texts” (“Finding” 22), being subjected to similar critical notions and lenses, which is an important starting ground for rereading literary criticism. Due to a shared colonial educational background, whether in Trinidad, Barbados, or Guyana, writers were also interpellated into similar ideas of the canon, a British literary tradition, and authorial myths, i.e. there are epistemological continuities to be made out.

Moreover, it is the Caribbean space in the European imaginary itself that conditions certain aesthetic responses. As a liminal space between the ‘Old’ and ‘New World’, a “threshold” and “confluence of innumerable conjunctions and disjunctions” (Dash, *Other America* 163), it has been consistently figured as a place where civilisation’s ‘others’ are ‘discovered’, or rather constructed, and probed for a definition of the European ‘self’. The Anglo-Caribbean artist novel returns this gaze onto the ‘Old World’ by engaging and refracting its myths and thereby fashioning literary authority. Further, Caribbean literature also occupies a pioneering position within postcolonial studies and criticism at large. As Ann Marie Fallon has stated, tropes of hybridity and creolisation, which are now central to analyses of postcolonial regions and identities, have first appeared in Caribbean literature, and Caribbean literature has in turn become central to these fields of enquiry, even representative of what Fallon calls “the postcolonial condition writ large” (59). This is a point that the artist novels address critically and where notions of representativeness for a ‘postcolonial condition’ and also the utility of conceiving of identities as ‘hybrid’ is put into question. These considerations as to the comparability and distinctive application of the *Künstlerroman* in a Caribbean tradition are not meant to suggest that there is any essence to this literature, but they provide a background to approach salient similarities.

The central thesis of my study is that the Anglo-Caribbean novel employs the *Künstlerroman*, a genre that has historically served to elucidate artistic subject formation and
the often agonistic relation between matters of aesthetics and politics, by staging and refracting its central structural features and mythemes in order to negotiate Caribbean artists’ situatedness in the literary field and to question, subvert, or reformulate artistic subjectivity in light of difference. By engaging with their own discursive interpellation, the texts expose the ideologies underlying artistic production, the changing conditions of the literary field, and the functionalisation of literature for anti- and postcolonial purposes. The artist figure as interconnecting discourses of authorship, masculinity, and ethnicity here serves authors to envision strategies of self-positioning and -authorisation in the context of diaspora, to scrutinise the epistemologies of a European literary tradition, and to expose the myths that underlie artistry and authority. Carving out a place in literary history and in light of the various demands levelled at the ethnically and racially ‘othered’ writer and the oscillation between aesthetic and socio-cultural imperatives is here mediated through tropes and narrative structures of gender and sexuality, which provide a means to probe a place in a tradition of literature that is based on ideas of patrilineal influence, inheritance, continuity, and of the author as sole originator of his work. Here, writers are complexly positioned between “veiling the artificiality of the artwork” (Wiele 9; my translation) in order to gain cultural authority by sustaining the myth of the autonomous, authentic character of the artist, and making the ideologies that underlie this ‘veiling’ and their ramifications for ‘othered’ subjects visible.

To delimitate the precise scope of my project, a few comments on my selection of texts and authors is warranted. In this project, I focus solely on novels that are written by male, émigré authors with a Caribbean background, written from and at least to some extent set within Britain or showing a concern with Britain, as my aim is to trace negotiations of the British cultural, social, political, and economic landscape as well as of constructions of Britishness. While I often use the term ‘artist’ in this thesis, as I contend that the novels draw on creative myths that are not necessarily restricted to specific artistic vocations or professions, my canon is limited to texts that feature an author protagonist, i.e. a ‘wordsmith’. As the artist novel in a Caribbean tradition indeed features a wide variety of artists, next to authors also painters, sculptors, musicians, or others, this choice is deliberate and should not suggest that literature is the only creative field that critically interrogates its own conditions, as my later theorisation of the artist novel mode as implied in larger, medium-indifferent mythemes of art and creation will also show. Rather, this selection is for once due to matters of comparability and the fact that the writer-artist simply dominates in the artist novel post-Windrush. More presciently, a central premise of this study is that writing constitutes a simulacrum to being, that is, it simulates and negotiates the conditions of existence. A crucial concern in my thesis is hence the engagement with subject formation through language, where novels that feature a writer
protagonist are especially apt to enquire into these processes, as they are to be seen as most self-referential in this aspect. The texts I chose also feature, at least partly, homo- or autodiegetic narrators, and the narrative and/or focalising perspective is – to a large part – that of the artist protagonist. This narrative mode and the conflation of writer protagonist and narrator is, for once, a frequently encountered mode in Anglo-Caribbean artist novels in general and further enables a closer look at the artist’s observing of his own creative process, which allows a meta-reflective look at subject formation. Yet as the analyses will show, the artist narratives also often disperse the artist problematic, e.g. onto other characters or through interrupting the narrative diegesis, and by breaking with an author-centric perspective offer a more nuanced take on social and aesthetic discourses.

The narrowing of my focus to male writer protagonists also warrants elucidation. I concentrate on enquiries into masculine subject formation through the artist trope exclusively, as my thesis investigates how writers stage male myths of creation, the equation of ‘masculinity’ and creative work in the history of ideas, and the compatibility of these aspects with subject formation under conditions of racialisation, which makes a rereading of texts featuring male protagonists interesting. Further, it is principally the work of the ‘founding generation’ of Anglophone Caribbean literature that is rather simplified in that regard. Most of the writers now associated with the foundational phase in Caribbean literature in Britain were male, and their work is now often considered as demonstrating a masculinist bias and “sympathies […] for male experience” (Houlden 49) exclusively, which is a point my thesis revisits. Therefore, this study excludes artist novels written by or centring on women, yet this is neither meant to imply that inclusions of female writers would not also merit in-depth attention, nor to imply that the gender of the author and the protagonists must necessarily converge to allow an insight into masculine subject formation, nor that masculinity cannot also be decoupled from the male body.

A third crucial point of demarcation pertains to the limiting of my corpus to narrative texts. While this might seem obvious for a study interested in the Künstlerroman genre, my rather broad take on the artist theme and my focus on mythemes associated with the genre would not necessarily exclude dramatic and lyric texts. Yet my selective focus is based on the fact that in narrative texts, the artist trope is most prominent, although exceptions like Derek Walcott’s epic poem *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000) constitute lyric engagements of this theme. Further, the novel as dramatising “the process of integrating self-formation” (Connor 7) is

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7 That is not to say that there has not been a substantial number of women writers during the same period. Studies by Belinda Edmondson (1999) or Helen C. Scott (2006), for instance, highlight the number of early post-war female writers, who have been given comprehensive attention by literary critics, however, only more recently.
inevitably premised on the ideal of coherence, linearity, and teleology, or at least the belief in that capacity, which parallels the structure that also constitutes the idealised norm of artistic subject formation. Moreover, while postcolonial literature’s situatedness in and engagement with the public literary sphere and modernist aesthetics has gained critical recognition in recent years, as I have mentioned above, the respective works often centre on the author personas and their non-fictional work. Almost all of the writers discussed herein, barring Samuel Selvon, have, next to their literary work, also produced a veritable amount of essays and theoretical or philosophical writings, and these certainly merit in-depth analyses in themselves with regard to authorial self-fashioning processes. My thesis draws on fictional work only, which constitutes a caveat in the context of analyses of Caribbean writers’ contribution to literary history and theory, and is, in light of the psychoanalytic theoretical framework my study puts forward, arguably more insightful than interpreting fiction through the authors’ theoretical writings. In other words, I pursue a reading that is, to rephrase Homi Bhabha, not so much against but indifferent to “the author’s intention and ideology” (xii). The positions regarding authorship, masculinity, and ethnicity the texts raise are, it is argued, performative and philosophical in themselves.

This undertaking then requires an apt theoretical framework that enables me to address both the intricacies of individual subject formation and the larger socio-cultural and literary-historical dimension that structures artistic position-taking, their interrelation, as well as the role of narrative herein. Therefore, I draw on psychoanalytic theories to attest to the psychical mechanisms that govern the relation of the (artist) subject to larger social structures. Specifically, I base my analyses on theories of subject formation, desire, and fantasy as they emerge from the writings of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek and complement these with, as regards the inherent narrative dimension, conceptualisations by e.g. Roland Barthes and Theresa de Lauretis as well as with poststructuralist perspectives on authorship. To frame the staged desires to write or become an artist as structured by the specific discourses and ideologies that regulate the cultural sphere and the relation of actors to each other therein, I additionally draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘cultural field’. I particularly look at narrative and linguistic strategies employed to negotiate the artist’s function in relation to changes in society, the literary field, and the institutionalisation of the very paradigm in which these fictions are situated, that is, the field of Caribbean, postcolonial, or black British writing. This allows me to explore the subject positions enacted and fashioned in the narratives, which are informed by the generic myth(eme)s of the Künstlerroman, as specific responses to ideologies that dominate the literary field. Here, my study answers to another caveat in the discussion of these works: while there is a “postmodernist orthodoxy that accompanies many spheres of postcolonial
criticism” (Scott 10), (poststructuralist) psychoanalytic approaches remain an “underused critical approach” (Edwards, “Psychoanalysis” 314). Moreover, the works I selected have been treated surprisingly uniform, and dynamic notions of subject formation and their anticipation of and engagement with ‘high theory’ often neglected, which is emblematic of a tendency in literary criticism to ‘close’ the texts, reinscribe clearly demarcated identities, and ultimately re-incorporate ‘otherness’.

This theoretical framework is also suited to enquire into the perception of the artist novel and Caribbean literature as ‘masculine-inflected’. As I enquire into strategies of self-fashioning and -narrativisation based on theories that emerge from sexual difference as basic structure of meaning making, this approach allows me, for once, to illuminate imaginary dimensions of masculinity, as intricately tied to myths of creation and patrilineality, which I conceptualise in turn as fantasies that structure and stage the subject’s desire to become an artist. Further, it enables me to look at masculinity as a linguistic position within the symbolic domain whereby positionalities within a (gendered) hierarchy of power are probed. This also makes artistic position-taking readable as responses to hegemonic forms of masculinity and to demands of Britishness. In these processes, it is precisely moments of breaks and gaps which are of interest to me, as they hint at the perceived compatibility of European myths and ideals of artistry and masculinity. What this methodology then offers is a glance at both aesthetic as well as socio-cultural concerns and, in this conjunction, at the performative nature and cultural power of literature.

To illustrate the claims made, I focus on the negotiation of the artist theme as well as the generic mode of the artist novel in four novels and a novel sequence. These are George Lamming’s The Emigrants (1954), Wilson Harris’s The Eye of the Scarecrow (1965), Samuel Selvon’s ‘London trilogy’, comprising The Lonely Londoners (1956), Moses Ascending (1975), and Moses Migrating (1983), with an emphasis on the second novel in this trilogy, V.S. Naipaul’s The Enigma of Arrival (1987), and David Dabydeen’s The Intended (1991). While, as I have indicated above, there are many more novels that engage the artist theme or the genre of the Künstlerroman, I restrict my close readings to a few, exemplary novels that best illustrate the prevalence and versatility of the theme as well as shifts in the function ascribed to the artist in British cultural discourse and the literary reactions to these. The selection comprises those texts that best enable me to establish a profile of the Künstlerroman mode in a Caribbean context and a model of the ‘diasporic artist novel’ and constitutes a cross section rather than a faithful genre establishment or conclusive survey of the appropriation of the artist novel by Caribbean writers. As I focus on the refraction of the genre and the employment of its myths, the novels chosen differ in their adherence to genre-typical conventions, yet all of them
intertwine artistic self-fashioning with questions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class and self-reflexively engage their own situatedness in the literary field. Where they vary most is in the conception of artistic agency and purpose and the belief in what one could term the artist’s ‘utopian power’ – as regards e.g. the artist’s role in the fashioning of what is perceived as the ‘new’ nation, the ‘not yet’ at each given time, and his laying claim to a literary tradition.

Here, the variation in status of the respective protagonists and in the severity of the artist’s agon provides a differentiated insight into the negotiation of the artist theme and attests to the breadth with which Caribbean authors ponder it. Where Lamming’s or Selvon’s texts focus each on the incipient artistic consciousness and efforts of their adult protagonist, Naipaul’s protagonist is already an established writer and, arguably, portrayed in decline. The status of Harris’s writer figure in this sense is left unclear. Dabydeen’s text is the only one portraying an adolescent writer in becoming and thus intertwines the artist theme with a coming-of-age narrative. While some texts, like Naipaul’s and Harris’s, award the artist (theme) more gravitas, the aspirations of Selvon’s Moses are portrayed as much less dignified. The spectrum in which the novels negotiate the artist’s function through their writer figures ranges from emphasising the capacity for regenerating culture and for reconciliation, corresponding to Theodor W. Adorno’s sense of art as the ‘governor’ of utopia (“Artist” 1045), to a complete rejection of these ideals and foregrounding the artist as indifferent and ideologically co-opted, and various degrees in between. While some novels probe a more conventional structure of the development of artistic sensibility and maintain character, plot, and, at least to some extent, a linear narrative or a Bildungs trajectory, others subvert these notions more pronouncedly self-reflexively and thereby criticise its premises. Further, the novels differ with regard to their reflection on the artist’s condition of alterity vis-à-vis literary authority: some negotiate this anxiously and others functionalise it or resort to ‘another other’, in form of rehearsing a ‘becoming-woman’ or through identification with the classed ‘other’, whereby they also shed a light on the lasting legacy of the European canon, its compatibility with Caribbean contexts, and its exclusion of a variety of ‘others’. As these elaborations show, the ‘new portraits’ eponymous to my study are then not to be understood as ‘new identities’, but as a critical interrogation of the very same, as the ‘portraits of the artist’ that emerge are always only temporary subject positions.

This study is subdivided into six major chapters that are framed by this introduction and a conclusory part. To provide the relevant parameters for understanding the Caribbean novel’s generic reference to the European artist novel and the trope of the portrait of the artist, chapter 2 outlines the state of research and the literary-historical background to my analyses. It traces potentials and lacunae by positioning this study in the relevant fields of research into the Anglo-Caribbean novel in Britain, specifically in terms of genre, the literary-historical conception of
the *Künstlerroman*, as well as understandings of author/ship. Chapter 3 then engages with the social and cultural context in which the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel emerges. It focuses on cultural politics between *Windrush* and the 1990s, the discourses and ideological underpinnings that dominate the literary field, and the desires that inform artistic subject formation – that is, it conceives of the literary field as the symbolic order or the *grand Autre*. Chapter 4 locates practices of self-fashioning in the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race. It delineates my understanding of artistic subjectivity for the Anglo-Caribbean novel and moves towards a more differentiated conception of the artist. Based on this, chapter 5 then conceptualises the ‘Anglo-Caribbean artist novel’ as desiring text that cites, negotiates, inscribes, or discards different fantasies of artistry and thereby illuminates the contemporary ideologies authors are writing under and against. As the involvement of the reader is, I argue, part of this artist novel strategy, chapter 6 looks at the ‘desiring text’ as potentially ethical text in generating *plaisir* and *jouissance* and theorises the strategic addresses to the reader. Chapter 7 then constitutes the analytical part that dedicates each a subchapter to the four novels and one novel cycle that form the heart of this study and here puts theory into practice by illustrating the artist novel’s particular Caribbean ‘implementation’. Each part here goes into detail regarding the texts’ unique correlation with the *Künstlerroman*, their employment of generic features, and the genre’s function for self-fashioning practices. The chapters here are ordered chronologically, which is not to imply that the function and relevance of art and the artist, as the novels foreground it, constitutes a linear trajectory of progress or decline: rather, the chronological ordering is due to the mapping of a changing literary and cultural landscape in Britain, which is why my study starts with George Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, a novel portraying what will later be perceived as a ‘typical’ migratory situation and set at the beginning of a Caribbean-British literary tradition. The subsequent years – and chosen novels – then mirror changes in the British diasporic field and in the situation of the émigré writers, which ranges from these early formative years to authors’ and artists’ ‘being settled’, centred in place “in spite of everything” and occupying “a new kind of space at the centre”, as Hall frames it (“Minimal” 44) – at least this is the popular conception. My readings will show that, next to there being certain counter-discursive processes at work, the discursive framing of a steady improvement of the migrant situation, as a move from assimilation to hybridity, is by no means as teleologically oriented as is suggested in critical literature.8

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8 A brief note on the terms this thesis employs is also warranted. As my analyses centre on male-authored texts that all feature male writer-protagonists, I use the pronoun ‘he’ to refer to the concept artist or author in this study’s texts and contexts. Whenever I speak of author or artist as a general concept, I will use s/he. I use ‘Caribbean’ or ‘Anglophone Caribbean’ as more general terms to refer to texts from the Caribbean region including Guyana, as they are now preferential to ‘West Indies’. ‘Caribbean’ will here sometimes be used synonymously with ‘Anglophone Caribbean’ or ‘Anglo-Caribbean’, and I will indicate specifically if ‘Caribbean’ is meant to include
Delineating the Anglo-Caribbean Artist Novel: Points of Departure

This chapter provides relevant points of departure for theorising and enquiring into ‘portraits of the artist’ in the Anglo-Caribbean novel, and the elaborations will highlight how a turn to the genre of the Künstlerroman is worthwhile. As my study approaches the artist theme as a subject the novels discussed self-reflexively engage with, a brief literary-historical sketch of this theme and discussions of the genre are warranted. This chapter then asks: What benefits does a genre-centred approach yield? How has scholarship engaged with the artist theme so far, and what potentials emerge for the Anglo-Caribbean artist narrative? Which blind spots does literature on the artist theme and artistic self-fashioning evidence?

It here seems fruitful to emerge from the last question and to start with the only book-length study on the artist theme in the broader field of postcolonial studies that exists until today. While many of the works from which I take my cue in the following have attended to the Künstlerroman in more detail, they all, even the more recent ones, evidence a crucial oversight, as they have left out in-depth considerations of the artist theme outside a strictly Eurocentric framework. Jean-Pierre Durix’s study The Writer Written (1987) here constitutes an exception. Emerging from the important observations that issues of authorship are a central concern in much of ‘Commonwealth writing’ and that the predicament of the artist is often dramatised through resorting to the genre of the Künstlerroman or to mediations on language and the imagination (60), he looks at exemplary fictionalisations of artist figures in the ‘New Literatures in English’ and the supposed function the artists fulfil in their respective society by analysing each one novel from different postcolonial regions – from Australia, the Caribbean, India, and New Zealand. Durix’s study is less a scrupulous analysis of Anglophone artist novels and their aesthetic interventions but rather an attempt to categorise these novels according to the main preoccupation of their artist protagonist. He includes, for instance, the artist as teacher,
the artist and authenticity, or the artist and society, without acknowledging the different contexts of production or the larger ideological formations inherent to the artist trope, particularly as regards differential categories like gender or race.

As such, Durix’s study is firmly located within a paradigm of responsibility, with the artist as ‘native intellectual’ first and foremost attempting to find a voice to “educate” and restore “a collective memory that has faded or has been destroyed by the colonizers” (14). While his work is laudable for its enquiry into the artist theme outside a Eurocentric context in more detail and for attempting to break a hitherto pronounced focus on the referentiality of ‘Commonwealth writing’ (60), the effort to put these literatures on the map in the described framework is simultaneously the book’s biggest flaw. Caren Kaplan’s review of the monograph pointedly sums this up: Instead of deconstructing the codes of Western literary criticism, she finds, “Durix is working for the inclusion of Commonwealth literature in the Western canon without destabilizing the concept of canonicity” (185). After Durix’s attempt, there has not been another comprehensive study on the occurrence of artist figures in the broader field of postcolonial literature, even though the prevalence of this topos has been acknowledged by various critics. This neglect, as part of my argument also states, might be grounded in the persistence of literary criticism’s conformity to, to phrase it with Edward Baugh, “a well-worn sociological-mimetic axis of literary theory” (“Foreword” iii), i.e. an identity-based reading of Anglophone Caribbean literature with an emphasis on its ‘sociological value’ that often marginalises matters of aesthetic, formal, and theoretical innovation. The literary-theoretical and aesthetic negotiations that move centre stage with the artist theme are thereby omitted. In the following, I will attempt to establish a framework to attest to these neglected factors.

### 2.1 Generic and Terminological Considerations: Towards an Artist Novel Mode

To enquire into the artist theme and the framework of the artist novel as a mode employed in the Anglo-Caribbean novel necessitates a brief introductory word regarding the importance of genre and relevant generic definitions. In the last decades, and due to the largely deconstructive practices prevalent in literary studies, genre-specific analyses have mostly fallen out of fashion altogether, despite a brief resurgence in interest in the Bildungsroman in the context of black British writing. Frederic Jameson, acknowledging that genre has been “thoroughly discredited

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10 Cf. Edward Norval on the continuing hegemony of this paradigm. He states that modern Anglophone Caribbean literature and criticism are still “largely dominated by a concern with imagining and authorizing an aesthetic founded on a politics of identity and difference, conceptualized as a response to the problem of colonialism, contextualized within the anti-colonial and early postcolonial conjuncture, and articulated in cultural nationalist terms that posit race and language as consanguineous figures of nation and history” (“Foundational” 111).

11 Cf. e.g. Mark Stein’s *Black British Literature* (2004) and Lisa Ahrens’s *The Transformative Potential of Black British and British Muslim Literature* (2019); for an enquiry into the female Bildungsroman in a Caribbean context see Antonia MacDonald-Smythe’s chapter on the Bildungsroman in her monograph *Making Home* (2001).
by modern literary theory and practice” (Political 91), still points out its importance, as it allows for “the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life” (105). This raises questions regarding the benefits of attention to generic conventions and modes, the importance of genre for processes of subject formation and its relation to power hierarchies, and readers’ response to generic conventions and their decontextualisation. My understanding of genre in this study goes beyond seeing it as a rigid categorisation under which novels are subsumed, but proceeds from seeing it, with Bourdieu, as “a fundamental dimension of the space of possibles” (Rules 89), a notion I will come back to in chapter 3. Genre, in this sense, is relational and based on similarities that ‘unite’ different texts in responding to the positions available in the literary field and a framework that writers use to explore intersubjective concerns.

This dynamic and relational perception of genre as mode that illuminates and influences subject positions considers it crucial for the negotiation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and as insightful regarding a changing landscape of Britishness. My understanding here somewhat resembles Sarah Ilott’s argument in her study New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries (2015). Ilott reads the emergence of new, postcolonial genres and modes of narration in Britain after 1990 as negotiations of a shared sense of identity that accommodates diversity and generic shifts as predicated on shifting constructions of Britishness (3–7). While my study takes a decidedly different approach by diverging from a focus on a shared identity, I share her opinion that generic conventions are intricately intertwined with constructions of Britishness (2) and, as I would expand, subject formation in general, and here it is the intersection of race, ethnicity – e.g. Britishness, sexuality, gender, and class which are of interest to my study.

The generic mode at hand also needs to be demarcated from its relative, the Bildungsroman, a genre that, as I have indicated, enjoys a certain popularity in the broader realm of black British writing. Some of the novels I discuss in this study have already been termed Bildungsromane,12 and, as my study is also interested in enquiring into the ideological function of the labelling and critical reception of texts, a closer look at the function this denominator fulfils is here warranted. The Künstlerroman is seen as based on similar ideological underpinnings as his ‘relative’, although that is not intended to say that both are always structurally the same. Lisa Lowe, for instance, identifies the ideological project of the

12 Seminal in this regard is the above-mentioned study by Mark Stein, in which he theorises the ‘novel of transformation’ in proximity to the more traditional term ‘Bildungsroman’ and, in giving an overview over respective black British literature, among others also mentions Naipaul’s The Enigma of Arrival and Dabydeen’s The Intended as representatives of this category. What is of interest to me is, however, not the question if and to what extent these novels are, in fact, corresponding to definitions of the Bildungs- or Künstlerroman, but what function the referencing of this genre fulfills with regard to negotiations of authorship and masculinity and the positionality of writers in the literary field.
“novel of formation” in general as bringing about an “idealized ‘national’ form of subjectivity” and interpellating readers as “subjects for the nation” through “the gendering of these subjects, and in the racializing of spheres of activity and work” (98), a claim that is highly relevant for my enquiry into the intersection of authorship, gender, race, and other differential categories. Yet whereas the Bildungsroman emphasises the “telos of […] reconciliation of the individual with the social order” that necessitates a renouncing of particularity and difference (Lowe 98), the Künstlerroman is more decidedly inward-oriented and “places the subject in a – at least on the surface – more emphatically individualist framework” (Sarkowsky 94) by portraying the artist’s move “from subjectivity to artistic productivity” (Seret 6). Rahel Rivera Godoy- Benesch in this regard rightly points to the fact that the frequent superimposition of the goals of the Bildungsroman onto the artist figure marginalises literary-theoretical values of the texts (66). The approach of Caribbean novels through the lens of the Bildungsroman then sets the subject’s incorporation to and reconciliation with society as a priori telos, present both in success and failure, and neglects the novels’ poetological dimension, a notion that the perspective of the artist novel renders more nuanced.

As I have stated, due to the self-reflexive refractions of the genre’s structural features and myths I consider it most apt to conceive the Künstlerroman or artist novel herein as a specific mode, as simultaneously inciting, mediating, and hedging in desires to fashion an artistic self. This must be understood as a narrative strategy and mode of representation and less as a rigid generic category. Sandra Pouchet Paquet has defined such an approach, albeit for autobiography, as follows: “Mode implies use of the conventions of autobiography in combination with other generic forms, for example, travel narrative, fiction, and elegy” and is thus more attuned to “the multidimensionality and contradictoriness of Caribbean space” (Caribbean 8; original emphasis). Conceiving the Künstlerroman as mode serves me to explicate the ideological premises and conventions on which narratives of formation rest and their perceived compatibility with diasporic subject formation, and to take into account the constructedness of notions of artistic development which, following Pankratz and Puschmann-Nalenz, is based on the confirmation and reinstatement of binary conceptions such as the canonical vs. the marginalised or the typical vs. the atypical (7–24). With my approach here differing decidedly from most takes on the artist theme, I am also not concerned with a precise

13 A brief word on the use of ‘representation’ in this thesis is warranted. Representation has been shaped by (post)structuralist, feminist, or postcolonial theories; my understanding of representation follows Stuart Hall’s concept of it as constitutive of meaning and intricately connected to power dynamics. In Hall’s understanding, representation describes “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (“Work” 17). Here, representation and reality are not distinct, and neither is the former a mere reflection of the latter, but representation is itself “constitutive” of reality (8).
demarcation of the *Künstlerroman* from its ‘relatives’.\(^{14}\) I acknowledge that there are of course fine-grained distinctions between the artist novel, the novel about (an) art(ist), the ‘portrait-of-the-artist novel’, and the *Künstlerroman*, for instance as regards the mentioned status of the protagonist and artistic development, but as this distinction would yield little insight for my view of the genre as a consciously employed mode of representation and in light of the subject positions offered, this study will use the terms *Künstlerroman* or artist novel interchangeably. When speaking of the ‘Anglo-Caribbean *Künstlerroman*’ or ‘artist novel’ in the following, then, I refer to this function as a mode and ideological discourse of the genre that is employed and renegotiated in the novels I analyse.

### 2.2 The Fictionalisation of the Artist in Literature: Positions and Potentials

The following paragraphs now give an overview over seminal research into and conceptualisations of the *Künstlerroman* and the artist theme in their literary-historical dimension and their relevance for the Caribbean novel.\(^{15}\) While some specifically British or comparative analyses of the artist motif do exist, Dagmar Flinspach, in her monograph *Das Bild des Künstlers im zeitgenössischen englischen Roman* (1996), states that in the field of English Studies, the artist theme lacks critical attention, and this claim still rings true, especially for literature after 1945, despite the fact that artist protagonists are generally quite common.\(^{16}\) The number of works on the *Künstlerroman* in a British tradition is altogether not very extensive, and after the mid-twentieth century, the genre has been declared all but exhausted, with both Zima (323) and Rivera Godoy-Benesch (67), for instance, pointing to its seeming obsolescence after the advent of postmodernity, a claim I strongly dispute when considering the conspicuous proliferation of artist figures in Caribbean literature. One might, however, detect a tentative resurgence both as regards the *Künstlerroman* itself as well as critical interest in it since the new millennium,\(^{17}\) and two aspects are salient here: for once, monographs and volumes on the European and US-American female *Künstler(in)roman*, for instance by Evy Varsamopoulou, Anette Pankratz and Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz, or Rickie-Ann Legleitner, indicate that the genre is particularly apt for authorial self-fashioning in light of – gendered or other – difference, yet a study on the artist theme in light of ethnicity is, in a British context,

\(^{14}\) A further related term, that of the artist novel, is seen by Seret to describe texts where the protagonist has already passed through stages of development and is presented as a formed artist (5), and indeed, a consensus in younger research seems to be that the *Künstlerroman* in particular focuses on the development or formation of the artist persona, most emphasised in ideas of progress that condense in images of travels, quests, or journeys.  
\(^{15}\) The theorisation of specific artistic and generic *mythemes* as fantasies will then take place in chapter 5.  
\(^{16}\) For an in-depth overview over earlier work on the artist novel and the artist theme and studies pertaining to respective epochs or national literatures, cf. Flinspach’s introduction to her monograph (1–26).  
\(^{17}\) For a German context, both Gabriele Feulner in *Mythos Künstler* (2010) and Alessandra Goggio in *Der Verleger als literarische Figur* (2021) also state that the *Künstlerroman* seems to have made a comeback since the turn of the millennium.
still lacking. Secondly, from an international perspective, a tendency to look at the artist theme in connection with neoliberal tendencies is palpable, where the *Künstlerroman* is emphasised as a highly contemporary genre apt to negotiate the role of art in the context of an increasing commodification of authenticity and ideals of self-realisation. For the Caribbean novel, I similarly detect a tendency to negotiate authenticity as a currency in the literary field under beginning neoliberal tendencies, especially since the 1980s, yet what also applies to the earlier novels is the employment of the *Künstlerroman* framework to respond to socio-cultural and production-aesthetic developments. Despite these newer tendencies, it remains, however, an under-appreciated generic lens, an aspect my study attempts to remedy.

### 2.2.1 Artistic Types and Legacies

The portrayal of the artist theme in the English novel is typically classified as indebted to the German *Künstlerroman*, a novel that describes the struggle of an individual to become an artist and who “need[s] to be free, to rise above the crowd and create” (Seret 27). While there are of course artist myths and ‘prototypes’ dating back much longer than the eighteenth century, the genre, according to Herbert Marcuse, only became possible “when the unity of art and life has been ruptured” and the artist has become a being distinct from his surroundings (“German” 75), which for Marcuse is associated with the *Sturm and Drang* period and culminating with the romantic artist (79). Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century discourses influenced by Descartes’s philosophy still emphasised the primacy of intellect, in whose wake imagination and fantasy are devalued against ratio and reason (Neumann 33–36) or must, in Shaftesbury’s assessment, at least be subjected to ratio and craft, and the artist’s divinely inspired creative powers bring about harmony and shape (36). Eckhart Neumann elaborates on this by contrasting philosophies around Thomas Rymer, whose French neoclassicist ideals envision artistic

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18 In a recent article on US-American novelist Michael Cunningham, Carlos Garrido Castellano emphasises the *Künstlerroman* as “one of the most productive literary forms of neoliberal culture” in which creativity and artistry are essential for self-definition (12). He shows how under the auspices of neoliberalism, the *Künstlerroman* serves as an ideal medium to engage contemporary questions of the production and function of art, especially in the context of ‘self-cultivation’ (13). For a Spanish context, Katie Vater’s study, also from 2020, similarly argues that changes within the literary market have influenced the rising recent popularity of the artist novel. Important are her insights on the ‘mainstreaming’ of literature as well as neoliberal aspirations for self-improvement that entail a striving for an authentic self, where the pursuit of nonmaterial goals becomes increasingly valuable (15–18).

19 The initiation of the genre is often traced back to Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) and Ludwig Tieck’s *Franz Sternbalts Wanderungen* (1798), yet many see it to be truly initiated with the second-generation Romantics, particularly E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Goldne Topf* (1814) and *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (1814–15) and the Kapellmeister Kreisler as artist. The genealogy of the *Künstlerroman* is, however, by no means undisputed. Ernst Bloch, for instance, makes aware of the fact that the artist as protagonist was always present in a European tradition, but “[n]either the Age of Greek and Roman Classicism nor the Middle Ages captured the life and strivings of their artists in the imagination”, nor was it ever “considered necessary to invent a name for the unknown poet of the *Nibelungenlied*” (“Artist” 267). For Bloch, this omission has “indistinguishably to do with the mystery surrounding the unrecognized genius that was to arise later” (267). Rivera Godoy-Benesch argues that for an English context, due to structural similarities to the modern *Künstlerroman*, one could even deem Bede’s account of the poet Cædmon as first English *Künstlerroman*, even though it is written in Latin (71; FN 6).
creation to be devoid of fancy and art grounded on reason and science, and those of e.g. Nicholas Rowe and Joseph Addison, whose appraisal of Shakespeare’s unique genius then brought about a turn towards the ‘natural genius’ invested with a singular degree of originality and creative power, but who is, because of his inimitability, also unsuited as artistic model (Neumann 36–39).

In the course of the eighteenth century, ideas of creative power are radicalised with the artistic genius as “second Creator, a Promethean figure who imitated not the ancients or other writers but only nature”, guided not “by elegance and learning” but “through God-given powers” alone (Herder 17). Where the artist before was conceived as beholden to tradition and *imitatio* and the classicist ideal of *prodesse et delectare*, in form of the erudite *poeta doctus* who unites knowledge, inspiration, and craft (Hoffmann & Langer 142), the eighteenth century saw a renewal of the divinely inspired artist of antiquity, the *poeta vates*, who possesses an extraordinary imaginative power and linguistic sensibility (Feulner 291). In its wake, ideas of craft and practice experience devaluation and original creative power constitutes the idealised norm. The author is reconceived as autonomous, original individual, as, as Thomas Carlyle phrases it in 1840, a heroic ‘Man of Letters’, a model that proves to be surprisingly enduring (Haynes 288), also, as Belinda Edmondson states, for the Caribbean artist (38–57).

These developments are intricately connected to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century and a subsequent imagination of the artist as inspired genius, who draws only on his own faculty of imagination (Bloch, *Verfremdungen I* 67–68). It is also this late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century context that is consensually seen as era where the artist figure (and discourses) as cited and reworked in the twentieth century emerged. For a British context, Anne-Julia Zwierlein has drawn attention to the authors and texts that have fostered the “(proto-)Romantic concept of the masculine genius and its original, self-engendered creation”: Lord Byron’s *The Giaour* (1813) and *The Corsair* (1814), or Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Alastor* (1815) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1818) (12). This differentiation of the artist resulted, in the course of the nineteenth century, in a variety of artist myths, with an emphasis on the artist as socially isolated, eccentric, outsider, or bohemian, and concomitant notions of illness and madness (Feulner 14). While modernism still retained the paradigm of originality and

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20 Christel Maier and Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf point to the lasting legacy of this figure: “Noch der ‘gesellschaftskritische’ moderne Autor des 20. Jahrhunderts bezieht seine Autorität aus dem Fortwirken religiöser Rollenmuster, die seine ‘höhere’ Einsicht begründen” (18).

21 ‘Madness’ and ‘illness’ are indeed not to be seen as counter-discourses to the genius ideal, but, as Neumann states, the myth of the genius continues in discourses of pathology in the *fin-de-siècle*, where artistic self-fashioning alsoforegrounds degeneration as a stigma of exceptionality (155). Pathological dispositions here also fulfil a hierarchical differentiation, as they devalue the bourgeoisie’s economic power which depends on the motivation and fastidiousness of the healthy, constant citizen, and morbidity, here, in a highly privileged understanding of art, functions as an alternative, a last resort of pleasure (156).
innovation, it is only after the second world war that the artist figure became more radically
demystified (15).

The ideals, and ideologies, associated with the genius, without which, as Flinspach states,
the establishment of the artist figure in literature would be unthinkable (7), prove surprisingly
enduring, also for postcolonial literatures, as Brouillette has stated: “if within the general
literary field the romantic author-function has been entirely discredited, it has nevertheless
managed to retain some continued life for certain audiences situated in the postcolonial sphere”
(Postcolonial 73). One could, in this regard, ask with Rivera Godoy Benesch whether “the
figure of the artist, due to its long tradition and through its confinement to the fixed narrative
structure in the Künstlerroman, has become so symbolized that it proves unsuitable for any
narrative explorations of real life” (99). Without going so far, idealistic and moralistic overtones
of discussions of the artist theme and genre that have characterised earlier criticism indeed still
tend to predominate. These postulated artistic ideals, which are most pronounced in Herbert
Marcuse’s widely received study Der deutsche Künstlerroman (1978), are firmly within the
“framework of the Geisteswissenschaften […] established since Dilthey” in reflecting “the
traditional assumption of the educative qualities of the process, experience, and object of art,
and the value (as well as distress) inherent in an education through art to autonomy” (Reitz 28;
original emphasis). As my analyses will show, the Caribbean artist narrative also self-
reflexively engages this legacy and re-implements its mythemes to different degrees.

What this short outline also demonstrates is that the hero of the Künstlerroman has
typically been male, with only a few exceptions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
Most seminal in this respect, and for an English-speaking context in general, is Beebe’s Ivory
Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero from Goethe to Joyce (1964). Beebe’s two
eponymous authors echo the diachronic restriction of interest in this topic, often said to
culminate with Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) and Stephen Dedalus as
last artist hero, after which, according to Beebe, the analysis of the genre seems pointless:
“Portraits of the artist after Joyce seem to follow the tradition already established without
changing it in any important way” (vi). Beebe’s study embodies a tendency that has dominated
literary criticism for a long time, that is, the construction and perpetuation of ‘ideal’ artist types,
which has been taken up and reproduced in literary criticism.

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22 Of course the idea of the prophet-artist as untainted by social and economic realities has already become
untenable in the nineteenth century, which saw this paradigm undermined through increasing commercialisation
(Poovey 101–116).

23 The biggest flaw of Beebe’s study, next to the hypostasising of the time frame between these two authors as
‘golden age’ of the genre, is his equation of the ‘portrait’ of the artist with the author.

24 Roberta Seret’s comparative study Voyage into Creativity (1992) likewise infers an idealised version of ‘the
modern artist’, which she traces from Herman Hesse to D.H. Lawrence.
With regard to the genre-typical mythemes the Caribbean novel self-reflexively negotiates, as chapter 5 will conceptualise, studies that centre precisely on particular artist types, which are embedded in myths of patrilineality and filial transmission of artistic creativity, provide an instructive point of departure for my study. Ernst Bloch, who has extensively examined the artist novel’s emergence, function, and forms, outlines the growth of interest in the artist figure throughout history. Whereas medieval reception neglected the figure of the artist completely, the rebirth of classical ideals, i.e. Greek and Roman models, in the Renaissance led to a revaluation of Apollo, the Greek god of art, and a subsequent titling of poets as ‘sons of Apollo’ (*Verfremdungen* 67), and artist configurations are still frequently traced back to models from Antiquity, such as Prometheus, Daidalos, Tiresias, or Orpheus.25 Drawing on later ‘mythical artists’, Lee T. Lemon’s *Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary Fiction* (1985) divides artist heroes in twentieth-century fiction from British, American, and Australian authors into Byronic and Wordsworthian types. The first archetype describes isolated, solitary, arrogant rebels, “monsters of selfishness” (xi), whereas the Wordsworthian artist, for Lemon ubiquitous from the mid-twentieth century onwards, is a rather ordinary, self-aware being, never absolutist, always in doubt and thus altogether rather an “anti-artist” (xiii). While I consider Lemon’s mapping of distinct types in specific epochs only interesting as a meta-discourse, it is insightful in another regard: in making use of what could with Foucault be called ‘author functions’, in form of Byron and Wordsworth, he draws a neat continuity from the nineteenth century to his present and implies a teleological progression and ‘evenness’ in the dissemination of the artist theme, which resonates with a conception of literary history as inscribed in ideologies of progress, a fact that is ubiquitous in many studies and culminates in Zima’s aforementioned assessment that in late modernity, the artist novel is altogether impossible.

As I claim that the Caribbean artist novel demonstrates an awareness of literary-historical developments next to socio-cultural ones, Gabriele Feulner’s *Mythos Künstler* (2010) is insightful for my study, as she focuses on literature’s entanglement with literary history and

25 See, for example, Dagmar Flinspach (1996), who traces portrayals of twentieth-century artists back to identificatory models from Prometheus to Marsyas, or Eckhard Neumann (1986), whose psycho-historical study on creativity, based on mostly German and Austrian artists, likewise draws on Greek mythology for the identification of different artist types. While it seems to be an unspoken rule in the analysis of the *Künstlerroman* genre – both in a British and German tradition – to analyse artist figures in terms of their adherence to specific mythical artist figures, I refrain from strategically mapping artist types in the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel on ‘mythological’ forebears. What interests me, rather, are the contemporaneous discourses that seem to influence the foregrounding of particular genre-typical mythical aspects. As the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel arguably constitutes a ‘meta-discourse’ on the European artist novel, it is rather the discursive fixation of the genre as grounded in these myths that they negotiate. In this respect, Eckhardt Neumann also provides a good overview over social and philosophical contexts that have influenced preferences for specific mythical figures. Where mythological figures are distinctly cited, I will go into more detail regarding their function in the analytical chapters.
sociology with regard to the transformation and desacralisation of artistic myths. Feulner, emerging from a German-speaking context that encompasses writers from Thomas Mann to Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre, argues that literary conceptions of the artist also demonstrate a belated shift similar to that advanced in various academic disciplines, which see the belief in the ‘power of art’ wane in the twentieth century. While Feulner’s study takes as point of departure only the myth of the artistic genius, I find her approach still instructive for my purpose as it enquires into literature’s reflection of art as a system that counters heroising self-concepts of artistry and because of its consideration of the specific contexts that yield different heroic or anti-heroic artist figures. Thus, Feulner states that works published around the turn of the millennium predominantly thematise the ‘desublimation’ of the artist’s existence (357). While she finds that literature has always reflected on its own system, the literary scene, and literary criticism, it is only around 2000 that she sees this particular portrayal of the artist theme proliferate, also in an Anglophone context (358–359). What Feulner postulates as a trend that only accelerates some two decades ago – the artist’s desublimation and the supersession of discourses that problematise the artist’s existence by satirical, comedic, or tragicomic narrative strategies (357) – is, to my view, manifest much earlier in the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel in Britain, even as early as the immediate post-Windrush decade, which speaks to the pioneering function of this literature.

For a Caribbean context, Belinda Edmondson in Making Men (1999), while not specifically focused on the artist, but on the broader issue of authorship, has implicitly also identified different artist types. She bases her analyses of Caribbean women’s writing on the observation that male writers like C.L.R. James, V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, or Derek Walcott, seen as founders of a West Indian literary canon, are deriving their literary authority and habitus of Englishness and manhood, on which West Indian (literary) nation building attempts rest, from a masculinist Victorian discourse, particularly from the figure of the “Literary Man” (41), who is “essential to the larger project of national character” (41) and who, through his work, as Edmondson cites Poovey, “mak[es] all Englishmen like each other – or, more precisely, like the literary man” (Poovey 110). For a West Indian context, Edmondson finds that “[t]he tropistic relationship between nineteenth-century Englishness and twentieth-century West Indianness” had such lasting effects on notions of authorship and nation that even counter-discursive witing “is still marked by a utilization of a specifically English vision of what constitutes intellectual production” (5). While I do not follow Edmondson in the

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26 The benefit of Feulner’s study lies in the fact that she does not see this demystification as a linear development from “sublimierend-verklärrenden hin zu entsublimierten, entzauberten Bildern des Künstlertums”, but states that the engagement of these shifts in literature takes place in form of a longue durée that is also marked by the simultaneity of different conceptions (448–449).
assumption that West Indian literature is solely tied to Victorian aesthetics and values, nor in her positioning of only two figures that serve as identificatory models – the gentleman and the peasant, I take my cue from her enquiry into archetypes from literary history and the connection of literary authority to masculinity that shape self-fashioning processes and wish to extend this in the following chapters to the level of narrative and to a broader range of myths of artistry.27

2.2.2 From Artist to Work: Metafiction and Self-Reflexivity

Where these works all foreground the artist as (sole) crucial category, a parallel strand in Anglo-American criticism in conceptualising the negotiation of art and the artist theme in literature has emerged from the 1980s onwards. Scholars like Linda Hutcheon, Steven Kellman, Annegret Maack, or Ina Schabert shift attention to the status of the work rather than the artist. In terms of the genre’s indicated ‘metafictional turn’, Linda Hutcheon’s work Narcissistic Narrative (1980) is most seminal. The Künstlerroman, Hutcheon states, is one form of the self-conscious and reflexive novel,28 whose difference in focus – on the unity of personality (i.e. the artistic personality) versus the unity of action in forms such as the Bildungsroman – has brought about a shift from “the novelist to his writing”, towards the level of poiesis itself (11–12). She traces the novel’s increasing self-reflexivity back to modernist authors, who added to the Romantic Künstlerroman by focusing on “psychic processes rather than empirical products” and “epistemological issues which in turn are likely to condition aesthetic realization” (26). The resulting self-awareness has then gradually ‘infiltrated’ the work: it moved from “preface into the content, and finally into the structure of the novel itself” (45). A second crucial fact that Hutcheon claims for metafictional narratives, of which the Künstlerroman is one form, is the blurring of boundaries between the literary text and literary criticism (12), a central aspect for my analyses. The Künstlerroman as genre is per se always engaged in its own critique, not least due to the constant reflection on the writing process by the protagonists, who are simultaneously also always reader and critic, which renders the novels themselves part of literary criticism and theory.

Two other engagements of the genre that focus (partly) on its English tradition, Steven Kellman’s monograph The Self-Begetting Novel (1980) and Annegret Maack’s Der

27 Edmondson’s claim has been contrasted by studies from J. Dillon Brown (2013) or Peter Kalliney (2013), who focus on partly the same authors but see them as preoccupied with a modernist instead of a Victorian literary tradition.

28 I will come back to Hutcheon’s idea of a ‘narcissistic narrative’ in chapter 4.2. In line with Hutcheon, I use ‘self-reflexive’ rather than ‘self-reflective’ texts in the following, although Hutcheon admits that she herself uses a variety of other adjectives interchangeably in this regard (2). In using self-reflexive, I acknowledge particularly her statement that these texts are “focused outward, oriented towards the reader” (7), a fact that I will specify in chapter 6. What needs to be distinguished, however, is the use of ‘self-conscious’ from ‘self-reflexive’, as the former implies that a text overtly thematises its own diegetic or linguistic nature, whereas in a self-reflexive text, this awareness is internalised (7).
experimentelle englische Roman der Gegenwart (1984), also draw on theories of metafiction. Maack, for once, points to the increasing self-reflexivity of the artist novel that results in the novel not just imitating a reality with its laws and orders, but in the very creation of those and the reflection of the process of creation (45). The subsequent focus on language and conventions of narrating have then moved gradually to the centre and replaced the focus on character. Kellman, more specifically, focuses on works that centre on their own creation, on ‘self-begetting’ narratives. These are texts that, through “an account, usually first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading”, confront readers with “process and product, quest and goal” of their artistic endeavours (119). While few of the Caribbean artist narratives are genuinely ‘self-begetting’ in a narrow sense, this transition in interest from protagonist to product is important, as it entails a shift from looking at the Künstlerroman in terms of the artist’s relation to society or the protagonist’s artistic habitus towards considering metafictional strategies and emphasising the narrative structure and the auto-reflexive tendencies that have accompanied the genre from the very beginning (Flinspach 12). This also allows to attest to the neglected fraction of unproductive or frustrated artists and to a negative autopoiesis, i.e. artists without creation, which Alexandra Pontzen in her monograph Künstler ohne Werk (2000) understands as reaction to a principle of reality that favours materiality and measures success by its product (22) against a phenomenological definition of art via categories of visibility, thingness, or independence of its producer (391). The focus on a negative aesthetics of production is notably foregrounded in the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel, which, as I have mentioned, often features failed or thwarted artists.

With regard to aspects of race and ethnicity, Madelyn Jablon’s analysis of ‘black metafiction’ in the US in her chapter on “The Künstlerroman and the Blues Hero” in turn demystifies such conceptions and developments seen as central to, indeed emerging with the European Künstlerroman as the genre’s innate Western bias. Claiming that “black fiction has always celebrated mimesis of process” as “equal or greater in value than the product” (55), she also finds that selected African-American Künstlerromane juxtapose their conceptions with the “nonfunctionality that distinguishes Western art as a luxury reserved for the economically privileged” and the privileging of “fine art over craft, classical music over ballads and folk music, and theatre for passive spectators rather than a responsive audience” (57). In light of these shortcomings, Jablon argues for a redefinition of the Künstlerroman and for expanding

29 As Kellman states, by nature, this genre compels readers to start again, to focus on the product of the process they have just witnessed; the self-begetting novel’s structure thus is cyclical - “[t]he final line […] propels us back to the beginning” (119).
the range of artist figures and conflicts that are subsumed under this moniker (55–79). The bourgeois character of Western art, i.e. matters of class, are ambivalently portrayed in the Caribbean artist novels: to some extent this is – expectedly – criticised, yet especially the more obscure language and structuring of Lamming’s and Harris’s novels as well as the required familiarity of readers with the intertexts and myths underlying the artist narratives also presuppose a certain degree of education and cultural capital. The refraction of the genre is thus also always intertwined with profiting from its bourgeois habitus, as the artist novel also constitutes an attempt to increase cultural capital by fashioning oneself as author of ‘serious’ literature and lending one’s work literary authority.

Whether termed self-begetting, self-conscious, or metafictional narratives, this line of work provides important insights for the Anglo-Caribbean Künstlerroman, not least for notions of filiation and male-connoted ideologemes of ‘fathering’ at text, which move centre stage with texts that focus on their own genesis, with this “portrait of the portrait itself” (Kellman 121). Yet studies on the artist novel that acknowledge self-reflexive and metafictional tendencies often fail to attest to their interrelation with the theme of authorship and literary creation, the manifestation of the theme on various levels, and its function, as the emphasis on struggles of artistic formation and creation is often discounted as a general strategy of postmodern narratives. Zima here takes an extreme position: streamlining the genre into two broad epochs, roughly from the Romantic period until the second world war and postmodernity, he generalises that the artist novel still evidenced a quasi-utopian stance on art until postmodernity, whereafter the only form possible is parody, which can only ‘react’ to societal changes like differentiation, secularisation, and commercialisation (42). In this vein, self-reflexive tendencies for him are merely different varieties – some geared towards light entertainment, others rather nihilist – of reacting to an insolvable aporia in the face of capitalist dominance, of ‘having nothing more to say’. This profoundly negative assessment, which Zima even extends to art and literature’s future in general (xiv), reduces the complexity of postmodern narration as a negative foil to earlier epochs perceived as more ‘wholesome’.

These foci on the circumstances of literary genesis can be fruitfully combined with another, more recent trend in critical literature that relates to discussions of self-reflexivity and which I consider immensely helpful for analysing the artist theme in the Caribbean novel. This strand in research enquires into the fictional text’s expression of an awareness of the production-aesthetic conditions that surround the work and into which artists are often conflictedly interpellated.30 The aforementioned studies by Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, Raphael

30 My notion of ‘interpellation’ is based on Louis Althusser’s concept of becoming a subject: in Essays on Ideology (1984), Althusser describes how ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the
Dalleo, as well as Florian Sedlmeier’s *The Postethnic Literary* (2014) all have, in different contexts and with different emphases, situated postcolonial literatures within their contexts of production and reception and engaged with the notion that texts register anxieties about the authors’ own positionality within the literary market. Sedlmeier, for instance, calls texts by authors who are identified as ‘ethnic’ and which overtly reflect on the conditions that shape their production and reception context ‘postethnic’. He convincingly argues that “the paradigm of communal representativeness, the idea that U.S. ethnic and postcolonial intelligentsia are cultural-political representatives for their respective communities” (13), results in a shift “toward the problem of representability itself, toward its conditions and contingencies”, which in turn problematises notions of representativeness (13). While I will focus on the specific shapes of the literary field later in this study, for now I wish to register that these more recent tendencies in research on postcolonial literatures on the fictionalisation of the texts’ own embeddedness in a “circuit of culture”, to use Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall’s term (qtd. in Hall, “Introduction” 1), constitute a crucial backdrop to my study, and I draw on these works in reading the novels’ authorial gestures and their reflection of the production, framing, and recognition of Caribbean literature in the British literary field.

Self-reflexive tendencies are then an integral feature of the Caribbean artist novel and manifest to different degrees, and while I also see them to be connected with negotiations of artistic aporias vis-à-vis the desires in the literary field and evidencing an awareness of artists’ own positionality within the public literary sphere, they are, to my view, not just expressing a creative and visionary impasse, a crisis of narration, but indicate the possibilities and limitations of all subject formation and point towards theoretical paradigm shifts in this regard. Through these, the novels stage and critically engage literary-historical developments and blur the boundaries between fiction and literary criticism.

2.3 Risen From the Grave? On the Author’s Death and Return

The increased focus on the artist as desiring creator of a work in Caribbean fiction from the mid-twentieth century onwards, here particularly in form of an author, at a first glance seems to stand in stark contrast to theoretical reconceptualisations of the author subject, which have, since the late 1960s onwards, postulated the ‘death’ of the very same. As I argue that the Caribbean artist novel negotiates its own field of production, reception, and theoretical
circumscription, this debate must then have infiltrated the works at hand as well. A further aspect of this study is thus to enquire into how the narratives anticipate, react to, and reflect debates of authorship in the twentieth century and participates in aesthetic and literary theory. In these regards, scholarship on Anglo-Caribbean novels that are here identified as artist novels exhibits an enormous blind spot: the dominant critical gestures of reducing the theme of authorship to either a form of autobiographical reflection on the author’s literary journey or to the author’s attempt to retrieve a collective memory means denying these novels the capacity to negotiate larger structural, philosophical, or theoretical shifts in the field of authorship and exert an influence on these.

Critical interventions in the field of authorship in the mid-twentieth century have radically undermined the idea of the author as sole, original creator and reconceptualised notions of authority, text, or language. As these developments partly overlap with the development of the Caribbean (artist) novel, they need to be briefly mapped out. What interests me here is not the precise evolution of this debate, nor all the actors involved in it, but I take my cue from the most seminal ideas in it to sketch the impact these interventions hold for the ideal of art and the artist as autonomous, and the conflicts that arise out of this already tense field in connection with an added emphasis on the artist as representative in Caribbean literature. Most importantly, I consider the author’s ‘demise’ as a conceptual figure with which to enquire into the artist novel’s staging of “crises of authorship” (Burke xxix) and their function. Seminal in this respect is of course Roland Barthes’ work from the mid-1960s until the early 1970s and Michel Foucault’s discussion of the author. Barthes’s short essay “The Death of the Author” (1967) coined a phrase that has by now become a common place in literary studies. Substituting the ‘author’ (auteur) with the ‘scriptor’ (scripteur) (147), Barthes undermines a tradition of literary authorship which rests on the notion of experience preceding language and the author as agential in transforming the former into the latter (146) and thereby desacralises the author/artist figure. Likewise, he also abandons the belief in the author as ‘father’ of his book that dominated in literary theory, a notion I consider in more detail later: “The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child”

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31 Where the first half of the twentieth century was still dominated by notions of the artist/author and the text/work as autonomous and wedded to Romantic ideas of art as “a vehicle of personal expression” (Lamarque 177) and the artist, in a humanist perspective, as able to access and express “shared but sometimes obscured human truths and values” through the “mastery of words” (Aryan 14), practical-critical theories and practices by theorists like I.A. Richards or W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley challenged the author as instance that confers meaning onto a text, albeit largely leaving the belief in the author, the work as unity, and the latter as reflective of an external, empirically graspable reality untouched. Cf. Sean Burke on the demise of the ‘biographical imperative’ (199–211).
These aspects then are variously anticipated, desired, dreaded, or rejected in the novels discussed.

The second seminal intervention in conceptions of the author subject is Michel Foucault’s follow-up to Barthes, his 1969 lecture “What is an Author?”, which puts forward the notion of the “author function” instead. Responding to Barthes’s essay, while never openly mentioning him, and linked to Foucault’s larger work on discourse, he sees the author as created by and perpetuating particular discursive formations. Foucault’s essay holds two important insights for my analyses: one is the reformulation of author/ship as a category of reception and the critical engagement of it as a “privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, […] philosophy and science” (300), and hence the function the concept has historically taken on, which can be extended to the artist in general. For Foucault, what makes an individual an author “are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice” (307). The ‘author function’ in Foucault’s understanding is “not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator” but rather gives rise to “a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy” (309). Secondly, Foucault’s theory is crucial for the reconceptualisation of the author as an “ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (222). These interventions in author/ship, as Burke has shown, have to be situated in their historical context and are reflective of and concerned with the structuralist renewal of language as well as the dissolution of subjectivity and universal categories altogether, the “general death of man” (13–14). They have served to reconceive of the author, or artist, as the result of processes of subjectivation which take place in the nexus of political, media, economic, or technological dispositifs (Schaffrick & Willand 41–42). Consequently, seeing the author as function of discourse means that the artist figure the text creates, references, or discards can provide insights into other, connected positions within the very same discourses – that of race, gender, sexuality, or class, an idea I will pursue in chapters 3 and 4.

The debates instigated by Foucault, Barthes, or Lacan’s ‘attack’ on the Cartesian subject in general initially seem to run counter to both the proliferation of artist figures in Caribbean literature and to the heightened focus on the author in postcolonial literary criticism, which is one area that has seen a “renewal of interest in the authorial life” (Burke 199). Yet this is not

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32 On the cover of their edited volume, Pankratz and Puschmann-Nalenz, for instance, describe the renewed interest in the author, exemplified by the proliferation of artists in literary texts in general, as a paradoxical turn in this regard. Burke also discusses the author’s ‘return’: as he convincingly shows, the death-of-the-author debate has always been more of a theoretical fantasy than literary practice. Rather, the notion of the author’s ‘return’ is a
a surprising development at all, but neither is it (only) a ‘belated’ reaction to a critical blind spot. Rather, the author’s ‘return’ is here also spurred by the fact that for postcolonial literatures, these debates have occurred precisely at the time “when new voices were being heard (black, female, marginal writers)”, and when “the author’s death denied authorship precisely to those who had recently been empowered to claim it” (Biriotti 6). Further, as Efje Claassen argues, postcolonial criticism draws on the category of the author to value the literary work and oftentimes, aspects like ethnic background tend to guide reception when “the fictional world represents moral dilemmas” (16), such as the blurring of binaries like victor/victim. As such, the interventions epitomised in Barthes and Foucault and the author’s ‘return’ in criticism, while younger than some of the novels herein discussed, offer suitable concepts to approach Caribbean negotiations of the role of the artist. These texts have sometimes anticipated or consciously engaged these ideas to negotiate the author’s positionality in the literary field as regards submitting to or rejecting the ‘paradigm of representativeness’ and the criteria by which their work is assessed and valued. The staging\(^{33}\) of author/ship in the Caribbean artist novel is thus best understood as a play with the signifying systems that are semantically tied to the concept of the author, which serves to expose the ideologies in which it is embedded and which it likewise legitimises.

A last important aspect in this regard is the notion of ‘intertextuality’. The heightened self-reflexivity of the genre, as I have sketched above, also allows for and furthers extensive intertextual allusions (Kellman 127). The Caribbean artist narratives are not just inter-mythical, i.e. citing creative concepts that are embodied in various myths of the genre, as I have indicated above and will further theorise in chapter 5, but also often outspokenly intertextual. Here, I am not interested in tracing the precise intertextual nature of the Caribbean artist novel, but in the function the intertext’s or -myth’s precursors carry for artistic self-fashioning. Jonathan Culler’s contrasting of two opposing poles of intertextuality is helpful here. Culler distinguishes the Barthesian “infinite network of anonymous citations” from the Bloomian “heroic struggle between a sublime poet and his dominant predecessor” (108). Barthes’s notion of intertextuality is best embodied in his above-mentioned essay, which characterises the text as a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash”, as a “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (“Death” 149). Whereas

\(^{33}\) Acts of ‘staging’, as I employ it in this study, are not to be understood in a derogatory sense, but following Meier and Wagner-EGelhaaf as “Inszenierungsakte, -logiken und -wahrnehmungen, die konstitutiv sind für die Bühnen der Kultur und der Geschichte, auf denen das Schauspiel der Autorschaft stattfindet” (19). This also implies that there is no authentic or essential core from which these acts of staging could be demarcated (19) – to rephrase Derrida, there is ‘no outside-staging’.
Bloom has also recognised that literature is a web of textual relations, he understands literary influence as a “misreading” of the artist’s predecessors and the oedipal confrontation with them, in a “wrestle […] even to the death” (Bloom 5), thereby ‘personalising’ and essentialising Barthes’s concept of the text as interminable tissue. As Thaïs Morgan states, Bloom fails ultimately “to shake off the metaphors of ‘influence’ and ‘source’ and the teleology that the model of literary history implies” (“Intertext” 6). I propose that the Caribbean artist narrative engages both ideas of literary influence, in form of Bloom’s notion of the Oedipal struggle with the “strong precursor” (5), which I see applying to citations of generic myths, but also the idea of the text as tissue. Further, it is precisely the oscillation between a Bloomian model of the ‘strong poet’s’ personal combat with a ‘forefather’ and the foregrounding of various intertextual influences to demonstrate textual interminability that serves to negotiate questions – and burdens – of authorial power, artistic agency, and the dealing with its perceived loss.
3 Frameworks of Cultural Production: From Windrush to ‘Cool Britannia’

A premise of my study is that portrayals of artistic self-fashioning can only be understood in relation to and signifying within a larger field of cultural production, and I contend that the Künstlerroman mode in the Anglophone Caribbean novel here serves to engage larger socio-cultural shifts and policies in England. The following paragraphs now conceptualise the ‘space of possibles’ for artistic self-fashioning by attesting to the heterogeneity of factors that influence this space in order to attest to the interventions and innovations the artist novels create. For a long time, as Gail Low states, the “ideological and political affiliations” as well as the relation between the individual and institutions in the literary field “have not been subjects that excite much academic scholarship” (“Finding” 22), and Low has early on provided an impetus to study this literature as an “institution’, made up of a network of social, cultural and discursive relationships” (21), a notion that my look at the literary field as symbolic order that regulates artistic self-fashioning will also pursue. While the socio-cultural context of Anglophone Caribbean literature in Britain has already attracted scholarly attention, three points remain under-researched: for once, temporally, these are the decades after the immediate Windrush years, that is, from the 1960s onwards. Secondly, as the fashioning of artistic ‘selves’ in light of differential categories does not take place along distinctive lines but, as Wendy Brown notes, “it is impossible to extract the race from gender, or the gender from sexuality, or the masculinity from colonialism” (123), a closer look at discourses surrounding race and masculinity in post-Windrush Britain that influence artistic subject formation is warranted. Thirdly and most pertinently, in distinction to existing studies I do not intend to give a mere overview, but am interested in the overall consequences these discourses, developments, and ideologies in the public sphere had for artistic self-fashioning, i.e. I enquire into how these inform position-taking, respectively subjectivities, in the literary field. A brief theoretical elaboration on the literary field will thus be followed by an outline of the discourses surrounding race, ethnicity,

34 The term ‘self-fashioning’ is associated with Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (1980), where it is employed to enquire into the structures of selfhood and identity in the work of Renaissance literary figures, such as More, Wyatt, Marlow, or Shakespeare. I only loosely borrow Greenblatt’s term to describe the textual processes of constructing the semblance of a literary ‘self’, of a literary or narrative subjectivity, and to enquire into the paradoxes of self-fashioning practices exclusively and am not interested in the ‘self’ of particular authors, but rather in the thematisation of the act of creating a ‘portrait of the artist’.

35 While I already refer to the terms ‘symbolic order’ and ‘great Other’ in this chapter, this terminology and intricacies of artistic subject formation will be elucidated in more detail in chapter 4.

36 Brown’s Migrant Modernism in this regard focuses on the immediate post-war years and ascertains a caesura in 1962, Low in “Finding the Centre” restricts her discussions to the years between 1950 and 1965 and in her later monograph Publishing the Postcolonial to 1948 until 1968, and Kalliney also ends his study Commonwealth of Letters with the early 1960s. As regards periodisation, in the introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010), Deidre Osborne maps out three heuristic phases that underlie the discussions of these works, described as “migratory” or “arriviste”, “settler”, and “indigene” periods (3).
masculinity, and class that structure it, before I go into more detail regarding distinctive shifts in cultural politics and resulting demands on artists.

My study here responds to lacunae in both Caribbean literary criticism and authorship studies. I aim to provide a more differentiated periodisation of the post-war decades by tracing shifts in discursive formations as they are entangled with artistic subject formation and engaged in the novels. My goal is to situate the Künstlerromane not within a paradigm of writing in and against a ‘borrowed’ culture, but as an integral part of literary Britain and as engaging with the whole literary field, and while I am here also concerned with the parameters of race and ethnicity that dominate in literary criticism, I also attest to aspects that go beyond it. In this respect, hitherto neglected facets, such as the influence of funding, Thatcherism, or multicultural policies on artistic position-taking will also gain more emphasis.

3.1 The Literary Field: Between Aesthetics and Politics

Emerging from these aspects, I first briefly sketch the literary field as the place in which artistic identifications take place – as the big Other that structures the subject’s writerly desire. The following elaborations understand the discourses and social fictions that surround artistic production as “representing the particular ways to be social subjects that the Symbolic order prescribes and regulates” (Campbell, Lacan 119). In the context of the artist narrative, this symbolic field consists of social, political, literary, and cultural discourses “that have the power to have their symbols and signs appear and enunciate” and is, due to the reign of the Law of the Father in British or Western culture, “inherently phallocentric and Eurocentric in its structure of concepts” and exclusive of “the feminine and the non-European Other” (Hogue 16). It seems thus fruitful to resort to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the literary field as a symbolic order in order to recognise the public literary sphere as the place from where the artist subject imagines the gaze – from “where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love” (Žižek, Sublime 116). In other words, this chapter, understanding the Bourdieuan notion of position-taking in the literary field in semiotic terms, conceptualises the field as the place of symbolic identification in relation to which authorial fantasies as imaginary identifications (chapter 5) are probed to stage and sustain writerly desire.37 As such, it delimitates the

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37 As one of few, George Steinmetz has drawn parallels between Bourdieu’s field and Lacan’s symbolic order by arguing that Bourdieu’s notion of the internalisation of hierarchical social relations and their reproduction through the subject tracks the individual’s incorporation into the symbolic (450): “Psychoanalysis is well-suited for analyzing the transformation of originally symbiotic subjects into agents equipped with the desire to compete in social ‘fields’ – agents who identify with parental figures and can sublimate, in Freud’s terms, or submit to the demands of the big Other in the field of the symbolic, in Lacan’s terminology. Lacanian theory allows us to reground Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital in Lacan’s notion of the symbolic order and in the related dynamics of recognition and misrecognition that are so central to symbolic identification” (453). Despite their openly voiced differences, Bourdieu’s theories often evidence traces of Lacan’s psychoanalysis. As Steinmetz points out, Bourdieu is careful to disavow Lacan as the obvious intertext to his theories of e.g. masculine
coordinates according to which symbolic capital can be acquired and recognised as well as the respective artistic position-takings, which forms the basis for enquiring into their fictionalisation in the analytical chapters. While Bourdieu’s theory is mostly used for text-transcendental interpretations, I here follow Alessandra Goggi’s claim that it is also apt for analysing the fictionalised staging of authorial processes, as it allows to conceive of subject positions, character relations, or narrative constellations as producing and being produced by particular artistic habitus (20–21), i.e. positions-takings, which serves to make legible the different and competing factors that structure the relations of agents in the field to each other.

Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field has served to transcend the notion of art as autonomous realm, with the artist as sovereign genius, and to reconceive of it as a field of relations between different actors. In The Rules of Art (1992), Bourdieu formulates a means of scientific analysis of processes of production and reception of literary works and provides relevant insights for analysing artistic self-fashioning within debates that structure the British literary field as a field of power in the period between the post-war consensus and post-consensus era (and beyond), the latter seen as inaugurated with the victory of the Conservative Party in 1979. The value of Bourdieu’s theory inheres in his focus on literature as marked by relationality, embedded in a field of power, engendered by and engendering “material and symbolic stakes” (xix). To examine practices and representational techniques of artists, it is necessary to analyse the literary field for once as “a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy” (Bourdieu, Field 162–163). It is, however, in constant interaction with other fields, structured by “relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural)”, in which all agents strive to conserve the value of their respective capital (Rules 215).

Within these relations, it is then not (only) artists who confer value on their work, but all actors involved in the field of cultural production, such as e.g. critics, members of academies, publishers, and more, who only produce the value of the work via producing “the belief in the creative power of the artist” and in the value of art (Rules 229). Artistic practices are then subject to institutional and social valorisation, yet this fact must at the same time remain veiled and the impenetrability of the field by external factors claimed to maintain the integrity of

domination, habitus, or symbolic capital, yet continuously betrays an indebtedness to psychoanalysis, for instance in his application of concepts like unconscious, misrecognition, phallonarcissism, projection, or reality principle (445–447). Steinmetz continues that “Bourdieu’s ideas are based on, or require integration with, psychoanalysis (especially the Lacanian version)” (448), and the latter “provides the key to understanding two of Bourdieu’s most significant and most ambiguous concepts, symbolic capital and habitus” (44; original emphasis). Precisely because their theories are so similar and because this has found so little resonance, I map this thesis’ symbolic order with both Lacan and Bourdieu.
cultural capital through disinterestedness. The degree of disinterestedness differs according to the respective forces within the hierarchies of the field, which Bourdieu describes as autonomous pole, that is, in its extreme form, the *l’art pour l’art* doctrine, vis-à-vis the heteronomous pole, where external demands – economic, but also social or political in nature – influence what is produced, distributed, and valued (Field 40). The structure of the field at a given time determines the positions artists can occupy, and here Bourdieu’s notion of a ‘space of possibles’ serves me to conceptualise the fictionalisation of the artist theme along these coordinates:

> Every position-taking is defined in relation to the *space of possibles* which is objectively realized as a *problematic* in the form of the actual or potential position-takings corresponding to the different positions; and it receives its distinctive *value* from its negative relationship with the coexistent position-takings to which it is objectively related. (Field 30; original emphasis)

Artists’ position-takings then describe aesthetic strategies with which the positions the field offers can be creatively negotiated and artistic distinction achieved, yet these are never unconstrained. Literary self-fashioning and authority are closely tied to a whole range of “problems to resolve, stylistic or thematic possibilities to exploit, contradictions to overcome, even revolutionary ruptures to effect” (Bourdieu, *Rules* 235). When the practice of literary writing, then, is not just silently exerted, but becomes the subject of inquiry, as is the case in the *Künstlerroman*, particularly after its ‘metafictional turn’, the position-takings and underlying conditions, discourses, and ideologies that shape the very work and process take centre stage. Within these parameters, specifically in a postcolonial context, the artist, in order to achieve literary legitimacy, must navigate between different ‘regimes of value’, received from both a British literary tradition and a gradually growing Caribbean and even broader postcolonial literary tradition with its shifting demands. The positions taken in this space are then akin to the staging of different subjectivities, as can be inferred from George Steinmetz’ work, which terms the subject’s desire for recognition by other actors in the field in Lacan’s terminology as conditioned by its “ineluctable entry into the Symbolic” (456).

The notion of ‘autonomy’, here, encompasses another dimension, as Bourdieu has shown by referring to Émile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre (*Rules* 209–213): the insistence on the autonomy of art fostered an intellectual who could, even had to act in other fields, such as the political, precisely with the authority gained in the ‘ivory tower’. This, especially, echoes the Caribbean or minority writer’s position, where the dichotomy between autonomy and commitment is always already blurred: as Lorna Burns and Birgit M. Kaiser write, in the case of postcolonial writing, i.e. writing circumscribed by matters of race and ethnicity, there exists

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38 As an “upside-down economic world”, the veiling of economic factors is part of the literary and artistic world to guarantee its claim to authenticity – that is, “those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness” (Bourdieu, *Field* 40).
a “set of assumptions about the social and political value of the work” that renders it “so over-determined […] as to reduce it to mere representation”, and its style and specific context is neglected “by the pre-established framework of values” (11). I understand heteronomy then as also encompassing notions of ‘commitment’, as, with Jean-Paul Sartre, the idea that the writer must use art to voice social and political ideas and “disclose the world and offer it to the generosity of the reader” (What 60). Bourdieu’s ‘complementary’ notion of ‘autonomy’ resonates with Adorno, who has answered Sartre’s idea of commitment. Adorno faults ‘committed’ art for betraying a belief in a positivist existence and emphasises the necessary refusal of artworks to offer themselves up to any particular goal or ideology, that is, to abandon both “the social contract with reality” and “speak[ing] as though they were reporting facts” (“Commitment” 180).

These conceptualisations provide a means to approach the Caribbean artist novel’s intricate interweaving of social and cultural politics in addition to economic forces that influence and privilege different forms of position-taking and representation not just as resulting from the supposed ‘precarious’ status of the Caribbean subject writing in an inherited tradition, but rather as a conscious staging of the desire for recognition of one’s artistic capital and as elaborate fictionalisation of the paradoxes that govern the field.

3.2 Perpetually ‘Other’? On Masculinity, Race, and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain

For the Caribbean writer, as I have indicated, the space of possibles is circumscribed by factors of race and ethnicity, and the fictionalisation of the artist theme is inextricably intertwined with the narratives that define Britishness and its ‘others’. But, as the ‘masculinist bent’ that is

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39 Sartre’s notion of a littérature engagée, an ideological and functionalised notion of literature, posits ‘commitment’ as ultimate purpose of writing. The ‘committed writer’ is inevitably ‘engaged’, that is, situated within and shaped by political and societal context, and must thus renounce impartiality: “The world is my task, that is, the essential and freely accepted function of my freedom is to make that unique and absolute object which is the universe come into being in an unconditioned movement” (What 60).

40 For art to achieve “social significance”, Adorno further states, the “truth content of artworks [has to] point[…] beyond their aesthetic complexion, which it does only by virtue of that aesthetic complexion” (Aesthetic 248). Particularly the idea of autonomy must, however, also be understood as an ideology constituted within the field itself rather than a transcendental concept. In The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990), Terry Eagleton has commented on the ideological function of the ‘purely aesthetic’ to veil the realities of social reproduction. The aesthetic, he argues, is implied in the middle class’s strive for political hegemony and thereby in perpetuating “dominant ideological forms of modern class society” (3).

41 A brief note on the distinction of these concepts is here necessary. Both ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ constitute differential categories, and both, following Ashcroft et al., refer to human variation: ‘ethnicity’ describes belonging in terms of “culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry” (75). Whereas the term has often been used to designate groups which are “not traditionally identified with the dominant national mythology” (Ashcroft et al. 76), its use is herein not restricted to a minority context. Where discrimination can take ethnic differences as basis, with the affirmation of one’s own ethnicity resting on the construction of and demarcation from an ethnic alterity constructed as negative (Antor 183), in a postcolonial context, ethnicity also constitutes an instrument for self-affirmation in form of belonging to an imagined community and is “usually deployed as an expression of a positive self-perception that offers certain advantages to its members” (Ashcroft et al. 75). In a British diasporic context, ethnicity then comprises such ethnicities as for example British, English, Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, and a variety of others. As regards the first two, in the following I will use ‘Britishness’ as the more general term but
attested to much of Caribbean fiction in the post-war years shows,\(^{42}\) this space also cannot be thought without examining discourses of gender, particularly masculinity. In both a Caribbean and Caribbean-British cultural setting, masculinities have only recently gained more critical interest, and Michael Bucknor’s article “Dangerous Crossings” (2012) and Kate Houlden’s monograph *Sexuality, Gender and Nationalism in Caribbean Literature* (2017) provide an excellent overview over developments in the field of Caribbean masculinity studies. Here, I provide the most important discursive aspects that surround and construct the Caribbean artist as ‘other’ in the literary field via the axes of race, ethnicity, and masculinity.

Pinpointing an ‘origin’ of Anglo-Caribbean literature in Britain inevitably leads to the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* in Tilbury in 1948, as a by now mythical signifier of the ‘birth’ of ‘black Britain’ altogether.\(^{43}\) Here, it is important to state that from the post-war years until the outgoing century, Britain has witnessed a *narrowing* and *racialisation* of definitions of ‘the British subject’, from a rather imperial interpretation of national belonging, i.e. ‘being British’ meaning belonging to an imagined cultural community, to increasing demands to define the nation as unity of nation, state, and society (Ebke 94–97). The mid-century was still marked by a public dominance of the idea of universality and equality – as Kathleen Paul terms it, a “mythical ideal of a single universal British nationality” (130) and the immediate *Windrush* period characterised by “a camaraderie inspired by a common sense of nationality and

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\(^{42}\) There seems to be a – often uncritically accepted – consensus that Anglo-Caribbean literature in the mid-twentieth century exhibits a “dominant rhetoric of male violence and sexuality” (Procter “Part Two”, 96), a “peculiarly excessive kind of masculine performance” (Houlden 49) and is altogether patriarchal and sexually conservative, assessments that to some extent mirror public debates on West Indian masculinity in the post-*Windrush* years. Cf. here also Leah Rosenberg (4) and Rosamund King (“Sex” 28–29).

\(^{43}\) Due to employment shortages in Britain after the war, the SS *Empire Windrush* brought the first recruited labourers from Kingston, Jamaica to Tilbury Docks, Essex on June 22, 1948. It is by now critical consensus that *Windrush* has itself become mythologised and thus needs a more critical examination. In the 1980s and 90s, it has become the scripted beginning of black experience in Britain and part of a national mythology, affirming “Britain’s public face as a multicultural nation, a conveniently distant and palatable signifier of a culturally diverse past” (Nasta, “1940s–1970s” 25), which has served to frame black experience “within a climate of exclusionary nationalism” (Donnell, *Twentieth Century* 201). *Windrush* has to be clarified as designating neither the definite origin of black immigration to Britain, nor of black British literature, but rather a retrospectively constructed event that has to date not ceased to hold sway over the narrative of a ‘multicultural Britain’. 

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communal response to the War” which had, however, by 1958 “evolved into prejudice” (Ellis, “Foreign” 224). This so-called ‘post-war consensus’ renders Britishness, as coinciding “with the territory of both nation and empire” (Baucom 10; original emphasis) still a rather inclusive signifier, which also had implications for the artist’s role in the post-war years.44

Yet despite this focus on universality, from the beginning of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain, the prevalent notion via which differences between the Caribbean and white British population and resulting racial conflicts were constructed and naturalised was masculinity (Collins 392), which speaks to the anxiety that has surrounded and continues to surround this category.45 In contrast to other male immigrants, such as those from South Asia, whose sexual charge was nullified in public debates, men from the Caribbean were perceived as hyper-masculine: “If Edward Said’s Oriental ‘Other’ was feminine, the Caribbean ‘Other’ was anything but” (392). The stereotypes advanced by British commentators and with which the public received the Windrush immigrants centred on family conceptions: they revolved around the ‘trinity’ of “promiscuity, patriarchy, and fatherly neglect” (397). Foregrounded here were the trope of the ‘unscrupulous’ and ‘improvident’ father, the inability to fulfil one’s duties of manhood, i.e. the protection of women and the responsibility of the father for the family, the maintaining of a sexual double standard that results in high birth rates and the spread of venereal diseases, and additionally the lack of ambition and foregoing of individual self-help (396–397). Linden Lewis, likewise, identifies these stereotypes as dominating the essentialised version of ‘the’ Caribbean male subject (“Caribbean” 107). Lewis also laments the lack of a theoretical framework that transcends this homogenisation and moves beyond the archetypical poles of

44 Under Clement Attlee’s Labour government from 1945 until 1951, the British Nationality Act (BNA) of 1948, adhering to an unconditional ius soli principle, conferred British citizenship to all people born in the Commonwealth as Commonwealth Citizen, with those living in a dependent colony subcategorised as ‘CUKC’ citizen – Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, which was used synonymously with ‘British subject’, and initially welcomed immigrants from the Caribbean colonies “as imperial brethren (albeit ‘dusky’ ones)” (Ball, “Immigration” 224). This broad definition of British citizenship was also emphasised by the successive Tory governments and applied at least until 1962 (Paul 10). For a detailed discussion of developments within British citizenship, see e.g. Almuth Ebke, Britishness.

45 Emerging in Europe and the United States in the 1980s in the wake of feminist movements and theory and initially predominantly sociological in focus, the field of masculinity studies is by now highly diversified and interdisciplinary and has yielded a plethora of perspectives and methodologies. As such, the premise of the field that masculinity, for a long time, constituted the ‘invisible norm’ against which femininity had been demarcated and obscured (Lewis, “Exploring” 3) in this sense no longer holds true. The flourishing research in the last decades has by now also transcended the paradigm of ‘crisis’ that has dominated it for a long time (Jackson & Balaji 20) and, crucial for my study, acknowledged the differential factors of race and ethnicity in attesting to what Jeff Hearn calls the “intersections of gender and other social divisions” (Hearn 91), see here especially Bob Pease and Kevin Pringle, A Man’s World? (2001) or Ronald L. Jackson II and Murali Balaji, Global Masculinities (2011). While I acknowledge the prolific work done in the field of masculinity studies, an outline is beyond the scope of this project. The discussions in this specific chapter draw on research on Caribbean masculinities in particular and follow Floyd and Horlacher in their argument that ‘masculinity’ should be understood in the plural as there are different varieties, practices, and ideals which can co-exist or compete with each other in the same cultural context (1). I will provide a conceptualisation of masculinity in the intersection with race as it characterises my study through the lens of psychoanalysis in chapter 4.
‘respectability’ and ‘reputation’ Wilson (1969) and Sampath (1997) have described. In a Caribbean context, Sampath, following Wilson, has outlined the different forms of public performance in which the fashioning of Caribbean masculinities takes place – in a dialectic of ‘respectability’ and ‘reputation’, the first influenced by morals and values inherited from colonialism and the latter as a hedonistic, carnivalesque subversion of the former. Sampath defines ‘reputation’, following the introduction of both ‘respectability’ and ‘reputation’ by Wilson, as “a working-class, live-for-today enjoyment of the kind of hedonism that is deemed as worthless by the respectable sections of local society” and dependent on the demonstration of sexual prowess in public (48–49). While the assumption of an inherent cultural dialectic is of course too narrow a definition of ‘Caribbean masculinities’, it provides a starting point to enquire into the symbolic order in which masculine self-fashioning takes place.

The stereotype of the hypersexualised black man, an “overdetermined totemic construction of black male potency” that figures as “antithesis to prevailing norms of hetero-patriarchal masculinity”, is crucial for reaffirming North American and European constructions of manhood (Houlden 50). Read through the lens of theories of alterity, these stereotypes levelled at the immigrant ‘other’, who, post-Windrush, was now no longer far away in the colonies, not only serves to demarcate appropriate ‘British’ behaviour but also fulfils a strategic purpose to displace British anxieties surrounding a decline in ‘family values’, emancipatory processes, and resulting shifts in gender relations, increasingly from the 1960s onwards, onto the immigrant ‘other’, the ‘enemy within’. This discourse of decline centred on the positing of all-encompassing ‘values’, in whose wake the othering of immigrants, particularly since Enoch Powell’s infamous evocation of the ‘British race question’ in 1968 and especially under Thatcher, took place via key phrases such as a loss of British values, unemployment, or male juvenile delinquency, which, while connected to economic crises in the 1970s, were often seen as a result of immigration and the notion of a ‘permissive society’ in the 1960s (Ebke 99; 163).

As the idea of a Caribbean masculinity was still strongly dominated by colonial stereotypes in the post-war decades, many first generation commentators, interviewed by sociologists and historians, took pains to emphasise the ‘non-threatening’, respectable character

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46 Alterity denotes an otherness that remains closely related to the self. The marking of difference, of othering in terms of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, or others, in this understanding, is part of the process of identity formation and always implied in power structures (Feldmann & Krug 185–186). Whenever I speak of ‘other/ness’ in this thesis, it follows this more differentiated and complementary understanding of alterity, unless stated otherwise.

47 Right-wing politician Enoch Powell’s racist “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968 is seen by Stuart Hall as inaugurating the “formation of an ‘official’ racist policy at the heart of British political culture” (“Racism” 30).

48 These discussions exacerbated under Margaret Thatcher’s ‘law-and-order’ rhetoric and public policies that echo Thatcherism’s imaginary return to the ‘values’ of the 1950s as “a talisman for lost stabilities” (Samuel 9). The dominant ‘British values’ are manifest in the evocation of a set of tropes associated with Victorianism, including the belief in self-reliance, suspicion of over-government, a reinstatement of the ‘authority principle, and the valorisation of ‘family values” (Samuel 10–14).
of immigrant men to contradict white portrayals (Collins 392–393). This shifted in the late 1960s and 1970s, which see the “most radical attempt” to “advance a strictly black code of black masculinity” (415), in which Afro-Caribbean masculinity increasingly came to constitute the dominant rhetoric (Procter, “Part Three” 194). The more inclusive understanding of Britishness that had dominated the post-war period was subsequently and in the wake of racial violence and riots, for which the immigrant groups were blamed, narrowed and became more exclusive – implicitly gendered, classed, and raced, an identity with which predominantly white, middle- and upper-class men identified (Paul 14). The disciplining of society and legislation enacted in the wake of an increasing anxiety about ‘British values’ being under siege are tied in with and influence an increasingly “political black consciousness” since the latter half of the 1960s that takes its cue from the Black Power movement in the United States, in whose wake ‘black’ is re-signified as a “marker of pride” (Procter, “Part Two” 95–96) and “political dissidence”, and “British-born descendents of New Commonwealth migrants […] boldly stressed their right to belong to the imagined community of the British nation rather than their ancestral affiliations to locations overseas” (McLeod 98). In this environment of a racialisation of immigration, ideas of masculinity shift and a more pronounced black ‘version’ of Britishness began to form; ‘black’ now functions as a political signifier of identification, a deliberately constructed category in order to achieve self-representation (Nasta, “1940s–1970s” 34). In other words, ‘black British’ becomes a political and cultural category, with ‘black’ signifying an inscription into a collective identity imagined as somewhat essentialist that has strategic significance for gaining political and cultural participation. This was based on renouncing a dependence on ‘whites’, also in terms of sexual relations, but Collins sees it to fall short considering its appropriation of and dependence on white models of masculinity in a counter-discursive fashion, particularly the notion of gentelmanliness, which manifests in archaic gallantry, chivalry, or notions of responsibility (415–416). Towards the end of the twentieth century, calls for more plural conceptions of black masculinity were voiced both by scholars such as Kobena Mercer and Stuart Hall, who have drawn attention to how fantasies of black masculinities marked by “hardness” in popular culture have also been posited strategically as “counter-identities” but have simultaneously been expressed “at the expense of the vulnerability of black women and the feminization of gay black men” (“Black” 31) and

49 The so-called ‘Notting Hill race riots’ of 1958 are a case in point. Through successive Immigration Acts that tied Britishness to ‘whiteness’ (Donnell, “Looking Back” 201–202), citizenship and notions of Britishness were increasingly defined in terms of race (Paul xii). The culmination of these developments is constituted by the British Nationality Act of 1981, which introduced the first fixed definition of British citizenship and banished the ius soli principle, by “replacing it […] with a purely genealogical principle of British identity” (Baucom 13) and dividing ‘Englishness’ from ‘Britishness’ by tying Englishness to an inheritance of race instead of British space (14). It also made manifest the ‘downgrade’ of the legal status of Windrush descendents in its name. The citizen statues introduced with the 1981 BNA still persist today.
found more emphasis in Caribbean literature. Yet Alison Donnell also makes out a critical moment that has emerged since the 1990s, where Caribbean writing now sees the outspoken articulation of sexuality, sexual politics, and particularly sexual diversity (Twentieth 9).

Discourses of Caribbean masculinity in Britain, then, operate on the specific relationality of non-white and white masculinities and largely neglect Caribbean intra-ethnic differences. Black masculinity, Kobena Mercer states, “is a highly contradictory formation of identity, as it is a subordinated masculinity” and exacerbated “when black men subjectively internalize and incorporate aspects of the dominant definitions of masculinity” (Welcome 143). The relationality Mercer maps out of course resonates with R.W. Connell’s Gramscian social constructivist model of masculinity as ‘multiple’ concept (76). In Connell’s theory, masculinities marked by classed and racial difference constitute ‘marginalised’ forms, e.g. in the context of power relations of Empire, (forced) movements of labour forces, or economic disenfranchisement in industrial and urban working class contexts (191–198), vis-à-vis a white, middle-class masculinity that has constituted the invisible and unquestioned norm for much of Western history.50 In the context of Caribbean immigration to Britain, class is indeed also a crucial factor for male visibility in the public sphere, which, as David Morgan states, takes place either through the deployment of wealth and property or through class struggles (169). As Ann Stoler’s (1989) and Catherine Hall’s (1992) studies on nineteenth- and twentieth-century relations of class and race have shown, class relations in the metropolis continue to be influenced by colonial politics, where the fortification of a white, middle-class masculinity has depended on the creation of and demarcation from an ‘other’ in terms of gender, sexuality, class, and race. Thatcher’s later slogan “Labour says he’s black, Tories say he’s British” suggests that racial inequality can be ameliorated in the economic field by internalising white, middle-class norms (Rogers 91). Crucial for Caribbean negotiations of masculinity, here, are aspirations to hegemony through property, ownership, and inheritance through the male line (Morgan, “Class” 168), a factor that the Caribbean artist narrative often negotiates both through actual aspirations to own property or through anxieties of creating a (literary) legacy.

50 Connell uses the Gramscian notion of hegemony to differentiate dominant forms of masculinity, i.e. ‘hegemonic masculinity’, and complicit forms from subordinated and marginalised ones as “configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships” (82). Where Connell defines ‘hegemony’, by now quite famously, as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77), ‘marginalised masculinities’ are much less prominently discussed, especially in the intersection of ‘race’ and ‘class’. Crucially, Connell terms those masculinities ‘marginalised’ which, albeit they might contain exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, are not able to authorise that very form and do not cause a ‘trickle-down effect’ for other, likewise marginalised men (80–81) and thus do not profit to the same extent from the “patriarchal dividend” (82). The latter describes the structural entrenchment of gender inequality wherein masculinity affords men greater access to power. This dividend extends to honour, prestige, the right to command, appropriation of products of (social) labour, or sexual pleasure (82–85).
‘Marginalisation’, moreover, also includes a ‘protest masculinity’ which “picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty” (Connell 114), a crucial aspect for the more politicised 1960s and 1970s.

Masculinity in the post-war years was, however, also an ambivalent ‘battleground’ in the Caribbean region, and, for once, centred around the notion of ‘crisis’, of men being uniquely at risk due to both the legacy of colonialism and the region’s perceived matrifocality, an idea most infamously put forward by Errol Miller’s *Men at Risk* (1991). Moreover, in the years marked by decolonisation and the short-lived West Indian Federation, masculinity was a central factor in national(ist) endeavours, into which exiled writers were also interpellated. Elleke Boehmer has theorised the intricate connection of gender and nationhood as mutually informative and nationalism as legitimating itself “through a variety of gendered structures and shapes” which render the ideal of nationhood as a clearly masculine one (“Flora Nwapa” 6). Nationalism, Boehmer states elsewhere, “operates as a masculine family drama”, a drama whose “symbolic economy […] would thus appear to be sharply delineated by gender, or, more precisely, by tropes that match up with prototypical categories of sexual difference” (*Stories* 28; original emphasis). Houlden also addresses the gendered and sexual frameworks that have been imposed on Caribbean men and contrasts the specific British discourse of the “hypersexual” black male with a West Indian notion of “the national citizen” (2–3), which implies that concepts of the nation are always already sexed and, more importantly, yielding gendered and sexualised performative scripts of black masculinity which are based on notions of respectability and the heterosexual home and family (4). Forbes in this regard points out that the rhetoric of the nation as masculine yielded a paradoxical imaginary, as both the rational, educated middle-class intellectual as messianic leader of the nation (43) and the icon of the black peasant or proletarian as closest to the people (49) came to constitute ‘ideal’ types.

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51 There are many factors underlying this perception – of course the legacies of slavery and indentureship and their disciplining of the male body, but also its institutionalised continuation in a postcolonial era, where “disciplinary methods to control the black population are maintained […] to police and protect gendered borders” (Bucknor xiv). A further factor is that due to nationalist exigencies, the Caribbean did not see a broad feminist movement develop in the 1960s, as was the case in Western Europe and the United States (Houlden 8), so that a gain in education and income of women in the region in the 1980s in combination with the traditional stereotype of the region as matrifocal, “often confused for matriarchal or matrilineal both of which are not at all applicable” (Mohammed 24–25), prepared a breeding ground for male insecurities and felt marginalisation. This did not apply to all masculinities equally: in the Anglophone Caribbean region, Afro-Caribbean masculinity was the most problematised, embedded within a discourse of the ‘disorganised’ and matrifocal Afro-Caribbean family and marked as deviant not only from Western or European forms of masculinity, but also from Indo-Caribbean forms, as the “more overtly patriarchal” Indo-Caribbean family rather corresponded to these hegemonic norms (Rheddock xvii).

52 The West Indian Federation was a controversial political union that, at the will of the United Kingdom, should jointly enter the Commonwealth. It was in effect only from 1958 to 1962, ending with Jamaica’s withdrawal in 1961. Decolonisation in the Caribbean then formally started with Trinidad and Tobago gaining independence in 1962, in whose wake other former members followed. Strategically, fostering the federation served to ensure British control over its Caribbean dominions while creating a stronger, independent economic bloc (Whitham 186).
Particularly interesting for artistic self-fashioning in this context, both Collins (415) and Edmondson (38–57) emphasise the prevalence of the (Victorian) ideal of ‘gentlemanliness’ for black masculinity. The “‘English’ vision of intellectual authority”, Edmondson argues, is founded on the English idea of authorship as gentlemanly endeavour: “intellectual labor is the realm of ‘real’ men, ‘gentlemen’, middle-class/upper-class Englishmen. For nonwhite, non-English men to make a case for self-government, they must state their case as gentlemen” (5). These tensions illustrate the complication of gendered subjectivity through the intersection with class and race and transpire in the artist novel’s ‘clashing’ of middle- and working-class discourses, or the imposition of a middle-class discourse on representations of the working classes.

3.3 “Fresh Minds at Work”: The Caribbean Artist in the British Literary Field

With these conceptual and discursive deliberations, the cultural field as symbolic order and ideals of the artist as well as concomitant representational demands – in short, the ‘space of possibles’ in which artists move and the possibilities of position-taking – will be the focus of the coming chapters. This chapter also demonstrates that available subject positions for writers were, as the previous chapter has indicated, by no means progressively increasing or becoming less rigid, which also counters a specifically British myth of steadily improving multicultural relationships: in Jo Littler’s words, it critically engages the idea that “we are just moving forward to a happier multicultural place”, which is “an Enlightenment-derived liberal myth that patronizes the past and does not do analytical justice to the present” (97).

3.3.1 Between Nation Building and Autonomy: From Windrush to the Early 1960s

In the post-Windrush period, Britain witnessed a general literary boom and an increasing interest in Anglophone literature (Low, “Finding” 23), which fed into the post-war ‘optimism’ that lasted until the 1960s (24) and also characterised public policies. Artistic self-fashioning in these foundational years of Caribbean literature in Britain was set in a tense field of differing demands levelled at the artist from within Britain, but also in the context of decolonisation, and between ideals of artistic autonomy and an increasing demand for social engagement. The dominant image of the artist that characterised the 1940s and 1950s was one of alienation and frustration. Gordon Rohlehr retrospectively describes the prevailing conception of the artist at

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53 Headline from the “Special Autumn Issue” of The Times Literary Supplement (1952).
54 In the post-war decades, many artists, particularly writers, from the Caribbean found critical acclaim in Britain. Nasta (“Voyaging” 570) and Kalliney (“West Indian” 740) show that between 1949 and the late sixties, over a hundred works by West Indian authors had been released in the UK alone.
55 My speaking of a ‘foundational tradition’ or ‘generation’ refers to the changed cultural landscape in which this could become a tradition, e.g. the now increased exchange between Caribbean writers in the post-war years and the institutionalisation of literature and literary connections, which was lacking before.
the time as still indebted to a “Renaissance/Romantic Existentialist theoretics” (Strangled 153), as “isolato” who stands outside of his society (154) in an atmosphere of “solipsism and silence” (152). This discourse saw the artist as “a kind of alienated Western man” (151) who had to rescue “experience from the turbulence within” and give it verbal shape (152). Kamau Brathwaite’s later assessment of exilic Caribbean writers in Britain echoes this notion of isolation with a decidedly heroic tone: “Until recently, the writer was hero, was one of the elite; his distance overseas added to the glamour of this ideograph. The reader was his pupil: told what to think; must follow if he could”, but was by 1970 “brought […] out of the tower, out of his castle, out of his ego” (“Foreword” 9). These notions of elitism also resonate with the artist as exceptional, yet alienated being and indeed with nineteenth century images of the suffering genius, and they must be understood in the context of the artist’s ambiguous interpellation and the challenges of position-taking in these founding years.

For once, Caribbean artists in post-war Britain were subject to desires for ‘nation building’ as regards nationalist projects and imagining a pan-Caribbean identity in the wake of decolonising efforts and Britain’s advocacy for a West Indian Federation in 1947. Artistic efforts to verbalise this ‘new’ nation were still steeped in the cultural legacy of the ‘great tradition’, and the cultural landscape in Britain in the post-war decade(s) continued to be marked by the Arnoldian ‘culture and civilisation’ debate, with experimentalism “reduced to even smaller ghettos” after World War II (Nairn 82). New Left thinker Tom Nairn’s classic essay “The English Literary Intelligentsia” (1977) pointedly describes a “synthetic-conservative myth” (63–64) instilled by the “landed gentry and the traditional (or non-industrial) sector of the bourgeoisie” (63) that would flow from Edmund Burke to F.R. Leavis (64). As key notions, Nairn makes out the “organic community” (64) and culture as “preservation, or the restoration, of an originally better state of affairs” (66). Interesting in this regard are the subject positions artists could occupy in this climate: Nairn defines these as either a “crab-like disengagement from the system”, an eccentric alienation that results in fragmentation rather than opposition (73), or as forging a meaningful “counter-culture” through borrowing from international culture (73–74). While Nairn does not speak of émigré writers in this regard, one can detect overlappings with the self-fashioning processes depicted in the Caribbean artist novel, as the exceptional role awarded to the artist in the Arnoldian notion of culture, with intellectual work, as Kalliney shows, constituting “a form of rebellion against group thinking” and the “unreflective haughtiness […] of metropolitan culture”, especially resonated with West Indian writers (Commonwealth 17). While writers also adopted a critical stance towards the Arnoldian/Leavisite tradition, its main tenets were often taken up for Caribbean nationalist projects in form of perpetuating a faith in an “organic or folk community”
as “an imaginative order of stability and cultural wholeness”, in which Leavis’s “apotheosis of a living English language spoken by the organic community” (90) was now appropriated for Caribbean, especially Afrocentric cultural nationalist aesthetics and the ‘little tradition’ of Caribbean folk culture (92).

Engaging with the socio-political context and cultural politics in the post-war years in Britain specifically suggests that in the earlier Windrush years, artists are, however, not just limited to forms of nation building in the context of the West Indian federation, but also had a role to play in ‘securing’ the Commonwealth against internal division and to foster assimilation to an imagined community of Britishness. Authors are interpellated into ‘fortifying’ the (remainders of) Empire and ‘securing’ notions of Britishness for white Britons while being simultaneously subject to racialisation. This is best exemplified in the BBC radio programme Caribbean Voices, the “midwife to West Indian writing in these crucial years” (Hall & Schwarz 164), which “tied the literary world of the English speaking Caribbean to that of London” (Low, Publishing 97–98). The programme’s role in forming Anglophone Caribbean literature is by now widely acknowledged and merits no in-depth discussion, yet what has been neglected are the ideologies inherent to it and their influence on artistic demands and expectations. The framing of artists in the radio programme illustrates art’s and literature’s functionalisation and ideological reclamation for strengthening the ties between the ‘motherland’ and the colonial ‘children’ overseas. The programme’s slogan “This is London calling the West Indies” stands emblematically for the institutionalised attempts to ameliorate the tense relationships with the colonies after the Second World War. Aiming to decrease American influence in the West Indies by “encourag[ing] the expression of West Indianness within a British framework” (Rush 184) and to further loyalty to Britain (Griffith, BBC 4), its nation building strategies depended increasingly on exiled West Indian writers in Britain, who served to transmit the idea of an inclusive and progressive Commonwealth – an “egalitarian imperialism” (Rush 149) – as an imagined community of native Britons and West Indians. Moreover, as an “ideological state apparatus”, it also served to decrease communist tendencies in the Caribbean (Bonner 435).

Scholars attending to Caribbean Voices have pointed out the aesthetic regime the programme furthered, which had a lasting impact on Caribbean writing in Britain in particular – especially under its long-time editor Henry Swanzy – and from which the artist’s role in the ideological project of pacifying and fortifying the (remainders of) Empire can be inferred.

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56 Broadcasted from March 1943 to July 1958 by the BBC World Service, Caribbean Voices featured creative work by West Indian residents in London and critical reviews from English critics. It also fulfilled a crucial function for furthering and mediating class alliances, and particularly middle-class values, in the post-war era, as Niblett shows in “Style as Habitus” (2016). For discussions of Caribbean Voices see also Low (“Finding”, Publishing), Griffith (“London”, BBC), and Kalliney (Commonwealth).
Swanzy’s gate-keeping practices included the furthering of ‘local colour’ and vernacular language, which was seen as grounded in the plight and ‘vividness’ of the rural and poor folk (Low, *Publishing* 102–104), the preference for stories that conveyed a ‘true’, ‘authentic’ Caribbean experience, seen as embodied in the ‘peasant’ and in “unsentimental” writing (McIntosh, *Emigration* 33), and aesthetically in a preference for realist portrayals, although writers associated with modernism, like Derek Walcott, also found critical acclaim. Thus, in 1946, Swanzy explained the rejection of manuscripts of Caribbean writers to editor Gladys Lindo as follows: “On the whole, I think they all have something in common, and that is a complete absence of local colour. That seems to me to be the greatest crime in this series, unless of course the writer is a genius with a universal message” (qtd. in Griffith, *BBC* 22). Arthur Calder-Marshall’s writing on *Caribbean Voices* in 1955 neatly summarises this restriction by claiming that it limited literary topics to “little but rum, cricket and calypsos” (452). Swanzy’s comments encapsulate the possibilities for Caribbean writers in the mid-twentieth century within the dominant production-aesthetic context and, translated to the *Künstlerroman* and artist myths, mirror and affirm the superiority of art over life, of access to a higher sphere of universal truth versus reporting ‘facts’. This posited distinction de facto constitutes an ideological project to maintain a distinction between a ‘universal’ idea of British culture and its Caribbean ‘others’, whose art is sought to stabilise the first. Yet the voraciousness for new stories with a supposed authentic, exotic edge was so prevalent in the post-war years that, as Low summarises, it was also easier for Caribbean writers – or writers conceived of as black – than white writers to get their stories published in Britain (“Finding” 25). This was also due to, next to an interest in the soon-to-be independent nations, a ‘liberal guilt’ (25). In this context, the “authority of alterity” (Dalleo 157) becomes an important aspect in artists’ cultural capital.

Seen in light of social and political developments in the period, the decidedly outward-looking nature of Swanzy’s programme, emphasised by the focus on local colour as well as a peasant and folk aesthetic, fosters artistic subject positions that are also implied in perpetuating the image of a ‘classed’ racial ‘other’, as peasant and rural, to stabilise hegemonic conditions and thus upholds class binaries as well as those between ‘high-’ and ‘middlebrow’ culture. Niblett has pointed to the entanglement of the programme’s proclivities with notions of race and class: its furthering of a particular aesthetic in Caribbean literature, he states, “need[s] to be seen in conjunction with […] the BBC’s role in helping to consolidate the new forms of habitus and new political-economic relations Britain’s ruling elites were seeking to instantiate in the context of a profound transformation in the world-system” (“Style” 124), and these were predominantly middle class in nature (125–126). Niblett here implies the ideological framing of Caribbean art as maintaining hegemonic relationships under the pretext of an “equal empire”
(Rush 161), where the writer himself then becomes a gatekeeper for classed – and gendered – cultural hierarchies. The gendered nature of the nation-building efforts Caribbean Voices was implied in and the furthering of West Indian literature and culture as a thoroughly male, ‘folk’ endeavour is visible in the fact that the programme, despite its first editor being Una Marson, did also not favour or further ‘feminine’ subjects and evidenced a gender bias (Low, Publishing 103).

Notwithstanding these factors, in the mid-twentieth century, Caribbean artists had arguably more creative leeway, as they were also sought to ‘invigorate’ a homegrown literary landscape perceived as now devoid of experimentalism, sensibility, and vitality. The greatest literary currency in this climate is originality, and this is mirrored in the art that was actually furthered in the post-war years. As Rogers outlines, the Arts Council under John Maynard Keynes, a key player in the cultural landscape after World War II and developed from 1941 onwards into a “modern reincarnation of the classical union between artist and public”, emerged from “a largely unexamined notion of organic symbiosis between the poor, cultivated artist and a well-funded public sphere in need of cultivation that was also ethnicized as English” (13; original emphasis), thereby accommodating a nineteenth-century discourse of the artist as exceptional, but economically suffering in a new, post-war welfare context. Vis-à-vis the younger generation of British writers, such as Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, or Philip Larkin, and their unadorned realism, “robustly masculine heterosexuality”, and lack of modernist sensibility (Kalliney, Commonwealth 116), hopes for cultural rejuvenation were vested in writers from the Caribbean. Anglophone or black Atlantic artists had a trenchant awareness of this rift between supposedly opposing notions of ‘aesthetic autonomy’ and innovation vis-à-vis political engagement, were themselves, as Kalliney shows, the most ardent defenders of aesthetic autonomy (5), and “fashioned themselves as saviors and usurpers” by claiming artistic disinterestedness (17). Kalliney states that post-war West Indian literature needs to be understood as a relatively egalitarian contributor to a metropolitan culture industry (130–131) and thus – without neglecting its subjection to raced and classed hierarchies, its anti-colonial criticism, or inferring that it was ‘just’ the product of the same – the literary field as a place of reciprocal influence between native British and late colonial writers. Artistic self-fashioning is negotiated complexly in the post-war years, and the artist narratives show that writers struggled with the artificial, yet consequential dichotomy between politics and aesthetics, between autonomy and engagement where they felt the need to position themselves. While Caribbean artists in the 1950s and early 1960s are also implied in a “politics of organisation and resistance” (Procter, “Part One” 15) and in their writing anticipate social and political shifts which will come to affect non-white citizens, compared to the following decades, the predominant idea of
a universal Britishness arguably also granted more artistic leeway and artistic subject positions seemed to be more varied.

### 3.3.2 Under Pressure: The Mid-1960s to the End of the Post-War Consensus

If the immediate post-war years until the early to mid-1960s were marked by the Anglo-Caribbean artists’ manoeuvring in the space between aesthetic autonomy and, particularly in the context of *Caribbean Voices*, their interpellation as ‘voices’ for preventing the fragmentation of the Empire, the following decades undergo a narrowing of self-fashioning possibilities, as symbolic demands increasingly focus on representability. This is intertwined with the narrowing of notions of ‘Britishness’ and ‘British subjects’. The 1960s hence are also somewhat of a transitional period in the British literary field, as both Phillip Tew et al. (“Surfing” 2) and Graham Riach state (“Ways” 139). For Caribbean literature in Britain, the overall cultural conflicts between “modernity against tradition; experimentation against conservatism (or the *status quo*); an outlook of futurist internationalism against the preserve of national heritage and, more broadly, the perception of an antipathy between the (seemingly) young and their (apparent) elders” (Tew et al., “Surfing” 2) were complicated by the fact that by the mid-1960s, the boom in Caribbean fiction had deflated (Riach, “Ways” 140).57 Secondly, the racialisation of immigration and the hostile rhetoric from the 1960s onwards lead to a heightened politicisation of literature as a reaction to a still persisting “unchallenged British identity” from which Caribbean writers were excluded (Riach, “Ways” 142).

In this climate, the Caribbean artist is interpellated into a politics of identity for the marginalised and tasked with creatively imagining (positive) identities. Now, “‘[t]he black experience’, as a singular and unifying framework based on the forging of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, ‘became ‘hegemonic’ over other ethnic/racial identities” in the face of achieving visibility vis-à-vis a white political and aesthetic discourse (Hall, “Ethnicities” 441). This results in what Hall would later term the fixing and perpetuation of an essential black, male subject (“Ethnicities” 443) and in maintaining the cultural separation between the ‘two Britains’. Somewhat in opposition to the ‘less’ politicised 1950s, where authors were welcomed into the mainstream and could claim some degree of artistic autonomy by seeking participation based on a, albeit elitist, more universal notion of art, artistic position-takings in the 1960s are now predominantly structured around the category of race, and this shift necessitates writers to seek acceptance in the literary field by claiming a West Indian or black identity as “strategic authorial position which allowed […] a certain

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57 Caribbean literature in Britain somewhat lost its capital in the literary field after *Caribbean Voices* had ceased to be broadcasted in 1958. Exemplary are Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s nostalgic comments to Andrew Salkey in 1966: “It doesn’t seem to me that West Indian writers are being noticed any more”, contrary to the 1950s (qtd. in Walmsley 46).
Anglo-Caribbean literature was then segregated in aesthetic terms more than before, and the notion of a “collective and committed” art (Walmsley 164), advanced by a younger, Black Power-inspired West Indian generation, dominates artistic debates. The implication of art and the intellectual in politics of liberation and emancipation leads to a preference of realism as the desired aesthetic mode, as best suited to the didactic role that art is assigned in this view, being accessible to a mass audience and thus bringing art ‘to the people’ (Sim 446). While the more immediate post-Windrush years had already seen an inclination towards realist portrayals for Caribbean writing but simultaneously left room for more experimental forms, as a desire for dash of avant-garde was vested in Caribbean writers in order to invigorate the British literary landscape, in the wake of these developments, positive stereotyping and realism as mode became imperative (Mercer, Welcome 238). British artist Isaac Julien would later tellingly call this the “ghetto of realism” (Julien & Nash 484).

Characteristic of the ‘political blackness’ that determined the role of the Anglo-Caribbean writer in the 1960s and 1970s and artistic perceptions is the Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM), active between 1966, when it was founded in London, and 1972. In an early issue of CAM’s literary outlet Savacou (1970–1979), devoted to, mirroring the positive essentialism outlined above, recover the ‘human subject’ in the racial ideology of Britain as former slave society, Elsa Goveia formulates the task of writers as immersing themselves in, preserving, and forming ‘West Indian culture’ in the face of a hierarchical society structured along axioms of race and class – an “inferiority/superiority ranking according to race and wealth” (14).

Emphasising the ‘choice’ the writer has to make, her essay reads like a call to battle: The writer, she argues, “cannot afford to isolate himself from the question of how the future is to be formed and what its content is to be. [...] Until we have made that particular choice, we are not going to be able [...] to produce art or writing or any of the other creative forms of activity” (13–14). While Goveia locates the artist’s task within the context of West Indian emancipation, her call to artists to “throw their weight on the side of democratisation” (13) also echoes claims made in Britain. Her comments are highly indicative of the discourse that dominated in this phase for another reason: by moving from the more impersonal artist’s choice to the collective “we” – “until we make a decision about the way in which we want the future to be built”, “the new culture which we need” cannot be produced (15; emphasis added) – she phrases the inescapability and mutual dependence the paradigm of representability suggests, where the

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58 As Tew states, literary avant-gardism was by the 1950s declared to have exhausted itself and realism was the favoured mode of contemporary literary critics (“Experimental” 193–194).

59 There existed other outlets for West Indian literature, many of them more regionally oriented, but as CAM was situated in London, its focus was arguably more resonant with the exiled writer.
artist must set “people of dark complexion” centre stage (14), and represent a collective and shape its future by speaking for it.60

Yet the position of the artist from the mid-1960s onwards also has to be considered in terms of broader cultural politics and academic shifts in Britain. On the one hand, the 1960s witnessed some major steps in the institutionalisation of ‘Commonwealth literature’ in general, including, for instance, the launch of the Heinemann African and Caribbean Writer’s Series, the encouragement of writers such as Naipaul by mainstream editors and publishers, the state’s furthering of literature and the arts, with the Arts Council as important actor and benefactor from which e.g. Selvon, Harris, and Naipaul profited in terms of recommendation or funding (Rogers 70), and the emergence of Commonwealth Literature as disciplinary field in 1964 at the University of Leeds, which laid the groundwork for the successive canonisation of postcolonial literature (Nasta, “1940s–1970s” 30). Yet these developments also illustrate that Anglo-Caribbean literature was increasingly compartmentalised and separated into a market niche and had, by the 1970s, through the furthering of separate minority cultural institutions, become excluded from the mainstream literary world (Kalliney, Commonwealth 14).61

The narrowing of artistic position-taking was arguably also fostered by shifts in the state’s financing of art and literature. Rogers has outlined how the Arts Council’s Second Royal Charter reoriented its funding policies in 1967 from producer-based to now audience-oriented factors, which entailed that ‘purely’ aesthetic criteria gave way to broader “conceptions of value” (78). The resulting artist model, albeit without overt ideational interference by the state, is reinscribed in line with the stereotype of the solitary genius and reflected a “masculinized conception” of the craft (Rogers 67). As an outstandingly creative but “hard-pressed individual” (78), he took on an increasingly educational role (63). In line with this, between 1966 and 1981, “lines of prestige” were established, where publishers and writers would recommend other writers, from which e.g. Naipaul and Harris profited (69). Intriguingly, the Arts Council Literature Department’s aim was to find “the next James Joyce” (Calder, qtd. in Rogers 70), a notion that curiously resonates with the popularity of the artist theme during these decades.

The increasing influence of what was seen as ‘radical’ black presses, like Bogle L’Ouverture or New Beacon Books’, in the 1960s also served to sever the ties with literary values based on liberal humanism and exclusionary of ‘Third World’ culture (Rogers 79). In terms of a critical paradigm, this implied a break from the notions of culture that predominated

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60 Although some members of CAM also voiced opposition here. As Anne Walmsley notes, Wilson Harris, for instance, warned that a social orientation of CAM would merely continue to exert pressure on the “creative mind” and again result in a “monolithic tribalism” (186).

61 The designator ‘Commonwealth literature’ or ‘literature of Empire’ here places writings from the ‘margins’ only in relation to Empire and in contrast to ‘British literature’ as implicit norm and leads to literature being excluded from other denominators (MacPhee 72–73).
in the 1950s and were implied in such theories like New or Practical Criticism, which were steeped in universalist ideals of ‘culture’. Yet this unravelling of the cultural foundations of English Studies and of the belief in a ‘universal civilisation’ also meant a decrease in artistic autonomy.\textsuperscript{62} The 1960s and 70s, then, for Caribbean artists entailed more firmly established cultural networks, through such institutions like CAM, but increasing compartmentalisation, a more decisive shift from aesthetic to social ‘values’ of culture, which renders the field more restricted and less autonomous, more institutional support, but also more cultural conformity. Overall, a clear socio-cultural and -political ideological thrust in these decades was harder to discern than before and after (Riach, “Ways” 139). These elaborations that place black cultural politics in the larger cultural sphere also demonstrate that the “burden of representation”, Kobena Mercer’s key phrase to describe black British cultural production and the minority artist’s social responsibility (Welcome 91), was influenced by a variety of factors in the cultural field, such as sponsoring, aesthetic preferences, and literary patronage and cannot just be reduced to matters of race and ethnicity.

\textbf{3.3.3 Stooges and Figureheads: From Thatcher to New Labour}

The late twentieth century was marked by different, competing strands as regards aspirations to hegemony in society and culture, but three distinct, yet interrelated factors indicate a shift here. For once, substantial changes were heralded by the electoral victory of the Conservative government in 1979 with Margaret Thatcher as new Prime Minister and the end of the post-war consensus, which brought with it various changes both in the cultural sector, particularly in form of a corporatisation of literary publishing, and the privileging of certain cultural values. Further, shifts in critical theory, e.g. the rise of postcolonialism as a theoretical strand and critical practice, and the compartmentalisation of art and literature fostered in the 1960s and 70s led to an increasing unease regarding the essentialisms that surrounded (black) cultural production. Lastly, cultural production was also influenced by an overarching crisis discourse, extending from political crises such as the Falkland conflict, to economic crises of the early 1980s, industrial decline, and the connected collective sense of an overall ‘decline of Britain’ (Ebke 221–224), to a discourse of a crisis of authority within fiction which lead to more stylistic heterogeneity (Horton et al. 6).

The political context of Thatcherism (a neologism coined by Stuart Hall), as the British wing of a transatlantic New Right movement (Brooker, “Thatcherism” 77), also influenced artistic subjectivities and preferred representational modes, both directly through directions of fundings and through the emergence of cultural opposition to its policies. In abridged form, the

\textsuperscript{62} The Arnoldian outlook on culture and its emphasis on autonomy also changed after a generation of professors came of age who had participated in the student protests in the 1960s (MacPhee 75).
main tendencies that characterised the late 1970s onwards were mass appeal, a return to ‘traditional’ values, and what Procter calls ‘national shrinkage’ (‘Recalibrating’ 130). Thatcher’s aim to end “a culture of dependency in Britain” (Brooker, Literature 9–10) and the restructuring of the British economy also brought with it a rearrangement of the cultural sector. This saw literary publishing “change beyond recognition” (Horton et al. 6), where publishing shifted “from being led by the product to being led by the market” (9). In this vein, minority writers had difficulties to get access to mainstream publishers and for their work to be considered as ‘art’ (Fischer 103). Thatcherite ideology, even though never consistently phrased, moreover influenced the artistic space of possibles for Caribbean writers along several – sometimes paradoxical – axes. For once, both Thatcherism’s neoliberal logic and opposition to its ideological tenets led to a continuation of the image of the artist as ‘solitary genius’. The principles of competition and personal effort of course extended to the arts, too, where the economic base, as Stuart Sim states, determined the activities in the superstructure, and a society based on capitalist principles, fostering the notion of individualism, manifested in such images as “the heroic author, painter, composer, etc. communicating a personal vision” (443–444). Brooker pointedly phrases the manifestation of different artistic tendencies that were seemingly in conflict with each other: “At one extreme, writers have taken on a bardic role, presuming to speak for a whole people: officially, in England, with the post of Poet Laureate” (Literature 142). Artists were ascribed an important function in conveying and upholding tradition and speaking for a united Britain, yet at the same time, as Brooker shows with the example of the Royal Family, the ‘symbol’ of Britishness, and their subjection to spectacularisation within an increasingly voracious mass market and media landscape, icons and values of tradition and continuity were not exempt from the logics of the market, which led to a less deferential treatment of “the idea of Britain” (143). Indeed, as Brooker further notes in a 2014 article, the artistic world since the 1980s “displayed an in-built scepticism towards Thatcher”, favouring artists that were anti-Conservative in stance (“Thatcherism” 76).

63 Thatcher’s famous dictum “[t]here is no such thing [as society]! There are individual men and women, and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first” (Keay 10) stands emblematically for the major ideological factors that mark this era: the fostering of an atomised individualism, the valorisation of the private in preference to the welfare state, furthered by the reduction of government interference into all aspects of society, and an anti-collectivist stance and opposition to a sense of solidarity between communities (Walkowitz 223).

64 For a detailed analysis of publishing possibilities under Thatcherism, see, for instance James English (1–18) or Joseph Brooker (Literature). Christopher Bradley provides an overview over Thatcher’s cultural policies in general and looks at a variety of cultural sectors.

65 Bradley – who offers a mostly naïve, rather uncritical reading of the Thatcher years – pointedly summarises the effect of cultural policies under Thatcher for ethnic minorities in Britain: “Mrs Thatcher proposed that all of them should find satisfaction in a free and commercial cultural market-place”, where “those minority cultural practices that have commercial value can be integrated into mainstream white culture” (305), and, consequently, the larger minorities have a strategic advantage in an internationalised book market (321).
In resonance with postmodern dissolutions of grand traditions and narratives, the extension of the logics of the market to every area of existence and the concomitant desecration of sacrosanct notions in this sense also had an invigorating effect on artistic endeavours: Thatcherite ideology and its espousal of a ‘Little England’ tradition that valorises ‘English’ everyday life and its associated cultural practices and artefacts which must be protected against external influx (Bradley 366–367), as well as openly voiced racism and jingoism provided a backdrop to fashion one’s artistic habitus in opposition to the dominant order. The gaining of authority through assuming “a position of marginality and social dissidence rather than celebrating the given order” (Brooker, “Thatcherism” 76) thus continued an artistic tendency already begun with Romanticism. This interpellated writers into a position of opposition, where they, however, also traded on Thatcherism, “channelling its energies, even as they sought to criticise many of its effects” (77). Moreover, the marketing and prizing of minority literature, epitomised in the Man Booker Prize, yielded (a select few) literary heavyweights and celebrities like Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul. The rising mass appeal of fiction – after all, the Booker Prize was even televised, speaking to the increasing spectacularisation of literature – led, however, to a sense of a devaluation of ‘the literary’ (Horton et. al. 6–7). Further, the 1980s also witnessed an increasing differentiation between the various ‘literatures’ in Britain and their relation to each other, manifest in problems of nomenclature as regards the denominators English, British, Commonwealth, black British, and postcolonial literature (English 4), which by now all carry different implications and market values. In this increasing compartmentalisation, the few Caribbean artists who did make it faced an additional pressure to ameliorate the symptomatic “lack of access to dominant regimes of representation: political, journalistic, and artistic” (Procter, “Ethnicities” 104).

While the tendencies that predominantly marked earlier decades – that is, the increasing racialisation and concomitant necessity to fashion images of a ‘positive blackness’ as essential, strategic identity – continued until the end of the twentieth century and, arguably, until today, the 1980s saw a larger shift in the cultural field on many levels. A rise in nationalist sentiment and the further politicisation of race as well as notions of individualism that seeped from the realm of economy into all other areas of life constituted a context for artists in which the continuation of the representational politics that marked earlier decades became increasingly questioned. ‘Flexibility’, here, as part of the neoliberal agenda, becomes quasi-naturalised to Thatcherism and one of its “most cherished dicta” (Beaumont 55). Moreover, and by some

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66 This prizing was also undergirded by an ideological project, as the Booker prize as a “postcolonial” prize served to affirm London’s domination of the former colonies and to rehabilitate the colonial past (Horton et al. 10).

67 For the context of Caribbean writing and its increasing ‘professionalisation’, the founding of Peepal Tree Press as important outlet for Caribbean writers in 1986 is seminal here.
discussed as most influential ‘threat’ to artistic autonomy, as Rogers summarises (83–84), the 1980s now saw the conceptual framing and positioning of ‘multiculturalism’ as a didactical weapon, a “set of hollow rituals” resting on “overdetermined notions of race and ethnicity” (Rogers 118–119), to compensate political impassivity in the face of societal tensions. This was by no means a contradiction but constituted part of the neoliberal agenda, where a “benevolent multiculturalism”, as Rogers cites Rasheed Araeen, was no more than “a thinly veiled attempt to obscure ongoing racial discrimination at the hands of the state” (87). Attributing funds to black and Asian arts was now premised on the idea that they serve to ameliorate the social situation in the 1980s, i.e. an attempt to fund the ‘right’ sort of Caribbean and Asian artistic productions (Saunders 16–17), where artists now functioned as ‘henchmen’ for political failures. This resulted in a “reductive cultural sociology” that limited artistic themes to “half-baked sociological diagnoses of the 1981 uprisings and a stigmatisation of the Black community through favoured terms such as: ‘Problems of black youth’, ‘arranged marriages’, ‘conflict between first and second generation West Indians’, ‘youth and culture in Babylon’, ‘police harassment’” (Owusu 96). These tendencies imply the increasing market value of ‘multiculturalism’ that would go on to characterise the later ‘Cool Britannia’ years, but which was also palpable in the 1980s.

A further shift that proves relevant for the Caribbean artist narrative and artistic subjectivities from the 1970s onwards took place in critical discourse and literary and cultural theory itself. In the 1970s and 80s, ideas that are commonly labelled as poststructuralist, based on the works by French theorists like Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, or Jacques Derrida, had become more entrenched. In its challenge to “the very foundations of Enlightenment rationality” (Horton et al. 15), their work had a profound impact on cultural studies in Britain and the conception of identity categories: in its wake, differential factors like race or ethnicity were reconceived as socio-cultural and political constructs, which also entailed

68 I understand multiculturalism as both referring to a description of society, but also as a political programme to make cultural diversity institutionally manageable. While the term has different connotations and definitions, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis’s conceptualisation of it as an ideological approach seems helpful for describing the politics of in- and exclusion that it implies: “Multiculturalism constructs society as composed of a hegemonic homogeneous majority and small unmeltable minorities with their own essentially different communities and cultures which have to be understood, accepted and basically left alone […] in order for society to have harmonious relations” (158).

69 After the election victory of the Labour Party in 1997, support for diversity became an entrenched part of cultural politics and multiculturalism a “doctrine” (Balasubramanyam 33) that was crucial for Britain’s international ‘rebranding’ as liberal and cosmopolitan. As Procter states, difference had subsequently been “incorporated into New Labour’s hegemonic vision” as part of ‘cool Britannia’ (“Ethnicities” 113). Writers like Rajeev Balasubramanyam point to the element of social control inherent to these debates (33–42).

70 From the late 1960s onwards, these ideas were received in Britain under the aegis of Marxism, particularly its Althusserian reconstruction (Easthope 10). Antony Easthope is careful to distinguish the Anglo-American reception of French theory: thus, while British theory took its cue from Althusser and from there moved on to Lacan, in the United States it was Derrida and deconstruction that initially had the most profound effect (xiii). Derrida, in turn, was only discussed more profoundly in Britain from the late 1970s onwards (165).
an assault on the ‘authentic’ and “innocent notion of the essential black subject” (Hall, “Ethnicities” 443). Two essays in particular, Stuart Hall’s “New Ethnicities” (1989) and Kobena Mercer’s “Black Art and the Burden of Representation” (1990), interrogate the notion of ‘blackness’ and its signification for and within discourse and pinpoint – Hall explicitly, Mercer more implicitly – a gradual shift in British cultural politics. Mercer famously terms artists’ being subjected to a desire for “corrective inclusion”, i.e. “making present that which had been rendered absent” in official art history, the “burden of representation” (Welcome 234) and finds that “whether one is making a film, writing a book, organizing a conference or curating an exhibition, this ‘sense of urgency’ arises because of the cultural reproduction of a certain racism [which] structurally depends on the regulation of Black visibility in the public sphere” (235). According to Stuart Hall, cultural production in the 1980s then witnessed a shift from “a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself” (“Ethnicities” 442). Hall calls for a less rigid regime of representation, where artists would refuse to represent “the black experience in Britain as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilized and always ‘right-on’ – in a word, always and only ‘positive’” (449).

As these deconstructive aspects moved centre stage and were by no means limited to matters of race or ethnicity, but entailed the interrogation of all identity categories, the radicality with which issues of gender, sexuality, race, or class had been discussed in the 1960s and 70s waned under a “post-structuralist focus on multiple selfhood” (Horton 40). The artistic estrangement from radical politics in the last decades of the twentieth century was also influenced by the fact that these politics had been “stabilized around particular conceptions of black masculinity” (Hall, “Ethnicities” 446), which now was not just assailed by theoretical shifts such as the ‘death of the author’, but also through a rising textual authority of feminist and queer political and theoretical movements. What the shift in critical theory in the 1970s and 1980s then also entailed is a doubting of the power and authority of literature altogether (Horton et al. 14), as well as a constant occupation with matters of canon formation (Brooker, Literature 31). Hall’s statement in 1992 that “marginality, though it remains peripheral to the broader mainstream, has never been such a productive space as it is now” (“What” 24) also points towards multiculturalism’s entrenchment in the cultural – and economic – landscape in Britain that would become more pronounced with the ‘Cool Britannia’ era from the mid-1990s onwards and the Parekh report of 2000.71 In this vein, the last decades of the twentieth century saw artists uneasily situated in, as Mercer calls it, a “grey area of complicity” between “identity-driven demands for minority representation and market-based adaption to diversity” (Travel 61).

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4 Perspectives on the Artist: Towards an Ex-Centric Subject

These contextual deliberations form the basis for the following theoretical part of my study. From the discussions in chapter 2 and 3, three lacunae have emerged that this chapter will now address in order to reconceptualise the artist subject as it characterises the Caribbean artist novel. The first, and major, concerns the continuous essentialism that surrounds the artist theme in critical discussions. While enquiries into female artist novels have attempted to decentre the male artist subject, the notion of a bounded, fixed writing subject as objective and distant observer, with an identity – a ‘portrait’ – is largely retained. Even newer studies tend to emerge from a Cartesian concept of the subject that infers the artist figure as essential, as a coherent entity with timeless aims, goals, or desires. The second point concerns the largely unquestioned Eurocentricity of the genre and ‘the artist’ and the neglect of differential categories of race and ethnicity. The third desideratum relates to the status of sexual tropes in writing and its intersection with authorship, which, in the novels discussed, is largely reduced to a thematic feature without examining its function and specific structural manifestation.

These observations warrant a methodology to read the artist as emerging in relation to these concerns. I propose to conceive the wish to write foregrounded in these narratives as indicating the subject’s inherent lack and the artist figure as a nexus of and means to stage the incommensurable desires and demands that structure the social and literary public sphere in Britain, as elaborated on in the previous chapter, and thereby, from a broader perspective, to ponder the problem of representation as construction and mediation of experience, knowledge, or ‘the world’ in general. What I am, then, interested in is the negotiation of different artistic subjectivities that emerge in these novels through the adoption of different sexed, gendered, raced, or classed identity scripts. I here specifically consider processes of self-fashioning and the reflection upon the same as crucial ingredient to the Anglo-Caribbean novel’s engagement with the artist novel tradition. In the following, I provide the theoretical grounds to conceive the artist subject as emerging in relation to historically discoursivised gendered and raced structures and to the discursive ‘offers’ in the symbolic order, i.e. the socio-cultural sphere, before chapter 5 enquires into the textual structures of desire and the specific artistic fantasies that provide means to negotiate these inscriptions and answer the Other’s desire.

4.1 An Other Portrait: Beyond ‘Identity’

A more differentiated account of the artist subject must necessarily emerge from the issue of an essentialised ‘identity’ so prevalent in Caribbean – and postcolonial – literary criticism. As the elaborations on the literary field have shown, agency in the field is disseminated on to various actors, such as the author, the reader, market, or others, and I here provide the grounds to
enquire into the subject positions that emerge from these entanglements. As this terminology indicates and as I have stated in chapter 3, my thesis aims to bring together the possible artistic position-takings in Bourdieu’s cultural field with Jacques Lacan’s notion of the subject as transindividual unconscious. This combination seems especially fruitful, as the premise of Lacan’s subject formation is that the subject emerges in and through language, which, “with its structure, exists prior to each subject’s entry into it” (Écrits 413). Because ‘language’, in this understanding, extends to all forms of symbolic representation, this implies that both the discourses that structure the literary field as well as recursive literary structures, like those of the genre of the Künstlerroman, can likewise be conceived in this way and as constitutive of the author subject. This understanding also transcends notions of Caribbean authors writing between a seemingly ‘stable’, yet for them foreclosed idea of Britishness and the “radical instability of the Caribbean as a cultural domain” (Paquet, Caribbean 8). Therefore, I consider the artist figure as an ex-centric subject rather than a coherent, timeless, conscious individual, in the sense of Descartes’s sum res cogitans (Burke 96), and as emerging in relation to an Other, i.e. the symbolic field of literature and socio-cultural discourses in Britain and the Caribbean, and always only provisionally ‘whole’ through identifications with particular images, more specifically in my case, the artistic idea(l)s and mythemes as well as gendered and raced scripts that influence and serve to probe an artistic subjectivity in this field.  

As both gendered invisibility as well as creational myths infer white masculinity, it is necessary and insightful to enquire into how the privileged factor of masculinity intersects with the ‘marked’ factor of race in Caribbean artistic subject formation. I here follow Ingo Berensmeyer’s urge that “[a]ny gender-related reflection on the semantics of cultural creativity also has to involve rethinking gendered myths about literary authorship” (159). While I will focus on the myths of gendered creation as they are cited in the Caribbean artist narrative in more detail in chapter 5, for now it is first important to map out masculinity and femininity, as intricately tied to notions of creativity, as positionalities within the symbolic order and within cultural production – in short, how authorship, or, broader, artistry, is organised via sexed

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72 Lacan’s theories do not exist as a systematic record but almost exclusively as transcriptions of his seminars between 1953 and 1973 as well as Écrits (1997). Not all of these are yet published in book form or translated.  
73 The suitability of Lacan’s theories for a postcolonial context has been hotly debated. He is often reproached for either his tentativeness on matters of race or the indebtedness of his theories to Freud, whose conception of the “less developed psychic lives of ‘savages’” was refuted by Lacan for the notion of developmental growth it implies and not outspokenly for its inherent racism (George & Hook 2). As Doris Feldmann summarises such criticisms: “Many critics argue that Lacan and his disciples do not sufficiently recognize the often contradictory struggles for individuation in different racial, class and gender groups” (“Mirror Stage” 26). Acknowledging these caveats, I concur with Sheldon George and Derek Hook’s assessment that his theories, nevertheless, provide a sophisticated means of attesting to the illusionary nature of race and racialised subjectivities through a focus on the unconscious forces that underlie identifications (1).
difference (Feldmann & Schülting, “Gender” 244) – and the respective positions of power that are taken up and refused by means of narrative. In a second step, I connect these notions to race.

As I emerge from the premise that the subject is constituted in relation to the Other’s desire and thus in language, I will focus my deliberations on gendered subjectivity on insights from psychoanalysis and narratology to show how, with Stefan Horlacher, masculinity emerges as a narrative structure operating “between subject position, gender relations, and a misrecognition of the self” (200; my translation). This brings us back to the ‘ex-centric’ subject as, in Lacanian terms, no longer self-sufficient or ‘autonomous’ “as it is constructed in the tradition of philosophy, that is to say, as corresponding to consciousness, to the conscious cogito”, but “structured around a radical split, a radical lack (Stavrakakis, “Peripheral” 1041) and always ‘outside’ of itself.74 Conceiving the subject in this way is not meant to imply that the texts do always support this notion: while some novels endorse a view of the subject as plural andcentred via their artist figures, others strive towards reinstalling a unified artistic subject and overtly maintain a belief in a conscious subject and authorial self-realisation. While an in-depth discussion of Lacanian theories on the subject is beyond the scope of this study, for my purpose, I conceive of the Caribbean artist narrative’s portrayed desire to write as a literary manifestation of the lack that structures being and which is thus indicative of the specific “discourse about the Other” (Lacan, Écrits 689) that the subject ‘speaks’.75

This is founded on the psychoanalytic insight that lack is constitutive of the subject and caused through its introduction to language, the discourse of the Other, adnascent with both the symbolic order and the unconscious as realm of language and culture (Burke 96), which is structured on difference. Based on Saussure’s structuralism, Lacan conceives of the unconscious, like language, as a dynamic system of differences between signifiers (Evans 100). The most ‘notorious’ among the signifiers in this discursive web are what Lacan calls ‘master signifiers’ – ideological symbols which organise all other floating signifiers and the desire of subjects and society – in Žižek’s terms: “an embodiment of a certain lack” and “pure difference […] perceived as Identity (Sublime 99; original emphasis). As privileged signifiers, they anchor the chain of signification (they ‘quilt’ it) and integrate and normalise, but are themselves void of essence in certain discourses. In the context of the Caribbean artist narrative, such master signifiers, this study assumes, are, for instance, ‘Britishness’, ‘whiteness’, or ‘real man’. Of course these master signifiers also undergo historical change, and as such ‘blackness’ itself, for

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74 For Lacan, the subject emerges in a relational matrix between imaginary, symbolic, and real registers, which constitutes a break with the concept as it has been understood since Descartes, i.e. as existing prior to language.
75 Lacan’s famous dicta “[t]he unconscious is structured like a language” (On Feminine Sexuality 15) and “(the) discourse about the Other” (Écrits 689) outlines the similarities between desire and language and the latter’s subsumption under the rules of the Law – in Lacan’s terms, “there is no metalanguage that can be spoken” (688). In other words, the subject does not speak (about) itself, but the Other’s discourse.
instance, can also take on the role of a master signifier in the context of a more politicised discourse of artistic creation within the niche of Caribbean literature and literary criticism.

In Lacan’s recourse to Freud, the entry into this order, the formation of a “social I” (Lacan, *Écrits* 79; original emphasis), takes place with the foreclosure of the child’s desire for the maternal body, which also entails relinquishing the pre-Oedipal state of unity, presence, and undifferentiation, and a form of enjoyment – jouissance – associated with this wholeness. It is initiated by the father’s intervention in this symbiosis, the ‘NO’, or ‘Name-of-the-father’ as first dictum that represents the Law and difference, and the child’s acceptance of the same as interdicting its desire for the mother (Evans 122). This is, of course, not to be taken as literal, as the father serves as the “representational agent of separation” (Ragland-Sullivan 55) who effects a “symbolic castration [...] which derails the ‘natural’ circuit of our needs” (Žižek, *Tarrying* 3) and, as fundamental signifier, “permits signification to proceed normally” (Evans 122). In the wake of this symbolic castration, the subject is established as ‘split’ and accepts its place in what could be termed the hegemonic social order. The symbolic dimension is analogous to the social world as regulated by laws and structures, the ‘rules of the game’, as Žižek frames it (*How to Read* 8–9), i.e., in my thesis, those larger, trans-individual discourses permeating society and the literary field that inform artistic production and the artist’s role.

Emerging from the dictum that “‘I’ is an other” (Lacan, *Écrits* 96), an important first observation for conceptualising the author in the artist narratives is that the author protagonist must not be understood as a fictionalised individual, which, in the case of the Caribbean novel, is often inferred and posited as emblematic of a ‘Caribbean identity’, and much less as bearing any semblance to the external author, nor his ‘speech’ as the speech of an individual but, as language speaks and thinks the subjects, consider it as an “effect of the signifier” (Burke 96). As the symbolic is “essentially a linguistic dimension” (Evans 203), the je, as subject of language, comes into play as a grammatical position and gains its meaning only as such and in relation to other positions, such as the ‘you’ (Lacan, *Freud’s Papers* 166). This implies that the ‘I’ of the artist narrative, in which first-person narration prevails, is an instance of discourse, its position determined by its relation to speech (80), and to be conceived as a placeholder in which different desires of the Other as well as responses to these cross and overlap. Through

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76 The ‘Law’ in Lacan (herein capitalised), imposed by the father in the Oedipus complex, “refers not to a particular piece of legislation, but to the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations” (Evans 101).
77 Drawing on Roman Jakobson, Lacan sees the “je”, the ‘I’ of first-person narrative as a “shifter”, as designating “the subject insofar as he is currently speaking”, that is, as “the subject of the enunciation, but it does not signify it” (*Écrits* 677) – in other words, it does not allow a conclusion as to what it is. As, for Lacan, the je as subject of language is “born through the reference to the you, and [...] this takes place within a relation in which the other shows him, what? – orders, desires, which he must recognise, his father’s, mother’s, educators’, or his peers’ and mates” (*Freud’s Papers* 166; original emphasis), it intervenes in the moi’s complete narcissistic identification with the specular image.
imaginary identifications that are probed to achieve a (illusory) semblance of self-presence and a coherent self (the Lacanian moi), the subject reacts to the primordial loss, i.e. the loss of the Thing (das Ding), the prohibited object of an incestuous desire (Lacan, Ethics 53; 67), which is the realm of the real as that which is lacking in the symbolic and irrepresentable by a signifier. The imaginary realm is structured by a duality of ego and image which, in Lacan’s theory of psychosexual development, corresponds to the mirror stage. Here, an “‘ideal-I’” (Lacan, Écrits 76) is formed through the identification with and internalisation of a specular image that precedes the ‘social I’, which, however, only yields an “orthopedic” form of totality and wholeness and is implicated in “secondary identifications” (76). Through these identifications, the ‘I’ is granted the semblance of permanence, but, as the image is conditioned by exteriority, it is also a priori alienated (76).

Conceiving of the subject thus as inherently ‘split’ is not meant to perpetuate the split that characterises discussions of the artist in literary history, but rather to provide an analytic tool to enquire into the predominance of this notion in literature and literary criticism. This allows me to attest to the formation of a literary subjectivity as an interminable process of identification with (masculine) artistic ideals that sustain writing and to their function as exposing the lack in the Other, i.e. the ideological incongruencies that structure the socio-cultural order. Approaching the author subject in such an anti-essentialist notion of subjectivity is particularly apt for a Caribbean context, as it also circumvents the subject’s reinscription into a “Western metaphysical conceptual tradition” (Azari 9). It also renders artistic types as outlined in chapter 2, such as the poeta vates or Romantic genius, readable as imaginary projections.

4.2 Phallic Identifications in the Nexus of Gender and Race

The subject, in psychoanalysis, is then difference, and the primordial form of it relates to sexuation as a kind of formal a priori condition for the very emergence of the subject, which distinguishes it from the subject of philosophy (Žižek, Less 747). The subject comes to be inscribed into this difference through its entry into language, which helps me to conceive of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ not as tied to biological notions of ‘men’ and ‘women’, i.e. in

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78 Lacan’s real constitutes an excess of speech that is tied to the ‘real’ body and its drives. For writing, this might refer to that which is not (yet) able to be made manifest in language, and it often surfaces in instances where the author’s body is foregrounded as a substitute for speech. Such instances indicate a break of the symbolic and/or the subject’s desire to return to the pre- or post-symbolic, i.e. to a before or an after the letter, which is characterised by impasses and impossibilities in the symbolic order (Fink, Lacanian Subject 27). Louis-Paul Willis here argues that the real in representation might manifest as anamorphic stain, as a distortion of the image of reality, an emptiness that can only be reconstructed, or the real ‘itself’, as an obscene, excremental, taboo object (234), which makes the real legible as conspicuous absence, the representation of a transgression, or an absolute otherness.

79 While Lacan here specifically theorises the child’s ego formation through identification with the specular image, taking place around the age of six to eighteen months, it is crucial that he later rephrases the mirror stage as a continuous process of subject formation, a “timeless structure of the dual relationship” (Evans 42).
their empirical or anatomical sense, but as linguistic and psychological subject positions that operate on the metaphor of sexual difference and are manifest as different narrative structures and speech patterns that imply different relations to power. As Drucilla Cornell phrases it, Lacan’s theory “demonstrates that women, as well as men, are masculine insofar as they enter the symbolic” (63). The gendered identity produced thereby “as a system […] is produced imperfectly. Gender identity is only ever bounded by historically contingent circumstances” (63). In this sense, the relinquishing of the maternal supplement “produces a cultural narrative, a fiction of male superiority and potency” (Rutherford 121). Horlacher concludes from this that the “master narratives of masculinity”, such as the “self-made-man” or “masculine achiever” constitute a defence against the maternal supplement (220; emphasis removed). In this context, the notion of upward mobility through authorship in the artist novel can also be understood as an attempt to establish masculinity and defend against feminisation, a fact that renders interesting the emphasis on failure and stasis the artist novels foreground.

More specifically, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as positions differ in, even emerge through their relation to the phallic signifier. The latter, no longer conceived of as an actual penis as in Freud’s theory, is an instance that creates meaning, as “emblem of the signifier par excellence precisely because its only presence is a dismembered absence – deferred, concealed, and buried” (Payne 91). But because the phallus is closely associated with the male sex, it figures as a symbol of potency, of tumescence and detumescence (Widmer 71), and the reduction of ‘phallus’ to ‘penis’ leads to an association of biological masculinity with power, which is, however, in need of constant production and proof through the enactment of gendered scripts, oriented on stereotypes of masculinity (Horlacher 223). Thus, the phallus as locus of power allows a reading of its possession as not predicated on biological notions of ‘male’ or ‘female’, but as a structure that suggests coming into and sustaining power. In this view, masculinity is just one, but the “universal function founded upon the phallic exception (castration)”, whereas woman is “not-all” (Evans 222). This last point has yielded much controversy in feminist theory, but it serves to emphasise masculinity for once as the dominant position in a symbolic hierarchy of power, which is based on cultural convention (Horlacher 223), and secondly to understand that

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80 The notion of the ‘phallus’ in Lacanian theory is notoriously debated. With regard to the emergence of the phallus as privileged signifier, Fink states that in Western and many other cultures, while there could be other concepts to take this role, clinical observation has yielded this signifier as prime “signifier of desire” (Lacanian Subject 102). Especially in feminist theory, the insistence on the division of phallus/penis has left many unconvinced. Jane Gallop, for instance, discusses the Lacanian claim that the phallus is a signifier only, albeit a privileged one, in Thinking Through the Body (1988) and points out that while “the signifier phallus functions in distinction from the signifier penis […] it also always refers to penis” (126; original emphasis), and this link undoubtedly exists. Judith Butler provides the most helpful discussion here. Recognising at once the indubitable link between the concepts but also the fragility of the phallus as privileged signifier, she states that “[t]he ‘structure’ by which the phallus signifies the penis as its privileged occasion exists only through being instituted and reiterated, and, by virtue of that temporalization, is unstable and open to subversive repetition” (90).
‘woman’, in this concept, is, contrary to masculinity, that which is not fully circumscribed by the symbolic order: it describes a series of differences which the symbolic fails to completely embrace, that which cannot be uttered by language as it cannot be captured by the limiting, delineating, confining processes the symbolic operates with – “woman is where no limit intervenes to inhibit the progressive unfolding of signifiers” (Copjec, Read 226). The masculine position, in Lacan’s graph of sexuation, describes a complete determination by the phallus, i.e. alienation within language, and being “altogether subject to symbolic castration” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 106). As such, the identification with the symbolic father, as possessor of the phallus and uncastrated, yields the masculine subject as one of méconnaissance, as “misrecogniz[ing] itself as being whole and complete of itself” as a defence against the subject’s ontological lack, which allows it to assume a position of masculine mastery (Campbell, Lacan 68–69). But through this complete determination, the ‘masculine’ is also defined by a restriction of enjoyment, with the only possible form remaining being phallic jouissance. As it “covers or poses an obstacle to the supposed sexual relationship” (Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality 7), phallic jouissance, in a figurative sense, operates to keep the existing order in place.

As this suggests that a masculine structure, as “finite with respect to the symbolic register” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 106), is that which is congruent with symbolic demands, we can draw conclusions for artistic position-taking in the domain of literary authorship as a realm of power. For the artist novel, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ positions can be distinguished with regard to the correspondence to the dominant regime of representation in each period, e.g. in form of realism, an emphasis on the folk, or the envisioning of an emancipatory notion of ‘blackness’. A masculine subject position in this conception manifests as order, linearity, conformity, limitation (Copjec, Read 231). Conversely, occupying a feminine subject position can also exalt the writing subject by providing a position of alterity and distinction to the order. These elaborations allow me to attest to formations of masculinity in the Künstlerroman and artistic work as gendered practice in more nuanced terms by transcending traditional Gender Studies approaches, which remain attached to the representational dimension of gender roles and relations and neglect the libidinous aspect as well as masculinity/femininity as speech patterns. As this implies that masculinity is not a being, but a doing, it is thus constructed and legible through practices of self-fashioning and its (de)construction visible on the level of language.

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81 In this sense, woman’s ‘not-all’ means that she is not fully subject to phallic castration and the Oedipus complex and possesses a surplus jouissance, the ‘secret’ to an excessive enjoyment. It is marked by “surplus declarations of existence that caused conflict […] [and] are silenced on the male side” (231), and interpretable as narrative digressions, inhibited speech, or any instance where order and thus sense-making is disturbed. This is also the point where post-Lacanian feminist theories begin, by, for instance, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, or Hélène Cixous, which conceive of the feminine as that which disrupts, that which never coheres with the symbolic order but undermines it.
Lastly, as sexual difference is “the ultimate limit of knowledge”, “reducible to neither nature nor culture” but emerging “at their intersection” (Homer 103), enquiring into negotiations of authorship as staging sexual difference also entails enquiring into processes of knowledge production, with which the artist novel and the artist as figure is centrally concerned.

Yet while subjectivity always proceeds from the notion of sexual difference as basic structure of thought, artistic and masculine self-fashioning must also be thought in relation to race, which both constitutes a thematic dimension in the artist novel and operates similar to sex and gender as a fundamental difference through which the subject experiences its being. The generic mode of the Künstlerroman engages the notion of a white, British, and to some extent middle-class universality as structuring artistic subject formation but dismantles it as, to use Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks words, as “a totality, a fullness that masquerades in being” (45) and exposes the historicity of these categories. From a psychoanalytic point of view, race as psychosocial construct, like gender, contains a discursive dimension, which here operates via the aforementioned (colonial) fantasies, such as the ‘primitive’, ‘threatening’, or ‘hypersexual’ ‘other’. This point is most prominently argued by Frantz Fanon, whose Black Skin, White Masks (1953) comments on Lacan’s mirror stage and states that where the social mirror reflects an ideal of whiteness, the black subject as ‘other’ is then perceived as “not-self”, “unidentifiable, the unassimilable” (161). Fanon’s famous scene of encountering the racialising gaze – “Look, a Negro!” (109) – illustrates how this causes the subject’s corporeal schema to crumble (112), i.e. the subject’s being thrown back to a corps morcelé.

While Lacanians are torn as to whether sex is the only ‘real’ difference and whether classed, ethnic, and racial difference do or do not precede the symbolic, a point critics seem to share, no matter their position on the determination of race by the symbolic, is that ‘race’, similar to sex, structures and fuels desire and also contains an excess form of jouissance (Tuhkanen 101). Subject formation, Lacan already maintains, does not follow a universal structure, because the “symbolic universe […] is not the same for everyone” but “[t]radition and language diversify the reference to the subject” (Freud’s Papers 197). Wayne Wapeemukwa has, in this regard, provided a differentiated reading of the Oedipal complex for

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82 Race, in turn, is intricately intertwined with ‘class’. For once, in the artist narrative, the ideological investments of class are visible, for example, in the stereotype of the artist as bohemian who seemingly stands outside a bourgeois order or of the Caribbean artist as interpellated as spokesman for the ‘folk’. In Britain, race and class came to be increasingly intertwined after Windrush and in the context of a racialisation of immigration. Stuart Hall et al. and Paul Gilroy phrase this intersection most pointedly by stating that the notion of a national crisis in post-war Britain was “lived through a sense of ‘race’” (Gilroy, Small 23; emphasis removed) and race has come to be “the modality in which class is lived” and “the medium in which class relations are experienced” (Hall et al. 386).

83 Cf. for instance Jean Copjec, who describes the distinction between these as follows: “sexual difference is unlike racial, class or ethnic differences. While these differences are inscribed in the symbolic sexual difference is not: only the failure of its inscription is marked in the symbolic. […] It is always a sexed subject who assumes each racial, class, or ethnic identity” (Read 207).
colonised societies, where he draws among others on Frantz Fanon, Octave Mannoni, and Jacques Lacan. With Lacan, he argues that in a colonial setting an “Indigenous Symbolic is supplanted by one which is non-autochthonous” (90). This to some extent applies to a diasporic one as well, where the system is, however, not supplanted, but the subject enters an ‘other’ symbolic order. This aspect is crucial for the transmission of a literary tradition from ‘father’ to ‘son’, and Wapeemukwa here refers to Lacan’s reading of Joyce, another colonised subject: where castration implies the transmission of the phallus from father to son (Lacan, Sinthome 164), in Joyce’s case, “it is not the father but the colonizer who performs this function of transmission” (Wapeemukwa 92; original emphasis). One can find a similar idea in Stuart Hall, who states that due to its “complex paternities common to all slave societies of ‘real’ black fathers and ‘symbolic’ white ones”, resulting in what he terms “son-fixated mothers and mother-fixated sons”, the Caribbean “‘lives out’ the loss of social power by substituting an aggressively phallocentred ‘black manhood’” (“Why Fanon” 353). This then also complicates negotiations of masculinity as well as filial structures of literary authority for the Caribbean subject and resonates with the emphasis on the (metaphorical) phallus in the novels.

Two aspects regarding subject formation in the intersection of sex and race are then particularly insightful for my study. For once, in line with the ambiguity of the symbolic universe for the racialised subject, race, specifically whiteness as master signifier, can assume the function of filling the “constitutive lack of the sexed subject”, as it promises access to the ‘self’ and offers “the prestige of being better and superior”, that is, “more human, more full, less lacking” (Seshadri-Crooks 7). In terms of the intersection with class, a middle-class whiteness, or at least ‘light-skinned-ness’ then comes to occupy the position of the phallus. This also manifests in speech patterns, where ‘masculine’ speaking in the British socio-cultural realm was conceived by Caribbean immigrants as involving “a factual logic of speech, action and analysis, which was its own morality, and a linearity of process and protocol”, and is best exemplified in Westminster politics (Forbes 47), which also echoes the Caribbean masculine politics of ‘respectability’, as sketched above.

Secondly, racial difference is not just to be seen in the context of symbolic crisis but can also constitute an ‘enabling’ factor for the artist subject, in form of negotiating subjecthood as part of an ‘imagined community’ of racial and ethnic belonging. Mikko Tukhanen, in

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84 While Wapeemukwa writes on Indigenous peoples in Pennsylvania, his findings are insightful for subject formation under race in a British context as well.

85 C.L.R. James’s comments in Beyond a Boundary on the intricacies of intra-racial divisions in the West Indies, where class is a crucial factor, are insightful here: “between the brown-skinned middle class and the black there is a continual rivalry, distrust and ill-feeling, which, skilfully played upon by the European peoples, poisons the life of the community. Where so many crosses and colours meet and mingle the shades are naturally difficult to determine and the resulting confusion is immense” (51).
elaborating on Sheldon George’s psychoanalytic theory of racial identity, posits that blackness can function “to cover over the primordial split in the subject” and, like whiteness, serve to “articulate the lost, alienated core of being for the subject” (99). This becomes particularly prevalent with a shift in cultural discourse in the 1960s and 70s and an increasing politicisation of blackness as well as within the niche marketing of postcolonial and Black British literature, where (a homogenised form of) blackness arguably becomes a master signifier itself that is aspired to in order to gain literary authority. To understand the foregrounding of writing and/as sexual conquest in the Caribbean artist narrative in its racialised dimension, another factor in the coloniser/colonised psychology is here important. The acceptance of the castration complex and the surmounting of the Oedipal conflict is complicated in a colonial context through the ossification of people into things and the inscription of the male, racialised ‘other’ as both feared and desired, which renders him both the phallus itself and the sufferer of the coloniser’s threat of castration (Wapeemukwa 86–87). The discursive hypersexualisation of the racial ‘other’ in Britain can then be understood as resulting from the ambivalent status of intense desire and the fear of not having but being the phallus. Because, as per its definition, the phallus is always absent, the racialised subject here occupies a singular position in white discourse: it constitutes the “material supplement or signifier, as that which must be possessed in order to validate the dominant subject’s putative possession of the phallus” and must therefore “endure a symbolic inscription corresponding to that of the female body” – that is, it must “‘be’ the ‘phallus’ so that the dominant subject can ‘have’ it” (Edelman 47). Conversely, the racial ‘other’ also constitutes an object of desire, as seemingly invested with, for instance, greater potency or, in the context of the ‘birth’ of Caribbean literature and the perceived creative stagnation in the literary sphere in the 1950s in Britain in particular (Wyndham 122), also greater literary creativity. Wapeemukwa clarifies what can be described here as manifestations of alterity and the disavowal of the ‘other’ in the ‘self’ by emphasising that the coloniser’s threat is ultimately “suicidal, since the Black phallus is nothing but a shibboleth of white jouissance” (87). As such, the emphasis on the phallus in the Caribbean artist novel, often in displaced, but also in its literal form, then can serve as both as an expression of the negotiation of a ‘colonial castration’, but also as a revelling in the power of being the phallus within white discourse and thereby to reflect and expose the dominant subject’s dependence on the ‘other’. Considering the artist’s positionality in the British cultural field, these different ways of relating to the ‘white’ symbolic

86 For a critical reassessment of Copjec’s and Seshadri-Crooks’s assessments as well as Seshadri-Crooks’s and George’s positions sketched here see Tuhkanen (96–105).
87 Frantz Fanon has elaborated in detail on the petrification of colonised subjects and emphasises particularly the black man’s reduction to a fetish: “[H]e [the black man] has been occulted. He has been turned into a penis. He is a penis” (170; original emphasis).
order then manifest in the novels in different ways of positing and negotiating a racialised artistic ‘being’ – ranging from a complete de-emphasis of racial or ethnic difference to race or ethnicity as strategically claimed aspect of alterity.

4.3 Observed Observers: The Artist as Narcissistic Subject

As these elaborations have already touched upon, the gaze is of crucial importance for forms of identification, and it is also a notion that the artist narratives saliently foreground, which is why at this point, a brief excursus to the relevance of subject formation through the gaze, as it relates to imaginary identifications, is necessary. As intertwined with structures of power, the gaze, in distinction to the ‘eye’, is always the Other’s gaze, never the subject’s. The eye, here, refers to the subject’s ‘seeing’ whereas the gaze is on the side of the object (Evans 73) – Lacan describes the “pre-existence” of the gaze in Seminar XI with the famous example of the sardine tin which, glittering in the sunlight, ‘gazes’ at the subject and unsettles it in its self-conception (Four 95): “In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. […] [T]hat gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which […] I am photographed” (Four 106; original emphasis). Every object can thus be the carrier of the gaze and simultaneously that which resists objectification. With this “inside-out structure of the gaze” (Feldmann, “Mirror Stage” 22), the division of the subject is ‘translated’ onto the field of vision (Evans 73). While the gaze is culturally inherently masculine-connoted and implied in the formation of sexual hierarchies, as Laura Mulvey’s Visual and Other Pleasures (1989) and Kaja Silverman’s Male Subjectivity at the Margins (1992) demonstrate, attesting to this ‘split’ will serve to provide a more nuanced look at conceptions of masculinity in the novels.

With the focus on an artist protagonist, the texts interpolate an additional order of observation that distinguishes this genre form others. As processes of observing – as a prerequisite for writing and becoming-author – constitute a core concern of these narratives, through the artist figure, both the observing self and the reflection of the creational process move centre stage. This heightened focus on creation as self-reflexive process is best framed with Linda Hutcheon’s concept of a ‘narcissistic narrative’. In 1980, Hutcheon draws on the notion of narcissism to describe “process made visible” (6), that is, literature’s increasing tendency to foreground the observation of artistic processes by either overtly referencing the

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88 Joan Copjec has proposed to read the fragmentation of ‘photo-graph’ by a hyphen as an emphasis of the semiotic structure of the visual, that is, the emphasis on ‘graph’ relates the visual to writing and gives the latter primacy in “lending things sense” (“Orthopsychic” 68–69).

89 I use the term, in concordance with Hutcheon, not in a pejorative sense, nor as a characteristic of author, narrators, or characters, but as a description of a textual mode, as an “ironic allegorical reading of the Narcissus myth” (1). Wherever I speak of ‘narcissistic’ in the following, this is not meant to evaluate but to emphasise the self-awareness of writing within and against particular myths, expressed in self-observation. Like the mythical Narcissus, the novels fictionalise a gazing of the artist at himself and his function.
text’s “diegetic or linguistic identity” through thematic allusions, or through pointing in covert fashion towards the text’s “linguistic constitution” (7). These elements are crucial components of the Caribbean Künstlerroman as well and are helpful to attest to how the texts reflect on their own aesthetic constitution and narrative construction and in this anticipate and guide their own reception. In doing so, they oscillate between covert – in Hutcheon’s terms self-reflective – forms of self-referentiality, as internalising problems of writing, reading, and language without necessarily commenting on them, and more overt – self-conscious – forms, in which these problems are usually explicitly commented on or present in form of allegory (7).

Yet ‘narcissism’, in my understanding in this thesis, has another dimension and refers not only to the texts’ ‘mirroring’ of their own constitution and coming into being.90 In line with Lacan, I propose that the cited mythemes of literary history that serve to negotiate coming into writing (chapter 5) take on the form of imaginary identifications, of an ‘ideal-I’ and introduce another dimension of narcissism by plunging the subject into constant ‘self’-mirroring in its identification with authorial models. The notion of the ‘gaze’ as component in subject formation is most central to the novels. Like in the mirror stage, where the “specular image” precipitates the ‘I’ in its primordial form prior to the subject’s coming into being through language (Écrits 76–77), the desiring text foregrounds the artist’s attempts at exerting visual power or his being subject to scopophilia as a simulacrum to writing and being read. The fictionalized attempts to master and turn others – or the self – into literary material and infuse them with significance and patterns of meaning serve to negotiate literary authority, as through structures of gazing in particular different gendered, raced, classed or other power structures come into focus. Yet, in line with the subject probing its own wholeness through specular identifications, it also allows insights into the perceived compatibility of the invoked literary and masculine models. Most importantly, these processes are intricately connected to searching for (modes of representing) ‘truth’, which is often foreclosed altogether, and to forms of creating and negotiating knowledge.

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90 In the Caribbean artist novel, metafictional aspects appear sometimes in explicit form, but most often in what could with Wiele be termed “Fiktionsironie” (34). In this sense, my study employs a rather broad term of ‘metafiction’, as characterised by Arno Löffler et al. as instances where the practice of narrating becomes the subject of narration: “Metafiktion liegt immer dann vor, wenn das Erzählen Gegenstand des Erzählens wird und damit seinen unbewussten oder ‘selbstverständlichen’ Charakter einbüßt” (113).
5 Fantasies of Creation: The Aesthetics of the Anglo-Caribbean Künstlerroman

Having thus conceptualised the artist subject, this chapter now maps the distinct identificatory models, i.e. myths and mythemes of the Künstlerroman genre, via which subject positions with regard to the demands within the socio-cultural sphere are negotiated. That is, where chapter 4 has focused on the subject in the nexus of gender, sex, and race, this chapter is interested in the narrative structures that underlie the portrayal of the artist subject and the desire to write. It conceives the Caribbean artist narrative as a desiring, or fantasmatic, text that cites structures and patterns of the Künstlerroman genre and thereby creates its own literary ‘genre’, but in its refraction also questions its underlying epistemological frameworks. “Myths of creativity”, Sabine Schülting states in a review in 2012, “represent a fascinating field of research that has only just begun to be charted” (138), and this study understands itself as a contribution to this field and as providing the important, but as of yet lacking angle of postcolonial, respectively Caribbean, engagements of this theme. To fathom the ‘fantasmatic narrative’ as a narrative that makes desire legible, it is first necessary to transfer the insights on the subject to an understanding of ‘text’ as it characterises the Caribbean artist novel.

5.1 Conceptualising the Fantasmatic Narrative

As the artist narrative is centrally concerned with coming into authorship, the desire to write and to have one’s symbolic capital recognised which the novels fictionalise render the text for once openly about desire. That is, this desire and its substitutes are expressed as thematic concern, in the thematic cluster of writing, reading, (literary) criticism, education, or the function of language, a cluster that is paralleled by and often rendered through the wish for sexual initiation or conquest, through gender relations, or the negotiation of sexual difference. Secondly, and in line with my theorising of the artist subject as essentially marked by lack, the text is also driven by subliminal structures of desire that do not necessarily correspond to the desires voiced by narrators or characters, i.e. it is a desiring text.91 Through its narcissistic structure, the Künstlerroman is both subject to and stages structures of desire and questions the ideologies that underlie the genre and its focus on the formation of an artistic self. Regarding ideologies of authorship, the market, and masculinity that influence representation, enquiring into structures of desire, as the “non-representative representative” (Lacan, Four 218), that which indicates a need (e.g. to write, to establish a coherent ‘self’) but is not representative of

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91 Cf. on the ‘desiring text’ Helga Gallas’s notion of ‘Textbegehren’, where she distinguishes manifest desire from the desire that dominates the text subliminally and advances it without the subject’s control over it: “Darunter ist ihr [die Sprache] manifestes Gehalt zu verstehen, mit Mitteilungs- und Kommunikationsfunktion, und ihr latenter Gehalt, wo durch die inhaltliche Eben der Sprache hindurch das Begehren des Subjekts sich artikuliert, ohne daß dieses sich Herr über den so sich (ent)äußernden Sinn wähnt” (259).
a specific, intelligible need, provides a means to analyse the struggles with representation that are foregrounded in the novels. Reading the Caribbean artist narrative as desiring text is most apt to enquire into its aesthetic as well as political dimensions, and, based on the conceptualisations in chapter 4, the following subchapters will now conceptualise the artist novel as a ‘desiring’ or ‘erotic text’, that is, as a text that stages the demands of the literary field as the Other’s desire and answers to these in form of fantasy.

‘Erotic’, in this understanding, takes on a double meaning: it not only refers to representations of ‘the erotic’, although that too, is an integral part of the Caribbean artist narrative, but also to an emphasis on the text’s awareness of and struggle against its own rules and the foregrounding of ideological gaps. In this sense, like the subject, the text is marked by lack, expressed by the desire to write. Richard Moriarty’s definition is helpful here: “texts are erotic”, he claims, “whatever their subject-matter, when their effects are comparable to erotic experience”, that is, when a text “suspends our sense of ourselves as unified subjects” and suspends our “secure identity as receivers of a message” through “bottomless possibilities of irony” and violation of “the symbolic barriers on which our culture, and therefore our place in it, depend” (149). Roland Barthes likens the text to the body in this regard, which is most erotic “where the garment gaps” (Pleasure 9; original emphasis), and where readers are confronted with gaps in a text, like “the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing” (10), which for Barthes is comparable to the seam between culture and its destruction (7). While the Caribbean artist narrative is not necessarily always an overtly transgressive text in the sense that Moriarty outlines it, as the assertions on its seemingly conservative treatment of issues of sexuality demonstrates, it certainly uses codes and strategies to probe the ‘suspension of the self’, which extends both to the artist figure and also to the reader.

Because the subject’s desire is always “the Other’s desire” (Écrits 690), it is necessary to first hark back to the previous chapters to resume its manifestations in the Caribbean artist narrative. I have described the ‘Other’ (grand Autre) as congruent with the symbolic order, and as the locus of speech it is necessarily always structurally incomplete and inconsistent (49). With regard to artistic subject formation, the Other/symbolic takes on historically specific forms, akin to my periodisation outlined in chapter 3 and the artist’s respective envisioned role, and can be described as the (cultural) discourses, ideologies, and demands that structure artistic subjectivity. For the genre at hand, these are then, for instance, the discourse of literary tradition and ideologies surrounding the canon, concomitant demands of adapting to ideas of authenticity and representativeness to gain literary authority, or ideals of (hegemonic) masculinity. Desire in the Caribbean artist novel, as I have implied, manifests on various levels. Thematically, it is negotiated by the wish for, e.g., literary productivity, celebrity, economic advancement,
recognition by one’s community, becoming a ‘man’, to be or become ‘British’ and to transcend classed and raced boundaries, and most of all to lay claim to a literary legacy. What interests me then in this chapter is particularly its manifestation as a narrative structure and the role of sexual tropes herein, and here I follow Teresa de Lauretis’s assertion that this approach is especially apt to enquire into generic properties. Desire working along with narrativity, she states, requires “the reexamination of the relations of narrative to genres, on the one hand, and to epistemological frameworks on the other” as well as an understanding of “the various conditions of presence of narrative in forms of representation that go from myth and folktale to drama, fiction, cinema, and further, historical narration, the case history, up to what Turner calls ‘social dramas.’” (Alice 105). The Künstlerroman, in general, is most suited for this enquiry, as a linear trajectory of development, geared towards the achievement of artistic sensibility, is here always inferred as ideal. I also consider this approach most suited to enquire into the artist subject’s desire to be recognised by another/an Other – as Alexandre Kojève states: “all human, anthropogenetic Desire […] is, finally, a function of the desire for ‘recognition’” (7). As a first preliminary observation, we can tie this in with the Caribbean artist narrative’s foregrounding of a wish to become visible in the literary sphere and to have one’s symbolic capital recognised.

As the lack in the subject, as chapter 4 has shown, is ontological and desire thus “eternally extending toward the desire for something else” (Lacan, Écrits 431), in narrative, it manifests as an “endless metonymic movement” (Eagleton, Literary 185), triggered by the objet petit a, the object cause of desire that sets the latter in motion. From this observation, enquiries into the narrative properties of desire as foregrounded in the artist novel can take their cue, as metonymy emerges as a narratively manifest effect “which is rendered possible by the fact that there is no signification that does not refer to another signification” (Écrits 520). As such, ‘metonymy’ here transcends its common meaning as a substitution of parts for the whole, but refers to the deferral and replacement of desired objects which resembles the shifting of meaning in language from one signifier to another, and like the lack at the subject’s core, writing, a text, and their ‘meaning’ can thus never be ‘closed’. On the level of narrative and rhetoric, this manifests, for instance, in the novels’ cyclical or spiral structure, that is, the

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92 The objet petit a (‘little other’), which I leave untranslated and unitalicised in this thesis, is not to be confused with the big Other (grand Autre). The big Other, in turn, needs to be distinguished from the more general notion of the ‘other’ I employ, and I do so in the following by using the capitalised ‘Other’ whenever I refer to the former. As one of the most difficult ideas in Lacanian theory, this thesis can only employ a very partial discussion and definition of the objet petit a. I refer to Jeanne Lorraine Schroeder’s abridged, yet helpful definition here: “If the Big Other stands for alterity itself and includes the entire symbolic order, the little other (petit autre) refers to specific others” and “serves as the object cause of desire” (19; original emphasis). Where “the true desire of man is the desire of the Other – i.e. to be recognised in intersubjective relations – the subject attributes her desire to the objet petit a. In this way, intersubjective relations are replaced by object relations” (19). As such, it “emerges to solve the deadlock of how the subject is to find support in the big Other (the symbolic order)” (Žižek, Metastases 178). Objet petit a will be of further importance in my elaborations on fantasy in the following.
frequent return to a beginning and an inconclusive or deferred ending, which hints at writing starting anew. It is also palpable in the often incoherent, partly fragmented or ‘split’, at times schizophrenic narrative instances. Most prevalent in this regard is the continuous metonymic substitution of signifiers of ‘creation’, ‘masculinity’, and ‘artistic prowess’, which defer the creation of a work but also sustain the desire for it.

This point hints at the second dimension where desire is even more manifest and brings us closer to the negotiation of sexed and gendered structures in the artist novel and negotiations of masculine scripts. Most often, the desire to write, which forms the core of the Künstlerroman, is rerouted to sexual matters; in fact, the Caribbean artist narrative most conspicuously intertwines writing and sex, and in light of these elaborations, this can be apprehended as a displacement of artistic desires onto a sexual Ersatz desire. With regard to the ‘masculinisation’ of the incipient Caribbean literary tradition post-Windrush and the discourse of Caribbean and diasporic nation building as masculine, this fact is both intriguing and insightful from a psychanalytic point of view as well as from the perspective of the artist’s conception in literary history, where creation is semantically tied to male procreation, a notion I will elaborate on later. The close connection of writing and sex, or, to use Peter Brooks’ words, the “libidinal economy” (Reading 314), an erotic desire that here underlies the striving for artistic creation, in the desiring text also manifests on the level of form. Robert Scholes’s comments on the intersection of fiction and sex in “The Orgastic Pattern of Fiction” serves to illuminate this substitute function:

what connects fiction […] with sex is the fundamental orgastic rhythm of tumescence and detumescence, of tension and resolution, of intensification to the point of climax and consummation. In the sophisticated forms of fiction, as in the sophisticated practice of sex, much of the art consists of delaying climax within the framework of desire in order to prolong the pleasurable act itself. When we look at fiction with respect to its form alone, we see a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counter-pattern of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution. (26)

While Scholes has been severely criticised for this generalisation, especially for the suspicion of his implicit postulation of a male-centred sexual act,93 his comments are insightful precisely because they fashion the structure of narrative akin to male sexuality and provide helpful in two ways: for once, they point towards narrative properties that strengthen and enforce these narratives as ‘male’ and which, through the connotations inherent to balance, climax, and resolution, evidence a linear and teleologically oriented pattern. Barthes has circumscribed this as “Oedipal pleasure”, i.e. the pleasure “to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end”,

93 Cf. on this notion e.g. Jane Alison, who discusses Scholes’s proposition and pointedly remarks that this is not her experience of sex; she cites critic Susan Winnett’s contradictory view that “[m]eanings generated through dynamic relations of beginnings, middles, and ends in traditional narrative and traditional narratology never seem to accrue directly to the account of the woman” (qtd. in Alison 10–13).
which he premises on the assumption that “every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father—which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibitions of nudity” (Pleasure 10).

Secondly, the structuration of narrative as governed by sexual differentiation operates under the ideology of heterosexual reproduction, evident in metaphors of family and filial relationships. This is crucial for the underlying impetus for e.g. demands of nation building in the Caribbean novel as, to refer back to Boehmer, a ‘masculine family drama’. Moreover, in the context of colonial history, it is intricately tied to asserting masculinity against a legacy of emasculation and as a factor of the aforementioned notion of ‘respectability’ in a West Indian context. A glance at Roland Barthes’s conception of the connection of narrative and sex illuminates this notion further. In “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative” (1975), he draws connections between the emergence of the ‘sentence’ and processes of sexuation: “Although we know little more about the origins of narrative than we know about the origins of language, […] it may be significant that man’s offspring should have ‘invented,’ at the same time (around the age of three), both the sentence and the Oedipus’ narrative” (271–272). To enquire into the formation of masculine and authorial subject positions as emerging in narrative and speech in the analytical chapters, it bears enquiring into this ‘Oedipus narrative’ and its manifestation in language in more detail. As the previous chapter has sketched, subject formation and the subject’s assumption of a place in the societal order takes place in the symbolic triangle between child, father, and mother, which are of course to be understood as positionalities vis-à-vis the phallus and as metaphoric for the regulation of desire. In this way, the Oedipus complex, understood as a basic structural pattern that limits the positions and actions the subject can take on by assigning it a locus or a place (Silverman, Male Subjectivity 19) and interpellates it into the dominant fiction (16), is retained in Lacan as stage where the Name-of-the-Father initiates the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic realm, where the satisfaction of desire is not just forbidden, as in Freud, but rendered impossible.94

Reading the Oedipus myth as a structural feature, a trajectory in which a male subject has to overcome crisis (in Freud the attachment to the maternal) to establish a heterosexual masculine identity, is justified by de Lauretis, who, in reading Vladimir Propp’s “Morphology”, shows that the myth’s fundamental structure, that of patricide, has become widely disseminated in legends and folktales in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is closely intertwined with the establishment of patriarchal systems (Alice 114–115). The production of our understanding of the world in mythical thought rests, she asserts, “first and foremost […] on what we call

94 The ‘positive Oedipus complex’ is here defined as the child taking on the parent of the same sex as rival and desiring the parent of the other sex.
biology” and always entails the male hero overcoming a female obstacle, “regardless of the gender of the text-image” (119). She argues that the movement towards the Oedipal stage, as congruent with the movement of narrative, produces the opposition of masculine as mythical subject and feminine as space in which this occurs or as mythical obstacle (143). The masculine as ‘mythical subject’, here, is identified by notions of activity, an identification with the gaze, whereas the ‘feminine’ is defined by passivity and an identification with the image, like the body or landscape (144). It is in this context that the novels’ staged gender relations will be explored: particularly, I here contend that they are expressive of a probing of coming-into-writing via an establishment of the male as ‘mythical subject’ that necessitates the mastery of the female, which in Lacan’s conceptualisation is congruent with linguistic excess.  

With this definition of the structure of the artist narrative, as ‘desiring’ or ‘erotic’ text, we can now turn to the artist novel’s staging of possible answers to these desires. How does the desire to write become legible, how is it sustained in relation to the Other, and how are – gendered, raced, classed – identifications articulated in it? I propose to conceive of the artist narrative’s staging of mythemes and generic tropes as fantasies, as an articulation of “our symbolic positionality, and the mise-en-scène of our desire” (Silverman, Male Subjectivity 18). In the following, I argue that the authorial subject positions the texts create are formed in confrontation with the literary and socio-cultural sphere and depend on the evocation of imaginary models – relating to authorship and masculinity – to negotiate the gap in being and in the Other, that is, the ideological incongruencies that dominate the literary field in the second half of the twentieth century, specifically for the Caribbean writer. For Lacan, fantasy is not just an image that the subject conjures up in form of a phantasm or illusion, rather, fantasy is “an image set to work in the signifying structure”, the “means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object” (Écrits 532). Fantasy is the subject’s mode of defending itself against the threat of castration and the lack in the Other by filling the gaps in our symbolic world (Finkelde 279). Constituting an “answer to ‘Che vuoi?’”, to the unbearable enigma of the

95 Rather than taking Freud’s theories as empirical facts, I analyse this trajectory as a linear-teleological structure that takes progress, a causal and logical connection of events, synthesis, and the eradication of semantic ambiguity as its goal and base. As such, I consider it as precisely that – a myth that informs the symbolic and imaginary registers and, in Lacan’s rereading of Freud’s Oedipus complex, as a structural moment in the formation of subjectivity that inscribes the subject into “the prevailing masculine-oriented symbolic world of language” (Azari 30).

96 The idea of fantasy emerges in Lacan’s work already in Seminar I, Freud’s Papers on Technique (1953–54), but, as Fink convincingly argues, has only come into being as a concept of its own in Seminar V, The Formations of the Unconscious (1957–1958; Fink, Against 39). Fantasy involves both the imaginary and the symbolic: on the level of the first, it can take the form of specific images that suggest wholeness, stability, and content (Kay 169), but language, too, can contain an imaginary dimension, as narratives can, for instance, be generated within a fantasmatic space, into which the fantasising subject is inscribed (Žižek, “Fantasy” 698).
desire of the Other, of the lack in the Other” (Žižek, *Sublime* 132; original emphasis), fantasy both constitutes the “frame enabling us to desire something” (132) and provides an image that tries to find an answer for what the Other wants and renders it knowable. Operating at the site of the *moi*, it is the scene that *stages* desire but does not *fulfil* it, it is “a screen masking a void” (141) and constitutive of our ‘reality’ by providing the stories, images, or myth via which a sense of ontological certainty and a framework in which life acquires meaning is provided. As such, it constitutes the vehicle that stages and governs the relationship between the subject and the social domain and illuminates the formation of the former within the rules of the latter.97

It is important to note here that fantasy must not be mistaken as only on the side of hegemonic structures by putting forward particular ‘content’, as Žižek shows. While fantasy takes objet petit a as its object and the latter serves to support an ideological structure, it rather teaches the subject *how* and not necessarily *what* to desire within this structure: “fantasy does not mean that, when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather, *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place?* This is what fantasy tells me” (Žižek, *Parallax* 40; original emphasis). For my study, fantasy then serves to make legible both the ideologies that structure artistic self-fashioning and the subject positions created to answer to these. As it illuminates how the idea of ‘self’ is defended within its socio-political context, fantasy can then also serve as a tool for ideology critique, as it is precisely “the manipulative role of fantasy” (Zalloua 9) that structures and aids ideology. Ideology, understood with Žižek, is not a veiling of the ‘real state of affairs’, i.e. an illusion located in knowledge, but itself “an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself”, which makes a position of (cynical) distance to it impossible (*Sublime* 30). We can take the ‘split’ between autonomy and heteronomy in the literary field into which Caribbean writers are interpellated as an example here. Fantasy as scheme that allows different ‘real’ positive objects as objects of desire (41) would here not instruct writers to take either the position of writer-activist or to maintain a position of detachment, but provide the images – for instance artistic myths and historical models – that create such a desire for position-taking in the first place. Thus, a conscious self-fashioning as ‘other’, as claiming alterity e.g. in terms of race or class, also works fantasmatically: an identification with working-class characters or the displaying of a ‘working-class aesthetic’, for instance, as criticism of the dominant class, while seemingly counter-hegemonic, is ultimately also located within this scheme, as possible answers to the “lack of […] *a* universal formula” (42) and never ‘outside’ ideology. Visions of artistic autonomy, freedom, and the principle of originality inherent to artistic myths derived from

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97 Fantasy as ‘defence’ is emphasised by Lacan in Seminar IV, *The Object Relation*, where he compares ‘fantasy’ to the frozen image on a screen that prevents from confrontation with trauma (119–120).
Romanticism then constitute the subject’s necessary misrecognition of these idea(l)s as productive in order to enable writing, and the subject’s ‘merging’ with these images secures and veils the ideology behind ideas of the autonomy of the field of art.

As fantasy then expresses and regulates the subject’s mode of jouissance and prevents it from realising the loss of the surplus mode of enjoyment, the evocation of artistic myths as fantasies to probe writing are also insightful regarding the sort of enjoyment the Caribbean artist is expected to provide – for readers, critics, or the market, and the ideologies inherent to these. In this regard, the social character of fantasy is crucial. Going beyond the individual, it serves to provide insights into the subject’s discursive interrogations. Žižek’s work is again instructive here. He applies fantasy to enquire into the role of desire and jouissance in a political context, particularly national concerns such as ethnic conflicts, and shown how it serves to fill ideological gaps, thereby illustrating its relevance as a political and supra-individual concept. Because “[a] nation exists […] only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure these practices” (Tarrying 202; original emphasis),98 artistic creation is implied in the idea of an ‘imagined community’ secured by collective ‘enjoyment’. Representation, as cultural and social practice, and the (re)formulation of myths in writing then must serve to include the immigrant subject in the national idea as well, while circumventing ascribing to it an excessive enjoyment that threatens the majority, by suggesting that it takes away from their enjoyment.

Translated to the cultural context, a look at the ‘essential black subject’ that characterised representation from the 1960s onwards can illustrate how national cohesion is based on limiting enjoyment. This tokenist form of granting representation serves as an ideological tool that includes racial ‘others’ into the British imaginary by enabling visibility, positive representations, and suggesting a means for ‘progressive’ black cultural politics and cultural resistance. Through the curtailing of available subject positions through a reversal of colonial misrepresentation, enjoyment is also restricted, as dissenting voices and differences within the black diaspora – in terms of gender, class, or other ethnicities – are omitted from public discourse. The representational regime arising out of the need for the ‘essential black subject’ is thus inherently ‘phallic’ in the enjoyment it guarantees, as it fixes ‘the black subject’ and makes it knowable to the majority as a homogenous category. Within these culture-political restrictions, ‘enjoying’ a similar form of acknowledgement and recognition as their native

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98 Žižek also connects this to the role of the ‘other’ in national discourses: “What is therefore at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the ‘other’ an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment […] and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment” (Tarrying 202–203).
British counterparts, as regards contributions to aesthetic innovation, remains often barred for the Windrush novelists.

In psychoanalytic treatment, the subject must ultimately traverse its fantasy (Lacan, *Four 273*) – because “fantasies cannot coexist peacefully” (Žižek, *Looking* 168) – and separate from the great Other’s phallic jouissance, and the mode of enjoyment thereby altered (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 72). In this instance of traversal, the subject does not work through its history, but writes it anew, as master of the signifiers (Finkelde 344). We can tie this in with the idea that the Anglo-Caribbean novel post-Windrush features a plethora of ‘failed artists’ and often explicitly stages the impasse to achieving the desired object, and reconceive the notion of ‘failing’ in this regard as moments where the subject’s complete identification with an authorial or masculine myth is suspended and identification – and writing – begins anew.

**5.2 Myths of Creation: The Artist Theme in the Anglo-Caribbean Novel**

After these more general elaborations on fantasy, the following part will now frame the conception of the *Künstlerroman* and artist theme in literary history as part of the fantasmatic narrative, as staged within the desiring text. Here, I focus on archetypical components that have come to characterise the genre, i.e. myths that are inherent to it, and aim to theorise their engagement and function in the Anglo-Caribbean novel. To this end, this chapter will, next to these structural aspects, also draw on dominant artist myths and mythemes and outline their literary-historical specificity. It frames commonalities regarding similar stagings of quasi-mythical elements, which emerge as ideologically moulded fantasies. Therefore, my discussions are structured into thematic clusters which centre each on related dominant myths of artistry and their function in the Caribbean artist novel. This refraction of myths and the underlying ideologies constitutes the distinct ‘artist novel mode’ and aesthetic of the Caribbean artist narrative. Embarking from reading the texts as ‘desiring texts’, generic elements and mythemes offer specific forms of subjectivation and serve to ameliorate the lack in being, a ‘gap’ in the artist’s self-fashioning, and constitute vehicles to come into representation. As fantasies of authorship and artistry emerge as always closely intertwined with contemplations of masculinity or are even predicated upon them,99 they also provide an insight into national ‘myths of masculinity’.100 Acknowledging that the prevailing artistic habitus is always subject

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99 As Žižek has stated, for Lacan, fantasy is “ultimately always the fantasy of a successful sexual relationship” (*Tarrying* 117).
100 ‘Myth’ is here neither to be understood in Northrop Frye’s sense as an “abstract story-pattern” in a “self-contained literary world” that can be found in many cultures and unifies all literature (*Fables* 31), nor strictly in Barthes’s conception as depoliticised speech (*Mythologies* 168–172), but refers to literary-historical myths of artistic creation and myths of the *Künstlerroman* genre. ‘Mythemes’, here, designate the constituting units and the “bundle of relationships” that “make up the underlying structure of a myth” (Rich 21). In this, my understanding of ‘mythemes’ is somewhat related to that of ‘ideologemes’, although not the same. The latter are smaller elements
to the staging of symbolic forms, rituals, and codes (Ruppert 94), the self-reflexive negotiations of elements of the genre both in terms of content as well as on the level of narrative also allow an insight into the nation’s self-imaginary.

5.2.1 The ‘Painful Twoness’: Divisions between ‘Life’ and ‘Art’

The double nature of the artist, the “two selves [who] are at odds” (Beebe 308), resulting from different ideals of creativity, and the supposed boundary and conflict between ‘life’ and ‘art’ is the central distinguishing feature of the genre and of the artist from other protagonists, and it naturally also constitutes a major theme in the Caribbean artist narratives. The idea of the artist’s dual nature, where the artist’s distinction from society rests on his extraordinary capacity of imagination, has its origins in Renaissance discourse, which has elevated the artist from medieval craftsman to an _alter deus_ (Feulner 12–13). In Marcuse’s elaboration on the genre, as Mhairi Pooler finds, “the advent of the _Künstlerroman_ [correlates] with the disruption of the unity of art and life, that is, with the identification – or awakening individuality – of the artist as a being distinct from his conventional surroundings” (34). _Künstlerromane_ thus often focus on the (male) artist’s attempt to overcome the constant internal threat of ego disintegration and to unify this divided self or, in Marcuse’s words, the artist’s task is to configure “a type of life that can bind together what has been torn asunder, that pulls together the contradictions between spirit and sensuality, art and life, artists’ values and those of the surrounding world” (“German” 78). With Bourdieu, this split can be translated into a split between autonomous and heteronomous conceptions of art, as art ‘for art’s sake’ versus art as responding to personalised or anonymous expectations (Rules 218) and as favouring those who “dominate the field economically and politically” (216).

The artist’s ‘twoness’ in this regard is spelled out more explicitly by Beebe, whose seminal study on the artist novel, _Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts_ (1964), translates this conflict into two different traditions. One views the artist as removed from society and gaining inspiration in elevation and solitude (the ‘ivory tower’), as reliant on one’s personal capacity for creativity, where art takes on religious character and the artist figures as divinely inspired (13–14). Here, the artist assumes a position of superiority, manifest in spatial and/or temporal within discourse or ‘particles’ of ideology. Frederic Jameson defines them as “historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a ‘value system’ or ‘philosophical concept,’ or in the form of a protonarrative, a private or collective narrative fantasy” (Political 102). As elements of ideology they are “narrative unities of a socially symbolic type” (172). For a textual analysis, it bears looking at texts in terms of how these ideologemes “have left their various traces” and how these “inherited narrative paradigms” are transformed “into texts of a different order” (185).

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101 Research into the European artist novel also indicates a prevalence of _alter ego_ figures in the genre, which can be seen as a particular manifestation of the ‘split’ subject, for instance in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s _Künstlerromane_ and -novellas.
distance. The second sees experience and immersion in life as crucial source of inspiration (the ‘sacred fount’), where the artist has to live “more [...] fully than other men” (16) and “experience is lived in the process of writing” (102). Whereas drawing on the German model of the Künstlerroman has often served authors to succeed in synthesising this split, “in stabilising and giving meaning to the fragmented selfhood and problematised artistic personas” (Pooler 2), this model does not provide the same relief for the minority writer, since writing in – and against – the inherited norms often seem to leave only two options for the author: a mere assimilation to these norms, or a complete rejection (in form of a counter-discourse), or so criticism suggests. Where Beebe has stated that due to the artistic self being in constant conflict with society “the hero as artist is usually therefore the artist-as-exile” (6), in the Caribbean artist narrative, exile is not just metaphorical but the artist is literally an exile and negotiates not just the separation of art and life, but also of two cultural domains and literary fields.

Notions of societal responsibility, resulting from moralistic and idealistic tendencies within the literary field and the genre particularly, also contribute to the myth of the artist’s dualistic nature. The literary-historical split between art and life, reality and imagination as a staple trope of the genre finds its aesthetic equivalence in the ‘split’ between a Marxist aesthetics that states that “the social relations of production must be represented in the literary work”, where realism is considered as the art form that serves to adequately represent social relations (Marcuse, Aesthetic 2), and claims resonant with ideas of autonomy, where “art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior” (6), which is seen as resting in experimental techniques of literary modernism influenced by Kant (Hammer 74). On a formal level, this ‘split’ then also pertains to the negotiation of tradition, where the Caribbean artist novels probe different modes, thereby variously foregrounding either the citation of the realistic-objective artist novel, in some cases also more explicitly social-realist, the Romantic novel tradition, or the modernist experimental novel in the wake of Joyce and Proust.

The fantasy of the suffering, split subject, the ‘painful twoness’ that must be healed, as arguably most prevalent artistic myth, is cited by Anglo-Caribbean authors both on the level of story and narrative, partly outspokenly and partly visible in schizophrenic and ‘split’ protagonists or in characters that present a mirror or foil to the artist figure. It staged as series of imaginary projections (spatially, temporally, or bodily) that illustrate the striving for unity. These are, however, revealed as always already subject to symbolic inscription and threatened by gaps in this order, for instance as regards the ideological function of the racial ‘other’ to veil

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102 Beebe associates the ‘ivory tower’ with writers such as James Joyce and Gustave Flaubert and the ‘sacred fount’ with e.g. Oscar Wilde and D.H. Lawrence.
the incongruencies in the fantasy of a ‘classless’ society, as e.g. Lamming’s and Selvon’s protagonists show. The orientation towards balance between the ‘two selves’ is often reflected in the physical disintegration of the artist protagonist, sometimes in the narrative structure itself, acting out the split by a breakdown of language and the text and a dissolution not only of the artist protagonist, but the very coherence of the novel itself. At times, it finds reflection in a split of temporary and geographical settings, suggesting the incommensurateness of two different selves that have been split by the experience of migration, but often also indicating two irreconcilable positionality within the literary field.

Related to this and also manifesting in form of a fantasmatic ‘split’ are perceptive differences regarding the professionalisation of art vis-à-vis its perception as undetermined and ‘pure’.103 The eighteenth and nineteenth century yield contrasting artist habitus, where the impoverished bohemian, failed Romantic genius, or degenerate artist emerge as distinct ‘types’ and counter-foils to a middle-class ideology of professionalism. Intertwined with this are notions of social mobility. The inherent bias of the genre, Robbins states, stems from the “utopia of rising without rising, of success that would somehow evade the ethical self-betrayal of assimilation into the ruling order” (416; original emphasis).104 The seemingly irreconcilable demands that art and life posit are made manifest in artists that renounce socio-economic demands and flee into art, which is pursued with religious ardour; this seeking of another world causes an attraction to the “otherworldly”, manifest among others in discourses of the sublime (Varsamapolou xii).

The artist’s ‘split’ then constitutes as a fantasmatic narrative structure, as it for once suggests that there is a coherent subject to return to. Further, the idea of art unifying that which “has been torn asunder” (Marcuse, “German” 78) functions as an ideological project that is still prevalent in discussions of Anglophone literature and serves to uphold the idea that the artist has a responsibility to integrate the immigrant subject into larger national narratives. With regard to the particular discourses of literature and the framework of cultural politics, the evocation of the ‘split’ can be seen as probing a solution to the double-bind of answering to the ‘burden of representation’ while aiming for aesthetic innovation. The staging of this ‘twoness’ is readable as a manifestation of the subject’s relation to his desire as being the desire of the Other and the identification with the phallic signifier, where the emerging complementary or

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103 Ruppert traces the mythologisation of ‘high art’ and the ‘free artist’ back to the rationalisation of the bourgeois society, where the utopian hopes for a free human subject fell short in light of developments in the eighteenth and even more the nineteenth century and were subsequently transferred into the realm of art (25).

104 Robbins notes that for the prototypical artist novel, “social distance (up or down the ladder) seems indistinguishable from intellectual or critical distance” (411). Bourdieu has called this dilemma the “paradoxical economy” of the artist dasein, where a triumph on the symbolic terrain is only possible when losing on the economical terrain (Rules 83).

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contrasting forms of authorial subjectivity that aim to unify the split are discernible as attempts to answer to the paradoxical ‘Che Vuoi’ that arises from the public sphere through media, academia, readers, or critics, and of how to react to a changed status of art and shifts in conditions of production and reception.\textsuperscript{105}

5.2.2 (Self-)Begetting: Creative Seeds, Literary Paternity, and Questions of Origin

A further central component of the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel is the negotiation of male myths of creation and concerns regarding the involved instrumentalisation and subjugation of the feminine in art. While this is inherent to the genre in general, it is arguably particularly foregrounded in the Anglo-Caribbean version, as gender relations are complicated by the ascription of different gendered positions in line with processes of sexualisation and racialisation. The literary-historical distinction between male and female principles of creation, based on a naturalised distinction of the sexes and symbolically present in creational myths, has for a long time connected artistic creation to male generative power – from Aristoteles’s \textit{logos spermatikos} to Ezra Pound’s notion that “[t]he mind is an upspurt of sperm” and sperm a “form-creator, the substance which compels the ovule to evolve in a given pattern” (qtd. in Pope 80). Christine Battersby elaborates on this with regard to the ‘artistic genius’: “the English term ‘genius’ was associated with male sexual and generative powers as the Latin \textit{genius}, which originally means ‘the begetting spirit of the family embodied in the paterfamilias’” (38). Whereas the – male – genius’ “instinct, emotion, sensibility, intuition, imagination – even his madnesses – were different from those of ordinary mortals”, ‘woman’ “was used as a foil to genius: to show what merely apes genius” (4).

Resonant with the distinction of mind and body in the history of thought, which, from antiquity to Bacon, Descartes, and Hegel, has posited the spiritual, intellectual as masculine and the material, natural as feminine (Krieger 130), and creativity in this vein as superior masculine intellectual potency in comparison to inferior feminine parity (131), the genius “was a male – full of ‘virile’ energy” but crucially able to transcend his biology: “if the male genius was ‘feminine’ this merely proved his cultural superiority. Creativity was displaced male procreativity: male sexuality made sublime” (Battersby 5). In this view, male and female principles of creation can exist within men and women alike, an idea that sublimises the male artist and is echoed in Maurice Beebe’s and Linda Huf’s studies, who also see him as special because he combines masculine and feminine characteristics (Varsamopoulou xxi).\textsuperscript{106} What all

\textsuperscript{105} The ‘split’ here might also be read as a manifestation of “the mystery of how writers and artists sell their wares to an even more ignorant public” (Robbins 434).

\textsuperscript{106} French feminist theorists like Luce Irigaray or Julia Kristeva would then further pursue the idea of an entirely feminine mode of creation, a notion best embodied in Hélène Cixous’s concept of \textit{écriture féminine}. Cixous
of these discussions evidence is a view of gender as complementary, with men as striving producers and women as receptive vessels (Bellonby 48). Here, men produce, i.e. create, and women merely reproduce, an idea that continues to influence artistic self-fashioning. Yet the conflation of biological conception in terms of intellectual mastery also betrays male anxiety and fears of ‘male superfluity’ in generation, as these ideas imply the “more pressing but unaskable question of whether there needs to be a male” at all, as “the work of generation available to the senses is wholly the work of the female” (Laqueur 59).

The fantasy of the male seed as idea and the phrasing of intellectual creation in terms of biology is metaphorised through sexual images and rhetoric, where the production of knowledge is inherently gendered male and resurfaces in phallic images or speech. This “engendering of ideas”, as Spiller rightly claims, not only expresses, but even creates sexual difference (60), and thus provides an interesting starting point to enquire into the relevance of sexual difference for the artist novel and its manifestation in speech patterns. Yet while ‘manhood’ and artistic creation are usually not in antithesis to each other, that is, the status of masculinity for artistic creation or in conjunction with it is usually not questioned, the Anglo-Caribbean artist novel here differs significantly. Due to the fact that for the Caribbean author, masculine subject formation takes place in a tense, contradictory discursive field that oscillates between emasculation and hypersexualisation, the resulting precarious status of masculinity informs the negotiation of artistic creation on all textual levels. In the foregrounding of this topic, masculinity is variously vigorously asserted, rendered as in ‘crisis’ and mourned, de-emphasised, or feminised, and the subject positions resulting from the subject’s answer to the symbolic demands of masculinity are continuously questioned within the narcissistic textual structure. Particularly on the level of narrative, the novels also probe occupying the position of ‘woman-as-other’ or non-heteronormative narrative strategies that critically engage fantasies of male mastery and thereby highlight the ideological underpinnings of literary discourse in this respect.

Images of male creative power often manifest in the fantasy of paternity. Metaphors surrounding the category ‘family’, ‘paternity’, or gender relations in general highlight the texts’ negotiation of patrilineal transmissions of (literary) authority and express the shifting power


Verena Krieger shows how virility continues to function as leitmotif in art and artistic self-fashioning throughout the twentieth century, for instance in the work and self-presentation of Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, or Julian Schnabel (132–138).

This stands in contrast to the female Künstlerroman, as Varsamopoulou states, where coming-into-art often necessitates a rejection of the writer’s ‘womanhood’ (xxiii).
relations that influence authorial self-fashioning. Problematic family relationships and familial expectations constitute a further key element of the artist novel, as studies by Marcuse and Pooler indicate. In contrast to the Bildungsroman, the Oedipal struggles that manifest in the artist novel not just mirror the protagonist’s finding his place in society through separating from home and initiating his own journey (as part of the ‘rite of passage’), but the family metaphor in the artist novel comes into play as a reflection of one’s own positionality in the literary tradition. Two seminal studies on the relation of tradition and writer, conceived in terms of patrilineality, need to be mentioned in this regard: Harold Bloom’s notorious The Anxiety of Influence (1973), whose account of literary genealogy frames authorship as a “battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads” (11), and subsequently Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) both connect ‘fatherhood’ with the notion of influence in writerly production. This metaphor is all-pervasive in Western literature to describe literary authority, both in affirmative and deconstructive ways.

In fantasmatic narratives of literary paternity, the writer, following Bloom, is caught in a struggle with his predecessor in an attempt to become a ‘strong poet’ through a “misinterpretation of a parent poem” (94), which is fraught by the successor’s constant anxiety of having nothing new to create. The creative ‘misreading’ of the ‘parent’ work, which Bloom phrases as Oedipal struggle (10) and which entails a symbolic killing of the father, is constitutive of the ephebe’s success. In such specific fantasies of the writer ‘becoming-father’ and inscribed in ideas of literary filiation, his ‘pen’ manifests “as an instrument of generative power like his penis”, which has not only the power to “generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim”, rendering the ‘pen’ an inherently sexual metaphor (Gilbert & Gubar 6–7). The Caribbean Künstlerroman self-reflexively negotiates this idea: here, literary authority as tied to the phallus applies at once to the European literary tradition and is closely

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109 From the point of view of psychoanalysis, Evans finds that “what distinguishes the symbolic order of culture from the imaginary order of nature is the inscription of a line of male descendancy. By structuring descendence into a series of generations, patrilineality introduces an order ‘whose structure is different from the natural order’ (S3, 320)” (63). As both Jane Sarah Bowskill (89–90) and Jane Spencer (142) argue, the idea of literary patrilineality continues to hold sway. For a Spanish-American context, Bowskill finds that literary genealogy still tends to follow the rules of the family tree, with literary prestige passed on from ‘father’ to ‘son’, a fact that is for instance evident in male prize-winners routinely citing mostly (European or American) men as their literary influence and the ensuing enforcement of a connection between a universal literary tradition and male literary prestige.

110 Edward Said has also linked the paternal metaphor to literary authority, claiming that the unity of a text conventionally hinges on “a series of genealogical connections” which are all underlined by “the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy” (Beginnings 112).
intertwined with idea(l)s of masculinity, but the notion of filiation, of literary roots in Caribbean discourse is also related to the mythologisation of an origin in form of a shared ancestry.¹¹¹

In this sense, it is not only distinct author models that serve to provide the fantasy of a secure origin and genealogy, but, as this myth is firmly connected to place, also landscape that is palimpsestically inscribed with literary (and male) traditions, in which the writer probes his masculinity through e.g. visual and spatial mastery. In different contexts, yet similar ways, Harris’s re-mythologisation of the Guyanese interior and Amerindian female as threatening but also inspiring creation, Dabydeen’s probing of, again, Guyana’s ‘folk’ for a masculine literary language, or Selvon’s and Naipaul’s transferring of this discourse onto the English landscape or metropolis attest to the prevalence and variability of this connection. This notion of origin is complemented by a wish for unequivocal ‘racial’ belonging, which is rendered even more complex through the installation of ‘black’ as an essentialised umbrella term in cultural discourse in the 1960s and 70s, in whose wake the diaspora is homogenised. Ideas of ‘rootlessness’ or ‘bastardisation’ can, however, also function as a strategy of self-legitimisation, as Kathrin Härtl has analysed with regard to Derek Walcott’s reference to the ‘bastard’ as a concept that characterises the influence of English colonial literature on the Caribbean writer. Her findings that in Walcott’s case, it serves as a means of “tak[ing] advantage of his colonial past and employ[ing] his mode of writing in the colonizer’s language” (234) is insightful, as ‘bastardisation’ can then also serve to undermine notions of a smooth transmission of literary power from father to son and hint at forms of literary authority beyond the phallogocentric order.¹¹²

The preoccupation with filial relationships finds its expression in (absent) father-son relationships or more metaphorised forms, where this relationship applies to the level of literary history by striving to match, supersede, or question one’s (European) predecessors. The artist novel here performs interventions in galvanised analogies of father/creator and child/product and exposes the ideological structures of the literary market and gendered relations on which these narrative analogies rest. ‘Father’, in a structural consideration of the Oedipal complex and understood as a signifying instance that does not point towards the ‘real’ father but is rather a manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father that regulates possible and impossible relations of desire (Lacan, Écrits 687–688), here determines the conditions of the subject’s laying claim to

¹¹¹ In an Afro-Caribbean context, Rastafarianism’s idea of a shared Ethiopian heritage constitutes one example of an imagined pre-colonial common origin; another is to be found in Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s poem “Calypso”, which imagines the origin of a pan-islandic community as “a skidding stone leaving behind the individual islands of the Caribbean archipelago” (Hegglund 110).
¹¹² ‘Phallogocentrism’ is a portmanteau of “phallocentrism” and “logocentrism”, coined by Jacques Derrida, which, emerging from the Lacanian notion of the phallus, describes how sexual difference dominates speech and thought. Phallogocentrism designates how logocentrism upholds the hierarchically structured binaries, wherein the masculine terms are conceived as dominant (Feldmann & Schütting, “Phallogentrismus” 570).
a literary legacy, to *create* an origin to fill the gap in being and invest the ‘faulty’ teleology inherent to desire with a telos. Instances where paternal analogies are conspicuous – also through their absence, substitute fathers, or in the broader notion of ‘origin’ – also attest to the rules under which occupying a place in literary history is possible. But the probing of the paternal fantasy not only serves to indicate the minority writer’s conflicted position vis-à-vis his ‘paternal’ predecessors, but also a preoccupation, visible in many Caribbean artist novels, with becoming a founder, a father of a new literary tradition oneself.

In this context, the fantasy of paternity and origin must also be understood as a response to a paradigm shift in literary studies. The diminution of the author’s authority and the claim to the text, which in the wake of poststructuralist literary criticism becomes the dominant paradigm to conceive of authorship, is, interestingly, similarly framed with this analogy by Barthes, as his ‘removal’ of the Author (with a capital A) envisions the suspension of the Author’s “relation of antecedence to his work, as a father to his child” (“Death” 145). This is a heightened concern for the minority writer, whose literary authority is seen as grounded in notions of ‘authenticity’ or writing the and for an essentialised (black) subject, which runs counter to these contemporaneous developments in literary criticism. The many intertextual references of the novels to ‘grand narratives’—as another fantasmatic father-son-relationship—and literary forefathers, which are negotiated on the level of story, plot, characters, and narrative transmission, can here then also be read as the genre’s intricate connection with developments in literary theory and questions of an origin of writerly authority.

5.2.3 Eros and Thanatos: On Sex and Art, the Muse, and the Artist’s Quest

Closely connected to the idea of male procreation is the fantasy of the artist’s sexual maturation as prerequisite for his artistic maturation, which, while related to the mythemes of literary begetting, has yet more specific connotations that transcend notions of paternity. While sexual initiation is also an important part of the protagonist’s rite of passage and reintegration into society in the *Bildungsroman*, for the *Künstlerroman*, it is even the crucial distinguishing feature, as Rivera Godoy-Benesch emphasises. Here, “his first sexual experience is associated with his decision to become an artist, which draws him away from society […] towards art” and “becomes a symbolic means to affirm the superiority of art over life and to justify the existence of the narrative itself” (70). As this shows, sexual expenditure demarcates the boundaries of ‘life’ and ‘art’: literary-historically, as Beebe’s study suggests, sexual activity is also seen as inhibiting artistic creation. The artist risks “dissipating creative energy in the mere process of living and therefore proving incapable of transforming experience into art” (18).
which echoes the ‘divided nature’ of the artist, and the choice whether creativity is spent in life or art “often leads to a confusion between sex and art” (17).

Sexual activity, thus, can also be seen as a “direct symbol for artistic creation”, also because it represents the contact with the traditionally female muse with “the prospect of procreation, and hence, productivity” (Rivera Godoy-Benesch 94). The invocation of the muse as a source of inspiration and instance that demands creation has been present in Western literary tradition ever since Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, but has been radically transformed with conceptions of art that centre on the autonomy of the artist (Wiele 167): where the muse has figured as envoy of the intellectual and spiritual world (Krieger 23), the trope has become somewhat obsolete in the genius tradition, the apotheosis of the artist, and a concomitant turning inwards for inspiration (27). Yet where s/he occurs, the male artist’s relation to the muse signals his division between ‘art’ and ‘life’: for the withdrawn artist, the muse remains idealised and untouchable, whereas the artist seeking experience in life consummates his desire with the muse (Friedman 40). The staging of an artist-muse relationship serves to sustain a fantasy of either artistic autonomy or as a means of probing how to correspond to societal demands. In the Caribbean artist novel, the muse is seldomly evoked in form of a metaphysically granted artistic inspiration, but as either exposing the gendered anxieties underlying this myth of creation or as emblematic of a crisis of narrative (69), that is, as a last resort where writerly desire seeks fulfilment, which likewise exposes the subject’s determination by regimes of representation and inscribes the muse again as gendered ‘other’.

In these artist narratives, the connection of writing and sexuality oscillates between the tropes of sexual abstinence as well as of a heightened emphasis on sexual activity. The foregrounding of an underlying “libidinal economy” (Brooks, Reading 314) that characterises the Caribbean artist novel is evident of a more complex field of tensions. For once, the fantasy of artistic maturation as dependant on sexual progress or the submission of the muse is expressive of a probing of coming-into-writing via the establishment of the male as ‘mythical subject’ that necessitates the mastery of the female, which in Lacan’s conceptualisation emerges as congruent with linguistic excess. The – sexually inflected – striving for artistic originality and individuality can be captured as a struggle within the symbolic order, which in terms of literature and the literary market corresponds to the accepted and demanded stories, genres, and aesthetic forms of the periods in question. In the artist novel, this pursuit is also a pursuit of a ‘surplus jouissance’: as that which remains outside of the dominant regime of representation, outside the ‘masculine order’, beyond the law, it resonates with a desire for formal innovation and artistic originality. The self-reflexive negotiation of sexual/artistic maturation in the Caribbean novel also allows for drawing conclusions about the status of the ‘feminine’ within
discourses of creation and the genre. Yet as has been shown, the Caribbean artist is subject to particular, in themselves contradictory discourses of gender and sexuality. Historically, West Indian men were feminised “by their subaltern position within the colonial system” (Booker & Juraga 70) and, in a Caribbean context, masculinity was also imagined as precarious, as the persistence of the risk discourse demonstrates, whereas in the post-war years in Britain, an emphasis on the West Indian man’s supposed hypersexuality and threat to the white, female subject, and fantasies of racial purity, was dominant. Fantasies of abstinence and the rejection of or unsuccessful relation with the muse, rendering the artist as invested only in intellectual creation, are here indicative of a wish to retreat to an imaginary state that is not yet thus discursively structured, as Dabydeen’s or Naipaul’s protagonists show.

The libidinal mediations and fantasies of sexual potency versus abstinence, as these elaborations show, often take the writer’s own body as basis, which also questions the status of the text. In the history of ideas, these two entities have always overlapped in how the world is experienced, where embodiment is expressed in the written word (and vice versa): “Text and flesh entwine within the semantic derivation of ‘corpus’, ‘corporeality’ and ‘corpse’”, which goes back to a Christian belief in the corporeality of the Logos (Mulvey-Roberts 1). In artist novels, body and text ideally converge at the end in a reaffirmation of the logos, but, as Rivera Godoy Benesch finds, the ‘marked’ body – in her case, this is a body marked by age, but similar observations can be made for the racialised body – is often not dissolved into or replaced by the text (94), but, as a material site for negotiations of identity, rather “intrudes upon the textual construct again and again and threatens its very basis” (80–81). As such, the body serves to point to – and one could conclude, unsettle – the work’s “status as an artifact”, as she cites Patricia Waugh (qtd. in Rivera Godoy-Benesch 80), and intervenes in fantasies of pure art. The body as foregrounding questions of matter both serves to negotiate its legacy as commodity and property in Caribbean colonial history and refers to newer discourses, such as the dissolution of the ‘essential black subject’ as well as poststructuralist interventions in ideas of identity, which pose a heightened concern to Caribbean writers and, as the valorisation and marketing of postcolonial literature often hinges on the representativeness of clearly demarcated cultural identities, raise questions of literary authority.

Notions of the artist’s (sexual) rite of passage as well as the aforementioned fantasy of unifying the subject’s ‘split’ are also present in the thematic and narrative engagement of the motif of a journey or quest, serving to express self-development and self-cultivation.113

113 Pooler’s study on early twentieth-century English ‘portrait-of-the-artist-novels’ in Writing Life: Early Twentieth-Century Autobiographies of the Artist Hero (2015) emphasises this point, as she argues that the notion of development, “as an artistically oriented Bildung, distinguishes the Künstlerroman from other similar narratives
Mirroring the constants of human life (birth, life, death), as a predominant trope in Romanticism, it is implied in a wish for remoteness, the foreign or alien, and the dissolution of boundaries and infinitude, which is seen as an alternative to a bourgeois existence and is also closely intertwined with the notion of Bildung (Feulner 228–229). For Beebe, the artist’s quest is entirely interiorised, being ultimately a quest for the self (6), and we find this idea of the interiorised quest also in the Caribbean narratives, where it is expressed e.g. through the introduction of different temporalities to the narrative or the suggestion of an alteration of perception. It sometimes manifests in narrative shifts between the present and the past, with the artist-narrator constantly returning to his youth or to earlier perceptions and insights with a seemingly matured gaze. The Caribbean artist novel ambivalently engages the myth of gaining perception through education and cultivation by foregrounding inhibited journeys, particularly in contrasting tropes of ‘seeing’ and ‘blindness’, and exposes the underlying ideology of progress into which the minority writer is interpellated and which is complicated through processes of racialisation.

In the Caribbean artist narrative, the quest for a self is, moreover, also often exteriorised and rendered in form of literal journeys, where spatial mobility and mastery of space are intricately intertwined with and probed as prerequisites for literary mastery. Concerns of temporal and spatial mobility are visible in the titles of many Caribbean novels after Windrush, which indicate the aporia inherent to ideas of telos and social climbing. This motif also makes visible the artist novel’s traditional gender implications, as literary-historical, the themes related to Bildung and quests have been conceived as male tropes, chronicling “what Friedrich Schiller called the ‘aesthetic education of man’” (Bellonby 48). Steve Sherwood differentiates emblematic stages here, stating that the typical artist narrative renders the struggle to create in form of a “romance of expression”, as a variation of the quest narrative, comprising three dimensions of creativity: the artist’s self-invention and -creation, the invention and mastering of a distinct, new style, and the creative act which often centres on the embodied pursuit of the artwork (96). It is also in this sense that the intertextual allusions to literary renderings of quests, journeys, and romances in the Caribbean novel, especially as they occur in Robinson Crusoe, Heart of Darkness, or to mythical quests, such as for El Dorado or the Grail, gain their importance. In citing such intertexts or -myths, the novels reference a colonial “nostalgic

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114 Cf. for instance the book titles in this study that signal notions of ‘ascending’, ‘migrating’, ‘intending’, or ‘arriving’. Lamming’s Season of Adventures, Mittelholzer’s The Life and Death of Sylvia, or Markham’s Marking Time are examples of further artist novels that eponymously centre on this theme.
yearning for male adventure and unspoiled ideal of chivalrous masculinity” (Haschemi Yekani 10–11) through the fantasmatic negotiation of a masculine narrative strategy.

The quest is, however, also a Thanatic structure, as its conclusion always implies the artist’s dissolution, as he would vanish with the vanishing of his desire. Where Freud conceived of the death drive (Todestrieb/Thanatos) as geared towards destruction and the live drive (Lebenstrieb/Eros) towards cohesion, and thus of both as opposite (Evans 33), for Lacan, Eros, as a libidinous pursuit of wholeness, which in the artist novel is most manifest in sexual tropes and structures, and Thanatos are complementary forces: “The function of desire must remain in a fundamental relation with death” (Lacan, Ethics 351). In the artist novel, the unattainability of objet petit a and the subsequent metonymic shifting of desire manifests in the continuous oscillation between the striving to produce literature and to achieve a secure masculine identity, and consequently the shift from seeking writerly to sexual gratification and to various substitute objects, such as the text, a love interest, or a literary predecessor, which are probed for reinstalling the subject’s original wholeness. This fantasy of the unfulfilled artistic journey, visible in such narrative and thematic digressions, spiral or cyclical structures, and the foregrounding of artistic and sexual ‘failure’, as well as the incessant probing of the Eros, is a strategy that serves to defer the artist subject’s achieving its ‘real’ desire and its concomitant fading, and retains the artist subject in a perpetual ‘becoming’.

This threat of the subject’s vanishing with its desire also often surfaces in images of stasis or exhaustion, whereby the novels overtly negotiate writing, and achieving one’s desire, as petrifying or mortal practice.\(^{115}\) Motifs of death, decay, or reification serve as expressions of the subject’s sense of aphanisis, i.e. the fading of the subject from the symbolic world (Lacan, Four 207–208). But as the death drive for Lacan is also an expression of the “will to create from zero” (Lacan, Ethics 212–213), these images are not to be understood as expressions of crisis (only), but also suggest new textual beginnings. Instances where the subject or writing are threatened by symbolic death also hint at the wish to break from social or cultural constraints.\(^{116}\) Where it occurs in literal form, it is crucially seldom the writer protagonist itself who faces death in the novel, but often other (close) characters who represent different forms of authorship and authority. In other instances, the destructive potential of the death drive is visible in images of decline and deterioration. As the structure of the journey itself implies death (which also applies to the structure of narrative in general, as always being geared towards an

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\(^{115}\) Corinna Sigmund has theorised writing as “eine mortifizierende Praxis” (255).

\(^{116}\) Elizabeth Abel and Marianne Hirsch, for instance, argue (albeit for the female Künstlerroman) that these fictions often culminate in death, which represents “refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound convictions and desires” (11).
end), foregrounding these images makes visible the ‘spectre of death’ that typically haunts these fictions.

5.2.4 Towards Utopia: The Artist’s Vision and (Not) Producing the ‘Not Yet’

Inherent to all conceptions of the artist novel is an – implicit or explicit, affirmed or denied – utopian dimension that renders the artist as bearer of utopia, as envisioning that which is ‘not yet’ and a new poetics. This idea is closely intertwined with the myth of the poeta vates, the artist as seer and prophet, who is seen as commanding a privileged insight and knowledge into past, present, and future and is tasked with creating new cultural systems of orientation to counter the threat of alienation with the advent of modernity (Gottwald 28).\textsuperscript{117} Bloch’s vision of the artist echoes these notions. He argues that the novel of the artist aims at a “portrayal of the desire to articulate that which has never yet been heard in Apollo” (“Artist” 274; original emphasis). The “action of the artist story – from the beginning of Prometheus […] concerns itself with the formation of the human, with revealing this”; as an “inventive story”, it “depends on revealing and shipping it in the not-yet and out of the not-yet” and is geared towards the future instead of the past (276; original emphasis). The Künstlerroman, in Bloch’s ‘fantasy’ and re-mythologisation of the artist as creative originator, functions as an irrefutable carrier for the “anticipatory illumination” of utopia, even when it is itself devoid of utopian aspects, because the “subject stands here philosophically for nothing less than the depicted action of engendering, for the work on the voices of the not-yet, which sound in the creation of an artwork in their own unique way and are audible and suo modo instructive.” (276).

Bloch’s focus on engendering is here insightful for another reason: it hints at the relation of the product and the process of producing, and while Bloch emphasises the product as process, he simultaneously denigrates the process that does not result in a product (Prinzip 215).\textsuperscript{118} In the Caribbean artist narrative, the fantasy of the artist as seer and prophet is centrally oriented around notions of ‘production’. These narratives most often portray a process without a product, in form of a negative (auto)poiesis, which speaks to the challenge to produce as ‘other’ in an inherited tradition, but also to the citing of a discourse that emerged in Romanticism and is related to the genius idea. Here, artistic faculties rather than the actual product are emphasised and the myth of Prometheus as ‘second maker’ and the objective idea of a work is eclipsed (Pontzen 29–31) – it is the begetting rather than the birth of a product that moves centre stage.

\textsuperscript{117} Anastasia Manola provides an in-depth overview over this model. She describes its central elements as “excitement, vocation, the visionary, and a reference to antiquity or biblical prophecy” (81; my translation). The poeta vates, in her understanding, also relates to utopian notions of a better, idealised world or salvation (81).

\textsuperscript{118} In Das Prinzip Hoffnung, Bloch speaks critically of the “sogenannte unendliche Annäherung ans Ideal […], jene Skrupelart, die es mit der Realisierung gar nicht ernst meint” (215), whereas the “Unterpfand der Zukunft” necessitates “die Endlichkeit des Prozesses und des dadurch immerhin überblickbaren Antizipationsabstands zum Ziel hin” as “echte[s], nämlich einen erreichbaren Endzustand implizierende[s] Vorgefühl” (216).
In this context, fantasies of ‘failure’, ‘hindrance’, or ‘blockage’ – altogether, of not producing – without being taken as normative evaluation, function both as a re-heroisation, akin to the Romantic artist hero whose destiny to fail is linked to the myth of Sisyphus (Pontzen 366), and to fashion a position as outsider by hindering the transferral of “a canon of bourgeois virtues and normative social expectations” (21), i.e. to break from the symbolic order.

In the texts selected, the negotiation of the problematic relationship of process and product, the absence of the product altogether, or its continuous rewriting, aspects which are self-reflexively foregrounded, also imply the frustration of heterosexuality and masculinity as ‘natural’ and linear process of development. The evoked product/process aporia is symptomatic of the writer dwelling on an as-of-yet unrealised speech and indicative of the conditions and practices of existence that influence the process. Thus, while the texts dwell on the fantasy of culmination in the product, it is the desired rather than the finished text that allows inquiries into temporal, spatial, as well as material conditions that influence the writing process (Sigmund 180). In it, the writing body, tools, the spaces in which authorship is probed, or contrasting text types that introduce different notions of temporal distance and immediacy are central. This insistence on the processual dimension in the Caribbean novel renders the writer perpetually ‘unfinished’, as the flight into different imaginary scenarios of writing is often interrupted by the sheer material conditions of the profession, emphasising that for the minority writer, due to aspects of race, ethnicity, and, related, class, “fiction writing [is] […] both a craft and […] a hazardous professional choice” (Kalliney, Commonwealth 133), a notion via which Caribbean artist narratives also undermine the myth of artistic creation as purely intellectual activity and question the Cartesian separation of mind and body, subject and object.

The ‘utopian’ function of art as related to the myth of the artist as seer or prophet imbues the figure with quasi-metaphysical qualities that reflect the artist’s relevance for evoking a “national consciousness” (Lewis, Modernism 2). The prevalence of the theme of ‘vision’ is often literalised in the artist narrative through isotopies of perception or the sublime as predominantly visual phenomenon; this is predicated on the genre as inherently self-reflexive and as staging the observation of creation and inquiries into the function of art. Engaging forms of ‘vision’, in the Caribbean artist novel, often serves to expose the function of the fantasy of the artist as prophet. Here, the notion of ‘split’ applies, too: the metaphor of ‘vision’ is engaged

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119 Cf here Sigmund’s notion of the l’écrivain désirant: “Selbstreflexive Texte, die das Szenario eines noch unerreichten Sprechens entwerfen, verhandeln die Frage nach dem Schreiben häufig als eine Frage nach der Lebenspraxis. Das begehrte Schreiben oder der begehrte Text wird dort in Beziehung zu bestimmten Lebensbereichen des schreibenden Subjekts gesetzt” (180).

120 In the – few and far between – analyses of Anglophone literature regarding the artist theme, this notion is particularly prevalent, as the artist is postulated as “eye-opener, a teacher or sometimes as a prophet, […] reminiscent of that of some romantic poets” (Durix 13).
through notions of ‘seeing’ and ‘blindness’, ‘looking’ and ‘averting one’s eyes’, ‘perception’ and ‘misconception’, being gazing subject and gazed at object, aspects which are, however, never invoked as unambiguously dichotomous, but as complementary and contrasting strategies to probe inscriptions and repudiations of myths, thereby continuously probing alternative subject positions. In this sense, the utopian aspects that manifest in negotiations of a ‘new’ vision function as self-fashioning strategies, both in their affirmation and negation. While the scopic realm as primary means of exerting power has been aligned with masculinity, most prominently in Laura Mulvey’s concept of the ‘male gaze’, and the “pre-eminence of the visual as informing the discursive knowable”, feminist theorists have contrasted the “scopical economy” with an emphasis on hearing, i.e. the invocatory drive, as the “privileged place of the maternal voice” (Ramanathan 110). Lacan has described the invocatory drive as “closest to the experience of the unconscious” (Four 104), and theorists like Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous have taken their cue from this idea to enquire into the pre-symbolic as that which challenges the ‘discursive knowable’.121 Stephen Heath, emerging from Hélène Cixous, states that there is a “total distinction” between look and voice, scopic and invocatory, and the voice is mythologically linked to femininity via the relation of “feminine – unconscious – archaic” (202–203). These different forms of observation and perception inform the artist novel, and the invocatory often serves to counter the fantasies evoked in the scopic realm. As such, structures of seeing, being seen, hearing, and speaking also allow insights into the assumed positionalities vis-à-vis the symbolic and for probing the ‘other’ position, i.e. the feminine, for self-fashioning.

While the genre-typical utopian imaginations might be perceived as foreclosed by the fact that Caribbean artist novels often portray frustrated or thwarted artists, I contend that it is precisely the notion of portraying that which hinders creation or portraying aspects of stasis, caused by the incompatibility of the fantasies of an inherited tradition and of myths of Britishness, that serves Caribbean artist to renegotiate notions of utopia. More specifically, it is the myth of the *artiste manqué* that Caribbean authors stage as central component of self-fashioning. Both Beebe (308) and Bloch (“Artist” 265), among many others, have emphasised that failure, frustration, and misadventure are inherent to the genre and are more common than ‘success stories’. Neumann’s *Künstlermythen* emphasises that it is precisely the artist-genius’ exceptionality and impossibility of implementing his vision that inevitably result in failure (83).

121 As one of the four drives in Lacan, the invocatory drive is intricately connected with the ear as erogenous zone and geared towards the voice as objet petit a, foregrounding the “erotic relationship to language” (Jaanus, *Four* 126). In contrast to the other drives, it has, as Lacan states in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, “the privilege of not being able to close” (200), as the ear is, in contrast to the other orifices that form the loci of the drive, always open, and simultaneously, “making oneself heard goes toward the other” (195; original emphasis). ‘Hearing’ as the drive closest to the unconscious is always oriented by the Other, and voice assuming the role of the phallus which the subject strives for to overcome the lack. While both eye and ear are entangled within the imaginary register, ‘voice’ also assumes the role of the super-ego (Lacan, *Anxiety* 341).
In this sense, it is not just completion or achievement that constitute forms of fantasmatic misrecognition, where the permanence and finitude of the text suggests a possible absolute nature of knowledge and ‘truth’, and thus wholeness and certainty, but ‘failing’, too, functions fantasmatically. This imaginary *méconnaissance* is visible in instances where we get a glimpse at the text that is envisioned, an excerpt from the ‘finished’ product, and where processes of rewriting what has already been written are accentuated. It is conspicuous that most of the artist novels in an Anglo-Caribbean tradition stage precisely this notion of incompleteness, evident in a quasi-fetishistic revelling in failure, and it distinguishes it from the traditional European artist novel. This shines a new light on the supposedly ‘tragic’ artist figures and renders readings that are taken in by the – misleading – melancholic or desperate mediations on artistic failure inherently lacking. Rather, the staging of ‘tragic artists’ must be understood as emerging from within this nexus as at once a mytheme that allows for artistic self-sublimation, but also as an a priori awareness of the impossibility of originality, authenticity, and responsibility, which rest on a fantasmatic ‘wholeness’ of reality or knowledge. Failure in achieving the desired goal, and the concomitant shift of focus from product to process, mirrored in the heightened self-reflexive nature and narcissistic introspection of the texts, emphasises the text as structured by desire and renders instances where the text-as-product is central (also in the negative, in the sense of not achieving it) as a mere ideal of a ‘whole’, integrated, finished text the desiring text strives towards and hence as located in the imaginary.

As the artist novel is, as I have proposed, a narcissistic narrative, the self-reflexive staging of hindrance and frustration amounts both to an artistic self-interrogation in light of the suitability of these myths, and often also to their ironic refraction. Particularly the notion of artistic growth, manifest in ‘circular reasoning’ that serves as an affirmation of acquired creativity (Maack 53), is drawn upon and partly outright denounced, for instance in teasing an epilogue or in endings that leave the writing subject and the product suspended in mid-air. In this respect, the repeated attempt to produce a text but not arriving at it is also, as Sigmund states, “a case of potential poesis” (27; my translation) that points towards alternative epistemologies, as that which is not yet fully symbolically inscribed – in Lacan’s terms congruent with the feminine position – and desiring of other (non-racialised, non-gendered, non-sexualised) subject positions. The identification with or foreclosure of the feminine principle in language in the artist narratives thus also speaks to the negotiation of the task to bring about the voices of the ‘not-yet’.
6 Readerly and Writerly Pleasures: The Ethics and Erotics of Encountering ‘Otherness’

Bringing the notion of the ‘new portrait’ full circle, this chapter continues the conceptualisation of the artist novel as erotic text and outlines how the *Künstlerroman* mode I have described so far also extends to staging readerly encounters with difference and the potentials and limits it entails. It prepares the enquiry into ‘comfortable readings’ in the analytical chapters as readings in line with dominant regimes of representation and demands, and ‘inconvenient readings’, i.e. readings that induce a break with the same and render ‘otherness’ irreducible or un-incorporable. The latter can be considered an ethical reading strategy. The analytical chapters will then pursue the following questions: How and what subject positions are foregrounded for readers, how are readers (dis)interpellated into/from hegemonic positions, and what ethical potentials does this unfold? How does the artist novel circumvent the perpetuation of essential categories, as pertains particularly to notions of race and ethnicity, while still offering access points for engaging with ‘otherness’? In Derek Attridge’s words, if an ethics of literature is grounded in the experience of otherness, how does the Caribbean artist narrative then cause readers “to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while attempting to understand it” (11)? In this vein, a rereading of criticism of the works discussed must also take place. As my evaluations of critical literature on the texts I discuss in the analytical chapters show, this is a tense field where criticism, likewise, is often complicit in inferring and preserving the fixity of identity categories through “fetishizing difference under the rubric of incommensurability” (Lazarus, “Introducing” 10).

Here, too, part of the *Künstlerroman* mode employed in the Caribbean novel is the anticipation, reflection, and negotiation of developments in literary theory.

Yet why focus on the reader in a thesis on artistic self-fashioning at all? The Caribbean artist narrative, I argue, is profoundly occupied with its own reception, which filters into the fictionalisation of processes and structures of reading. Further, creating is premised on consuming (the products of) others, and here the artist narrative enacts Barthes’s idea of reading as a prerequisite for the artist’s own creation: “Why do I write?” […] That point of departure is the pleasure, the feeling of joy, of jubilation, of fulfilment that reading certain texts written by others produces in me → *I write because I have read*” (Preparation 130–131; original

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122 Critics who have engaged with an ethics of reading or its moral implications are, among others, Martha Nussbaum and J. Hillis Miller. Robert Eaglestone’s *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (1997) provides an overview over this debate. When I speak of an ‘ethics’ of reading in the following, this always refers to the relationship the reading ‘self’ (potentially) undergoes with the read ‘other’.

123 Monika Albrecht, writing on recent transitions within the field of Postcolonial Studies, here rightly criticises the “sweeping generalization one frequently finds in the field and […] a mode of *quod erat demonstrandum* postcolonial critique that takes for granted what it claims to explore”, resulting in “a large body of literary criticism which is not only highly predictable in its results but also, as a result of blocking out everything that is not within the scope of certain core beliefs, remarkably superficial in its literary analyses” (52).
emphasise). Lastly, the focus on reading serves to negotiate the pleasures, frustrations, and ethics involved in encountering the ‘other’. Here, the artist narrative navigates an especially delicate terrain: as the writer (both actual and fictionalised) finds himself in the predicament of potentially perpetuating (neo)colonial structures of domination through employing the ‘master’s tools’, i.e. the English language or, on a superstructure and even more specifically in the context of this study, myths and staple tropes of the literary tradition by drawing on the genre of the Künstlerroman and thereby universalisms, part of the artist novel strategy is to actively involve the reader in the writerly task to delegate the responsibility usually levelled at the artist. ‘Responsibility’, here, carries a twofold meaning: as the reader’s response-ability, i.e. the possibility to react to a text, and an ethical obligation to respond (Oliver 15).

Reading is negotiated on various planes in the artist narrative and is, in line with notions of creation, staged as both theme and process. As such, many of the novels introduce other characters as challenging and antagonistic readers, who function as quasi-literary critics, or feature writers who start off as readers, e.g. of canonical classics, their predecessors, or their contemporaries or rivals.124 Sean Burke in his disquisition of Barthes’s, Foucault’s, and Derrida’s engagement with philosophical thoughts of the subject and acts of rewriting states that, with the literary text becoming more self-reflexive, “autocritical, autodeconstructive even”, the boundaries between literature – the ‘creative’ – and criticism become more porous (170), which suggests that self-aware acts of reading and of meaning-making move centre stage. Via these fictionalised readers or reading instances, different subject positions are, moreover, created by either guiding readers to identify with or challenge the positions they embody.

As I have outlined for the conditions of producing art in chapter 3, its reception is, likewise, to be understood within this discursive field. For the British post-war novel, as Steven Connor outlines, forms of reader address became more complex due to the novel’s general necessity to respond to “twin imperatives”, both of which are implied in the loosening of older forms of social division (12). For once, this regards a renewed sense of a unified, common culture after the experience of the war, which the genre of the novel should reflect in addressing a collective readership. This, however, clashes with an increasing commercialisation within the cultural sector and the diversification of modes of consumption in a mass cultural market, which complicated such a collective address (12–13). For the Caribbean artist narrative, the existence of a ‘double’ audience – located in Britain as well as the Caribbean islands – as well as notions of a self-reflexive “strategic exoticism” and “postcolonial guilt”, to use Graham Huggan’s

124 This, again, echoes Bloom’s notion of misreading and ‘poetic warfare’, where, in order to succeed in the Oedipal struggle with his forefathers and become a writer in his own right, the writer must enter into a “corrective movement”, i.e. a strong reading in form of a “poetic misreading or misprision” of the works of a predecessor (14).
(Exotic 32) and Sarah Brouillette’s (Postcolonial 21) terms respectively, make reader address and engagement yet more complex. Moreover, the addressed readerships changed with different generations of Caribbean writers in Britain, where the address to a more homogenous notion of a white, British, middle-class readership that applied to the first generation of Windrush immigrants shifted with the second generation to “a readership produced by forty years of ‘cultural diversity’, attuned to issues of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, national identity and transculturation” (Woods 748–749; original emphasis). Brouillette, drawing on Graham Huggan’s global reader figure, whose reading practice in its exoticisation of foreign cultures is marked by a ‘touristic’ conscience, here maps out a tendency that affects particularly younger Caribbean literature since the 1980s. She argues that as authors respond to their own reception within a framework of presenting “the Third World or global South to a presumably apolitical metropolitan audience”, the reader here “is one correlate to a pervasive guilt about the consumption of postcolonial cultural products” (Postcolonial 5). In other words, writers have to exercise their authority within a setting in which the legacy of colonialism is mixed with a guilty pleasure of nostalgically longing for a past with clear racial, or, as I would add, gendered and classed divisions (Smethurst 282).

Acknowledging that textual representations not only reflect but create subjectivity, that they, as Ansgar Nünning has it, are “involved in the actual generation of attitudes, discourses, ideologies, hierarchies of norms and values, and structures of feeling and thinking” (160), a focus on readerly subject positions here entails enquiring into how difference and questions of alterity are made encounterable in this field of tension and how strategies of creating, sustaining, and frustrating readers’ desires affect epistemological certainties and effect specific reading positionalities.  

Attridge’s discussion of an ‘ethics of otherness’ provides an apt starting point here, albeit I am aware of the fact that this might be exclusive of other aspects in ethics. Because otherness must be readable for the reader to engage with a text, it must “turn into sameness” (11). For Attridge, who in this regard discusses J.M. Coetzee’s work, an ethics of otherness here entails the engagement with a text that recognises “its potential for reinterpretation, for grafting into new contexts, for fission and fusion” and brings about “new possibilities for thought and feeling” in a “creative transformation of familiar norms and habits” (11). As such, it is closely tied to the formal propensities of a text, and for Attridge it is “the formally innovative text, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, [that] makes the strongest

125 Louis Althusser’s notion of the subject is here also helpful to conceptualise the ‘power’ of literature in this regard: the individual is subject to a form of greater authority (such as the state) and simultaneously under the illusion that one is a free agent, an illusion that is created with the help of literature (Currie 35–36). In controlling readers’ positions, fiction not only urges them to sympathise, but to identify with fictional characters and thus to occupy certain subject positions (36).
ethical demands” (11). In line with this, it is crucially not those texts who most openly thematise notions of alterity which are the most ethical in this regard, as ethics should not be mistaken for ‘sympathy’, but rather those that make the greatest demands “upon all these familiar discourses” of traditional humanism, Enlightenment, or Romanticism and thereby question their origins and contingency (13). ‘Ethical’ thus entails the questioning of established knowledge, the overcoming of “the subject” which – in its pretheoretical arrogance – claimed mastery over self and other”, and the recognition that the self “is a subject related to otherness” (Feldmann, “Beyond” 123). ‘Alterity’, here, is not in dialogue with the reader, but present in an “intensity of its unignorable being-there” (Attridge 13), which is also potentially unsettling. Thinking through this with Roland Barthes, an ‘ethics of otherness’ could be described as “refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text)”, which Barthes considers an “anti-theological activity”, as the refusal of a fixed meaning means, “in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law” (“Death” 147). This resonates with questioning the foundations of Enlightenment values, which also presume a universal subject, in whose wake ‘others’ have been deemed inferior.

The genre of the artist novel is here arguably particularly suited to enquire into these processes. Katie Vater’s analyses of contemporary Spanish artist novels, for instance, show that the popularity of artists as protagonists is both due to their difference from and relatability with readers. Historically, she states, readers were fascinated with the artists’ eccentricity, their disinterestedness and “difference from the ‘common man’”, whereas presently, they relate to them “in their search for authentic creative expression that mirrors readers’ own desires for authenticity” (15) or for a life beyond material goals (16–17). Bloch’s philosophical view of the genre, which I have drawn on in the last chapter, similarly draws attention to the artist’s supposed ‘fuller life’: for the reader, Bloch suggests, the “life of the artist seems to be more attractive” than reading about “the so-called higher echelons of society” (“Artist” 265). Through the genre’s portrayal of a “more colourful” existence, it may “affect the involved reader when there is suffering and failure” (265). “Such vicarious reading”, he continues, “is not only a substitute for real life, but can also jar readers an prepare them for something” (265). Bloch hints at the affective potential of these texts that is predicated on notions of difference – in his case, these are class differences – and may result in an ethical response to them.

The importance assigned to the reader in discussions of the genre corresponds with Barthes’s famous ‘birth’ of the reader at the ‘cost’ of the author and the revaluation of the

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126 Crucially, Attridge does not exclude realist texts from this cluster, as they can be even more demanding than modernist works, because in them, the text’s “otherness is often disguised, and requires an even more scrupulous responsiveness on part of the reader” (11; FN 17).
former’s position: “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author” (“Death” 148). Conceptualising the reader with both Barthes’s notion of the ‘birth of the reader’, i.e. the reader’s entry into the text, and Lacan’s ‘birth’ of the subject as its entry into the symbolic order, s/he should be understood, as Luke Johnson states, “as the symbolization of the readerly being”, which is ‘killed’ by the letter and transformed “into a literary subject, or function of the text” (“Author” 5; original emphasis). In this understanding, similar to the artist subject, the reading subject is then marked by lack, which it aims at filling in reading or, more specifically, in attempting to determine what the Other – in this case, for instance, the (imagined) author – wants from it, as Barthes states: “The text you write must prove to me that it desires me” (Pleasure 6; original emphasis). The artist novel’s staging of an artist’s life can here be read as resonating with what Barthes has called the reader’s desire for the author: in The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes states that the author, as “the other”, lurks in the middle of the text, and “in the text, in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine” (27; original emphasis). The author reappearing as a desire of readers and critics is then especially visible in the emphasis on autobiographical detail in the reception of postcolonial literature.

In this vein, the ‘erotics of writing’ I have so far focused on in this study are also closely connected with the reader and an ‘erotics of reading’, which entails enquiring into the deriving – or stifling – of pleasure from a text. Robert Scholes’s connection of the narrative with the act of sexual intercourse, which I have referred to in the preceding chapter, explicitly implies the reader in this erotic relationship: “Like the sexual act”, he states, “the act of fiction is a reciprocal relationship. It takes two. […] In the full fictional act, […] writer and reader share a relationship of mutual dependency”, with the meaning of the fictional act being “something like love” (27). His comments serve to conceive of readers as desiring subjects in this ‘relationship’ as well: they desire to know about the protagonists’ fate, about the cultural context, or, bearing

127 ‘Reader’, in this context, is analogous to ‘author’ and to the subject as conceptualised in chapter 4, as the acceptance of a symbolical position that has “no singular existence outside the text” (Pint 136). Like the writing subject, the reading subject, too, is a position offered by the text and by no means referring to an external reader. In correspondence with this understanding of subjectivity, I refrain from drawing on reader-response theory in my study, which conceives of the practice of reading as ‘completing’ a text and perpetuates a humanist concept of language (Easthope 141) but base my insights on theorists who have conceptualised reading as a mobilisation and result of desire, and see the reading process as perpetually unfinished. Doris Sommer, moreover, claims that the “underdeveloped practices of ‘reader response’ theory” and its “strategies of containment” are emerging from a universalism that is unsuitable for what she calls minority writing (xiii).

128 Although I will introduce the corresponding notion of ‘bliss’ later in this chapter, in the following, ‘pleasure’ is, like in Barthes’s text, intended to refer to reading experiences that cover both of these facets unless explicitly restricted to the first meaning of contentment.
in mind that most Caribbean writers addressed themselves to a white, British, middle-class audience, to understand that which is ‘other’. These desires are then potentially ‘erotic’, not just because readers’ engagement is, in the Caribbean artist narrative, often created and sustained through the novels’ ‘sexual undercurrent’, but because they are comparable to the erotic experience in which the sense of self as unified can be suspended, e.g. in a deferral of the reading ‘climax’. Such a pleasure created in reading could exceed the conventional “Oedipal pleasure”, which consists in the urge “to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end” (Barthes, Pleasure 10). Following the elaborations in chapter 5, this Oedipal pleasure of ‘unveiling’ is also a profoundly masculine pleasure, tied semantically to the structure of a quest and sustaining the ‘mythical’ male subject.

To understand how narrative can here create specific subject positions, respectively what and how reader positions are endorsed by a text, insights of literary theorists who have explored the role of desire in narrative are helpful. Teresa de Lauretis’s aforementioned ground-breaking study Alice Doesn’t maps out how representations offer, further, or exclude certain subject positions and, in her case, shape notions of masculinity. There she states that the structure and movement of a narrative causes readers to assume the subject positions offered by the text and to become “engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning, and desire” (106). Building on the notion that the ‘self’ is dependent on the Other, as per the formation of subjectivity in the mirror stage, in “Desire in Narrative”, she further argues that as texts (she speaks of film, but this can be extended to other cultural texts) “address spectators both individually and as members of a social group, a given culture, age, or country, […] certain patterns or possibilities of identification for each and all spectators must be built into the film” (136). Narrative, for instance, hails readers as ‘man’ or ‘woman’, or rather, as she states, as “non-man” (Alice 121), and, as she finds in reference to Laplanche and Pontalis, identification is not straightforward, but premised on the subject’s taking over of attributes of the ‘other’ and its (partial) transformation in this light (141). In the texts under scrutiny, this hailing, for instance, comprises the narrative creation of particular affects or the play with readers’ implication in the male artist’s gaze, e.g. through character or narrator focalisation. With regard to Britishness, like masculinity, a text may thus foster readerly allegiances with hegemonic notions through foregrounding a white, middle-class British gaze on ‘others’, or encourage identification with marginalised characters.

To attest to how this is predicated on the pleasure a text potentially creates, it is worth turning in more detail to the work of Roland Barthes and his distinction of ‘readerly’ (lisible) and ‘writerly’ (scriptible) texts, first introduced in S/Z (1970), as well as his seminal essay The Pleasure of the Text (1975), which attempts to theorise reading as erotic process and the text as
an erotic site, as open, infinite, and “perverse”, confronting readers with “language in pieces, culture in pieces” (51). In the latter text, Barthes famously distinguishes texts of ‘pleasure (plaisir)’ and texts of ‘bliss (jouissance)’ according to their effect on the reader:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria: the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading.
Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Pleasure 14; original emphasis)

While Barthes’s distinction of these terms is not always straightforward and his application of the notions plaisir/jouissance and readerly/writerly often subject to irritation and vacillation, it proves insightful for the subject’s position towards the text’s ‘surface’ ideology. Kris Pint states that ‘pleasure’ and ‘bliss’ conceptually parallel Barthes’s earlier distinction of ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’, and he reformulates their meaning in psychoanalytic terms: “with the texte de plaisir, the reader can pleasurably project one’s imaginary fantasies onto that which one reads. The texte de jouissance makes this identification impossible and profoundly destabilizes the reader’s identity” (141). The readerly text, so “strongly anchored in a particular system of meaning that the reader enjoys little freedom to experiment with alternative interpretations or codes” (137), is “devoted to the law of the Signified”, it rests on connotation (Barthes, S/Z 8) and does not consider the multiplicity of meaning the signifier allows.

Barthes’s phrasing and Pint’s psychoanalytic rerouting are insightful for a Caribbean diasporic context and the subject of alterity: as the ‘readerly’ text is “committed to the closure system of the West” and to perpetuating its goals (Barthes, S/Z 7–8), it is more aligned with Western, enlightenment notions of linearity, rationality, or coherence, and more attuned to the ideologies of Eurocentric grand narratives. In terms of knowledge and representational regimes, a ‘pleasurable’ reading experience would be more in line with the demands of the symbolic order and geared towards identifiability and knowing the ‘other’. This can take place, for instance, through stereotypical portrayals, as representations that correspond to the horizon of readerly expectation, or, in terms of plot, through corresponding to readers’ “anticipation of retrospection” (Brooks, Reading 23; original emphasis), i.e. the providing of narrative closure by satisfying readers’ hope that what is to come in a story will illuminate what they have already

129 As Marcus Willand (153) and Kris Pint (133–134) state, Barthes’s increasing focus on the singular reader paradoxically seems to re-introduce another ‘fixed’ subject with the much-quoted notion of the ‘birth of the reader’ that comes to occupy the gap left by the ‘death of the author’. While I acknowledge the fallibility of Barthes’s theory in this respect and admit that his elaborations on the reader and reading process are somewhat eclectic and idiosyncratic in his work, it still provides a suitable theory for this thesis, particularly when combined with insights from psychoanalysis: Barthes himself draws heavily on psychoanalytic vocabulary, such as ‘fantasy’, ‘Oedipus’, or ‘the imaginary’, which enables me to build on and enrich the ideas on subjectivity as put forward in previous chapters.
Speaking with Lacan, this entails a seeming satisfaction of the reader’s seeking objet petit a, which extends, for instance, to obtaining ‘authentic’ knowledge about another culture or, especially conspicuous with regard to the Windrush novelists’ texts, which are often subject to autobiographical interpretation, about the author instance itself. Yet as the ‘other’ is always tied to the demarcation of the ‘self’, a less obvious objet petit a in this sense consists in what Kim Middleton Meyer in an excellent article on Asian-American literature calls readers’ ‘cultural literacy’ and the desire for a “progressive notion of difference made readable” (97); put differently, a sustaining of readers’ sense of ‘righteousness’ and their misrecognition of being on the ‘right side’ of history, for instance part of a (now) tolerant, multicultural Britain. In this sense, the text of Plaisir also upholds conformity with the societal status quo.

A text of bliss, by contrast, would have the opposite effect: geared around shock and ‘loss’, of meaning, of historical or cultural certainty, the resulting unsettlement is potentially discomforting. ‘Bliss’, or jouissance, in this understanding, is closely aligned with what has been conceptualised as the real and feminine excess and with what is outside dominant regimes of representation: referring to Lacan, Barthes states that it is that which “cannot be spoken, except between the lines”, whereas writer and reader of pleasure “accept[...] the letter” (21), which echoes Lacan’s Name-of-the-Father. The text of jouissance corresponds with Barthes’s earlier notion of a writerly text, as an “ideal text, [where] the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest”, a text without beginning but accessible “by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one [...]”; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language” (S/Z 5–6).

Because of this ambiguity, the writerly text detracts from easy consumption, disinterpellates readers from a place of complacency and rather ‘hails’ them as active co-producers of the text; it makes readers ‘responsible’ and is more apt to effect an ‘ethics of otherness’. In the artist novel, this might be achieved through a defamiliarisation of the tropes of the genre, the incessant repetition of artistic failure, or the confrontation of readers with tragicomic affects.

For Judith Roof, the text evoking bliss also counters heteronormative ideologies, and her findings are insightful for how this might manifest in narrative. Such a text stages the “counterreproductive perverse” and confronts “the oedipal that imports the heterosexual,

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130 This point strongly converges with what Bloch identifies as component of the detective novel: Being primarily Oedipal in form, geared towards “revealing a past crime” (“Artist” 276; original emphasis), it guides the reader’s desire – which is modelled on the figure of the detective – along this trajectory of uncovering, and overcoming, an event that has its origins in the past, a “primordial darkness” (“Detective” 254), and which might be the cause of the artist’s struggle or failure in the present.

131 The distinction between pleasure and bliss cannot, however, simply be mapped onto the distinction between readerly and writerly, as in a writerly text, both that which is within the bounds of ideology and its subversion operate simultaneously.
familial, masterful tropes of knowledge, identity, gender, and sexuality” (xxiii). As such, it is for once implied in hindering its own reproduction (xxiv) and thereby circumvents the reproduction of “natural experience” that inheres in the narrative’s shape of ordering or cause/effect relations (xv), which is implied in sustaining both heterosexual as well as capitalist (re)production (xvii), a notion that curiously resounds with the hindered or aborted instances of writing in the Caribbean artist novel. Further, as “vaguely parasitic on the memory of narrative”, it foregrounds “properties of the text as text”, such as image, rhetoric, and language (xxiv), and we could infer from this to look for instances where narrative linearity and teleology are disturbed by, for instance, self-reflexive or metafictional instances that lay bare the ideological project of maintaining these systems of (re)production. Doris Sommer’s monograph *Proceed with Caution* (1999), which focuses on the enticing and frustrating language games in ethnically marked texts, illustrates further narrative properties of a potentially ethical readerly ‘loss of subjecthood’. She distinguishes readerly engagement in minority writing in terms of ‘universal’ and ‘particularist’ books, reminding of the texts of pleasure and bliss. Particularist books interrupt reader’s “desire to overtake otherness” (x) and “sting readers who feel entitled to know everything as they approach a text” (ix) by effecting an “ethical distance from the object of desire” (31) through rhetorical moves. Such devices that could potentially have a distancing effect comprise e.g. withholding information or giving false leads (4), which serves to erect barricades against “the rush of sentimental identification that lasts barely as long as they read” (15), giving information too unstintingly, in form of supplementary information, which might destabilise readers’ epistemological framework (75), prattle and monotony, even to the extent that it bores, which makes the reader visible as *function* of the text (147–148), or teasing and then frustrating “intimacy or borrowed authenticity” (156), e.g. through silence and hushes (165). Sommer’s “rhetoric of particularism” (x) is apt to approach texts or textual passages “upon which no *consequent* language [...] can be superimposed” (Barthes, *S/Z* 5; original emphasis) and to enquire into specific strategies of distancing.

As that which Barthes terms writerly text “is not a thing” and can, in its pure form, hardly be found “in a bookstore” (*S/Z* 5), I am not arguing that the Caribbean artist narrative is per se a writerly text. Barthes moreover states that it is the subject that is able to both enjoy the text of pleasure and bliss simultaneously that is most subversive, and Susanne Gruß here points towards the “positive ambiguity” of Barthes’s notion of pleasure/bliss, which lies in the fact that it “defies both conservative and left-wing social discourse” (6–7). An ‘ethical’ reading, in

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132 As Barthes states, this subject participates in both the hedonism of culture as well as its destruction and revels in this contradictory and interminable conflict: “he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split, twice over, doubly perverse” (*Pleasure* 14).
this regard, would fortify its readers against a too quick and uncritical alignment with certain cultural values and ideologies. What I wish to propose, then, is that the self-reflexive foregrounding of the agon of representing and negotiating alterity rests on different codes that work to alternately sustain and traverse readers’ fantasies, resulting in an oscillation between readerly and writerly, or pleasurable and blissful positions. Here, the codes of the genre are intricately at work. Referring back to the genre as a ‘space of possibles’, the codes and patterns employed in the novels for once function as anchor points that might lead readers into known territory. Thus, the notion of an artistic quest, the discourse of the solitary genius, or the male writer’s dependency on a female muse are recognisable tropes that may cause pleasure through readers’ familiarity with it. On the other hand, literary strategies such as a narratively created dynamic of advance and delay^133 or the fictionalisation of reading processes, e.g. through reader figures, who serve as (dis)identificatory models, may serve to reorient readers’ knowledge by causing a confrontation with readerly biases and one’s own ideological positions regarding knowledges of the raced, gendered, or sexed ‘other’. While some texts intentionally disturb readers epistemological and ontological foundations, by being, for instance, profoundly ‘politically incorrect’ and thereby shake readers out of their complacency, or, with Lacan, out of a narcissistic identification with a dominant moral regime and out of a comfortable ‘feel good’ position, others, through aligning readers with the text’s dominant perspectives, enact a suturing of the reader to the text’s endorsed ideologies. These aspects pertain, for instance, to a metropolitan reader’s (and also critic’s) identification with a subject position as ‘liberal intellectual’ or the misconceived notion of a continuous progression towards a more ‘enlightened’ and liberal Britain.

To different degrees, the artist novels then engage the reader through the oscillation between citing and defamiliarising the staple tropes of the genre and sustain or undermine their conformity with dominant discourses and self-reflexively stage the artist as supposed stable centre of meaning, a notion that has been ‘revived’ in the reception of Caribbean literature.

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^133 Peter Brooks tellingly calls this dynamic, with Freud, ‘forepleasure’, which he describes as a process of “delay and advance in the textual dynamic, the creation of that ‘dilatory space’ […] through which we seek to advance towards the discharge of the end, yet all the while perversely delaying, returning backwards in order to put off the promised end, and perhaps to assure its greater significance” (Psychoanalysis 29–30).
7 Stagings and Refractions of the \textit{Künstlerroman} in Anglo-Caribbean Literature

After having laid out the contextual and theoretical premises for the refractions of the artist theme and novel in Anglo-Caribbean literature after \textit{Windrush}, this chapter now puts theory into practice by focusing on five exemplary novels in the period between 1954 and 1991 to illustrate the \textit{Künstlerroman}’s particular Caribbean ‘implementation’ and the major social, cultural, political, economic, and artistic concerns expressed, anticipated, and problematised in fictionalised artistic self-fashioning processes. This also serves to illustrate both the Caribbean novel’s pioneering function in reacting to changed conditions of authorship and artistry as well as the versatility of the genre.

7.1 The Anxious Pioneer: Rejecting Essentialisms in George Lamming’s \textit{The Emigrants} (1954)

Bajan novelist George Lamming’s second novel \textit{The Emigrants},\textsuperscript{134} which followed the immense success of his (‘autobiographical’) \textit{In the Castle of My Skin} (1953), serves as a starting point for my enquiries into the Caribbean artist novel. Published two years before Selvon’s \textit{The Lonely Londoners} (1956), \textit{Emigrants} is seen as a – if not the – founding narrative of diasporic experience and one of the first post-war black British novels set in England, and thus itself an ‘archetype’ and a point of reference for many of the other novels discussed in my study. Despite its pioneering status, the novel has by far not attracted as much critical interest as Lamming’s debut \textit{Castle} or his later novels. This, I argue, is due to the novel’s complex take on matters of art, aesthetics, race, gender, and politics, which relates uneasily to the dominant discourses at its time of production, as regards especially its negotiation of ‘black’ and ‘British’ and gendered concepts of an emerging West Indian nationalism. \textit{Emigrants} anticipates the problematisation of the ‘essential black subject’ as well as the dismantling of the author as figure of authority that will become critically entrenched only from the 1970s onwards. For this matter, the novel is located somewhat recalcitrantly in a cultural context that is on the one hand dominated by ideals of anti-colonial resistance and fantasies of forging a pan-Caribbean community, which necessitates the representation of a coherent West Indian subject as a model for identification, and on the other hand marked by an emphasis on British cohesiveness in the tense context of post-war insecurity and colonial disintegration.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134} All references to Lamming’s \textit{The Emigrants} refer to the Ann Arbor Paperbacks edition (1994) and are henceforth abbreviated as ‘\textit{TE}’. All emphases and capitalisation trace back to the author Lamming unless stated otherwise.

\textsuperscript{135} Kalliney, on a related note, states that the 1950s are an awkward period in literary history, as uneasily situated between modernism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (\textit{Commonwealth} 117).
In this chapter I argue that the text’s employment and refraction of structural items of the *Künstlerroman* serves to foreground the essentialisms underpinning these ideas, which are attached to aspects of race, gender, sex, and class, and thereby to problematise the artist as spokesperson for the West Indian diaspora and as inaugurating a Caribbean literary tradition, notions which are particularly structured around aspects of artistic mobility. Lamming’s artist, figured as thoroughly liminal figure, is best described as an ‘anxious pioneer’, which is expressed in the uneasy engagement of myths of engendering – ‘fathering’ – a text and the artist as healing the split between (national) West Indian and British concerns. The text’s dominant artistic subjectivity thus emerges in opposition to the period’s conception of West Indian artists as both ‘saviours and usurpers’. While homogenising notions of Britishness or an essential West Indian subject that lie at the heart of representativeness are thereby exposed, Lamming’s text employs a vocabulary of sexual difference to demarcate autonomy as artistic ideal. In figuring the artist as liminal and afflicted *isolato*, it curiously builds a bridge to the very last novel in this study, Dabydeen’s The Intended, whereas the novels by Harris and Naipaul depict their writers as more confident re-creators of artistic myths.

While the work is – as is predominantly the case with this generation of novelists writing in Britain – read mostly with regard to thematic aspects, some scholars have mentioned Lamming’s self-reflexive engagement with conditions and aporias of artistic creation and some even hint at the intricate connection of writerly and sexual desire. Page, for instance, mentions that the novel’s structuring of episodes around the sexual trope “shifts attention from the characters to the process of artistic creation itself” (32). Yet there is no in-depth analysis of the function of the artist theme, literary authorship, or the politics and aesthetics of *The Emigrants* – or Lamming’s other novels – as a *Künstlerroman*, although this connection has sometimes been noted. This seems curious, as Lamming’s oeuvre is centrally occupied with the notion of coming into writing and heavily draws on mythemes of the genre. Generally perceived as a difficult “experimental ‘high art’ writer” (Brown, *Migrant* 73), the intricacies of *The Emigrant*’s narrative style are often brushed aside as unnecessarily complicated and intellectual, as a narrative game whose ultimate goal lies in “appearing Modern” (Morris 77).

The novel, I contend, self-reflexively engages the contemporaneous literary discourse, structured by a rift between ideals of autonomy, as an inheritance of modernism to which many

136 Cf. e.g. Kalliney (*Commonwealth* 135) or Ho (118).
137 All of Lamming’s six novels demonstrate a struggle with creation to some extent and can be said to reference the framework of the artist novel.
138 In this vein, J. Dillon Brown pointedly notes the “exasperatingly” rampant comparison of Lamming to Joyce, especially in early reviews (*Migrant* 79). But this still prevails: Timothy Weiss even goes so far as to demarcate almost the entire *Windrush* generation into ‘Joyceans’ and ‘Conradians’, finding that “Joyce’s mark seems particularly evident in Lamming and Selvon, while Conrad’s stands out in Naipaul and Harris” (“Windrush” 174). While there are similarities between Lamming and Joyce, I contend that they are cited self-reflexively.
Caribbean writers are drawn, and heteronomous demands, as cultural politics particularly in the context of *Caribbean Voices* suggest. In Lamming’s text, the hindered artist emerges as a result and nexus of this difficult interpellation in the literary field in the post-*Windrush* years. While all artist novels engage this theme, *The Emigrants* foregrounds the process of finding a vocabulary to express the artist’s agon whereas in the later novels, this is either presented as achieved or already satirically exaggerated. Lamming’s novel is not a classic artist novel per se, and unlike many other novels in this study, it does not contain overt intertextual references to canonical texts. The genre-typical mythemes it draws on are often rather manifest in the narrative structure and the entanglement of erotics and writing.\(^{139}\) Contrary to Lamming’s general assessment as outspokenly political and committed writer, a notion that is often based on his non-fictional writing,\(^{140}\) the text, in problematising essentialist ideas of the (artist) subject, pre-empt[s] ideologies that will come to underlie Caribbean writing and canon formation in Britain and here dwell again on ‘difference’ as well as notions of identity on which such endeavours are grounded. Here, I part ways with the dominant characterisation of post-war Caribbean literature as “being in harmony with, as shaping and being shaped by, a developmental history of decolonisation and cultural nationalism” (Donnell, *Twentieth 35*) and as committed to establishing an “authentic Caribbean identity” in order to claim “political legitimacy” for the formerly colonised (Rosenberg 5).

Lamming’s second novel introduces the topic of the *artiste manqué*, the tragic, suffering artist-hero, in the wake of *Windrush* and the early phase of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain. The book traces the voyage of a group of West Indian and other emigrants to Britain on the *Golden Image*, a ship reminiscent of the SS *Empire Windrush*, and their subsequent arrival and settling in the metropolis. Within the array of characters introduced in three chapters, readers mostly follow the perspective of a writer, Collis, who continuously comes to the fore and is submerged again by the narrative and who is closely associated with the intermittently surfacing homodiegetic and even heterodiegetic narrative voice. While *The Emigrants* does not feature

\(^{139}\) This is not an exception at this early stage of the Caribbean artist narrative, as further texts that engage this theme, such as *Black Lighting* (1955) by Roger Mais or *The Last Barbarian* (1961) by Jan Carew also show. Lamming would only consciously employ what has been termed a canonical ‘counter-discourse’ in *Water with Berries* (1972), another artist narrative that engages Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Caliban as emigrant, here, is split into three artist personas – a painter, a musician, and an actor. For *Water*’s engagement of Shakespeare’s Romance, see, e.g. Supriya Nair’s *Caliban’s Curse* and Maria Paola Guarducci, “Only the Ship Remained”.

\(^{140}\) Cf. exemplary Raphael Dalleo’s assessment of Lamming’s oeuvre. Dalleo sees his work as bridging “the division between literary activity and political leadership” (154) and Lamming’s striving for authority grounded in “a tradition of struggle and armed resistance” (160), a notion which a close reading of *The Emigrants* does not support. It is no coincidence that Dalleo’s analysis of Lamming’s work in a Caribbean public sphere focuses solely on his non-fictional work, as the novels engage this topic more complexly and often in contradiction to it.
the first occurrence of this topic, it constitutes a crucial milestone in the formation of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain as well as an Anglophone Caribbean literary canon. Set against the social, political, cultural, and aesthetic background laid out so far, this chapter diverges from existing criticism in some crucial ways. While it also considers the notion of exile, so prevalent in criticism, it especially re-reads the novel’s emphasis on matters of sexuality and masculinity in the context of myths of male creation on which ideologies of nation building (both in a Caribbean and British context) rest. In enquiring into how artistic subject formation is portrayed as contingent on different spatial and contextual configurations, I also demonstrate how the novel demystifies the artist as privileged, agential individual.

7.1.1 Inhibited Journeys and Schizophrenic Subjects: Flights from Responsibility

The sense of a rift between artistic autonomy and responsibility for a community, the archetypical division of ‘art’ and ‘life’, mediated through notions of the private and the public and notions of masculinity and femininity, and thus an awareness of the writer’s uneasy interpellation into the differing desires that structure the literary field is at the heart of Lamming’s text. While less prominent as overt theme, it is a motif around which the narrative is centrally structured and whereby reader’s desires to get to know the ‘other’ are sustained and frustrated. Central to these negotiations is Collis, whose journey to England parallels his aspirations to become a writer there, manifest in – and displaced onto – the desire for ‘a better break’ and to ‘make a man out of himself’, both mantras that are frequently repeated in the novel. The artist’s journey here is congruent with a literal journey from the margins to the centre, and the agon of artistic self-determination is embodied in Collis’s struggles to dis/connect to/from the fellow Caribbean emigrants on the *Golden Image* and processes of scrutinising others as literary material and identificatory ‘models’. With Collis, the text enacts the fantasy of the suffering and split artist, which is here tied to his involuntarily interpellation into the ‘sacred fount’ myth, i.e. the idea of “art as experience” (Beebe 16), and takes this tradition’s conception that in the close relation of art and life “one can exhaust or destroy the other” (17) to its extreme through the characters’ and the narrative’s dissolution.

In drawing on the mytheme of the artist having to make use of his experiences to create, the novel inextricably intertwines the writer’s journey into artistry with the social role of literature, with Collis figured as unwilling representative of a collective unified by race, gender,

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{141}}\] An earlier instance is Claude McKay’s Protagonist Ray in *Banjo* (1929), whose desire to transcribe “‘instinctive gifts’ of unlettered black men” (Kalliney, *Commonwealth* 133) becomes a form of manifesto which is cited, repeated, and transformed in the post-war Anglo-Caribbean novel.
and class, thereby enacting what Florian Sedlmeier has called a questioning of “the paradigm of communal representativeness” through shifting the focus to “the problem of representability itself” (13). While readers learn of Collis’s writerly profession only later in the text, he is always closely identified with processes of textualisation and problems of representation through frequent hints that he ‘rehearses’ stories and relationships or sees others “with a purpose” (TE 31). The artist’s orientation in the narrative resonates with the psychoanalytic idea that sexual difference underlies all meaning making – and writing – processes: his very first mention as character, as opposed to Collis as inferred narrator before, to which I will come back later, already references the entanglement of writerly subject formation with gender and class, as he wonders whether he should join a female or male passenger on the ship (TE 27). Class, as further differential category, is mentioned secondly, and it is crucially a factor about which he has only heard from other characters (TE 28). From the outset, the text presents the artist subject as structured by the Other’s desire: the writer’s journey and desire is determined by gossip and talks overheard from others and he is oriented towards ‘sameness’. Gender, race, and class differences then direct him towards another emigrant, Dickson, who is supposedly ‘like’ Collis, yet who remains, in a Conradian allusion, “impenetrable” and “rigid[…]” (TE 30). The hindered alignment with Dickson foreshadows the text’s frustration of smooth identifications via race, gender, and class, which troubles the genre-typical quest motif as securing writerly ‘arrival’ and the writer’s ‘task’ of forging of a collective based on unifying identity categories.

The artist in Emigrants is never figured as agential, but continuously foregrounded as a specific subject position within the symbolic order: Collis as character is both interpellated as ‘committed writer’, even outspokenly so by the character named ‘Yugoslav’ (TE 100), and likewise affected or rejected by other characters, and as narrator is swallowed and ‘disgorged’ by the narrative. Dickson’s repulsion, moreover, expresses the textual subject’s ‘rebellion’ against its author, his feeling that “he had been seen” by Collis (TE 31) results in a physical attack, and his later reproach of Collis, the writer, as liar (TE 102), echoing Plato’s condemnation of poets as liars, posits the subject of the author’s gaze as rebellious. Here, the text also foregrounds the body as intervening in Collis’s attempts at textualisation, speaking to

143 Although the precise class affiliations remain somewhat ambivalent: both Collis and Dickson seem to belong to the middle class, as their education (Dickson) or status as published writer (Collis) indicate. Further, Collis shows a lack of understanding of the meaning of ‘working class’, as transpires in his conversation with the ‘Yugoslav’ (TE 99). The conversation on the train between an unnamed Grenadian emigrant and an English passenger later in the novel further points to this, as the Grenadian man emphasises that “the better classes get much the same standard of education as you [English] do” (TE 117). Curiously, in scholarly literature, The Emigrants is sometimes featured as ‘working-class writing’, cf. e.g. Ron (121–142).

144 The spelling here alternates, later he is referred to as ‘Jugoslav’.

145 “The day I find out you’ve been telling lies about me I’ll get you as sure as I’m standing here. […] I happen to know that you write,’ Dickson said” (TE 102).
the text’s performance of a refusal of ‘being incorporated’ into dominant ideologies, as Dickson’s resistance is rendered in corporeal terms. His body is “warning [Collis] that it shouldn’t be touched” (TE 31). Dickson, who is in many ways similar to Collis, thus also constitutes the real to his order and pre-empts Collis’s speaking for the ‘other’. In like fashion, the text continuously performs the anxiety of ‘being written’ by emphasising the withdrawal of the artist’s ‘material’ from his potentially violent gaze. Dickson later feels like his “body was a black ember smouldering under Collis’s eye” (TE 274), and the sheer mention of Collis’s name by the character known as ‘Yugoslav’ causes Dickson to “avoid his eyes” and to withdraw from the Yugoslav’s taking his hand and leading him to Collis (TE 268–269). At other times, characters become aware that they are mere “extensions of Collis” whose “action dictated theirs” (TE 274). The text here cites a Sartrean notion of committed authorship, with Collis’s “words […] [becoming] actions” (Sartre, What 23), and equates this form of writing with a danger of feminisation, evident in Dickson’s fear of passivity in being guided by the Yugoslav, and of castration. Collis as writer is figured as causing the dissolution of his subjects, quite literally so, as the other characters fragment or melt under his gaze, which renders them indistinguishable: “I can’t see any difference between the two of you [Dickson and the Yugoslav], […] you’re both grey” (TE 274). The constant failure of vision, of grasping the ‘other’, performs a gaze – as a simulacra for writing – that acknowledges rather than veils lack by foregrounding the castration anxiety inherent to a confrontation with it, following Lacan’s statement that “it is in so far as all human desire is based on castration that the eye assumes its virulent, aggressive function” (Four 118). In this, the text performs the difficulty of finding a non-violent form of language and representation while it simultaneously emphasises the subject’s inescapability from discourse. The ‘material body’ as intervening in textualisation here can moreover also be read as anticipating what will later form a main line of contestation within postcolonial criticism, i.e. a clash between Marxist-oriented critiques of (seemingly) objective material conditions and a too exclusive focus on textuality.146

The fantasmatic clash between ‘life’ and ‘art’ is also performed narratively and spatially. The artist as isolato and the mytheme of the ‘split’ is here evoked to emphasise the anxiety of writerly restriction through an interpellation as spokesman for ‘his’ West Indian community. On the level of narrative, Collis’s ‘birth’ and ‘death’ as narrator, embodied in the ambiguous relation between Collis as character and homo- and even heterodiegetic narrator, stages the futile fantasy of detachment and likewise troubles an Oedipal narrative trajectory, which would

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146 Scholars mostly aligned with this reproach on postcolonial criticism are Arif Dirlik and Benita Parry.
reinscribe the ‘mythical’ male subject. The text’s first pages leave readers unclear as to who is speaking, and the first time an ‘I’, which is later associated with Collis, comes to the fore is tellingly as part of a collective ‘We’ (TE 5). Only six pages in, a distinctive ‘I’ becomes palpable, which soon again vanishes, and Collis becomes merely a character and part-time focaliser, before briefly resurfacing as narrator in the last chapter. This narrative ‘death’ is also mirrored in his last words: “Father Into Thy Hands I Commend My Spirit” (TE 24). The religious reference and the emphasis on ‘hands’ and ‘spirit’ reverberate with demands of becoming a literary ‘father’ who, reminiscent of the Romantic genius, is able to synthesise the material and the spiritual (Emison 313). This fracturing of “psychological boundaries by traversing first and third person as well as dialogic representation” (Page 29) then amounts to a poetological comment on the situation of the writer within the societal collective.

The text switches to a heterodiegetic narrative situation, but Collis’s temporary ‘break’ into it (resonant with the novel’s repetition of ‘a better break’) attests to the writer’s desire for individuation and its frustration and an uneasily held distance of the subject to his community. Collis-as-narrator resurfaces around a third into the first chapter, this time mid-sentence:

The clarity of their talk had shaken Collis into a kind of frenzied thinking; until tonight I didn’t worry myself with reasons except there were the reasons which they have given. Now I see more clearly in what way I belong to this group which has one thin certain. Flight! We’re all in flight; and yet as Tornado says we haven’t killed. We haven’t stolen, I never killed, I never stole. […] But if that break doesn’t turn up? My God, what a flight . . .

His mind had changed its course to a different and wider speculation. He was beginning to imagine things.

. . . and suppose this sickness sweeps through everyone in these islands and there’s a general flight. […] I’ve heard of others fleeing, but it seemed something quite different. […] He left the dormitory and walked up the deck. (TE 49-51)

The fact that the ‘frenzied thinking’ also characterises the mode of the homodiegetic narration indicates that this is indeed Collis speaking. The schizophrenic frenzy that marks the subject’s struggle for distinction from the all-enveloping ‘We’ and a climactic progression from ‘We’ to ‘I’ – “we haven’t killed. We haven’t stolen, I never killed, I never stole” – emphasises the writer’s anxiety of being subsumed under a collective ‘We’ as a homogenous, essential immigrant subject and a striving for autonomy. Collis here is not only metaphorically split between ‘I’ and ‘We’, but literally split between character and narrator. The never quite certain

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147 Collis’s exact positionality is, from the outset, ambiguous: he is, arguably, first introduced as homodiegetic narrator, yet this association is only possible through later allusions to events we have originally witnessed through his narration. There are a variety of factors that speak for Collis being the unnamed homodiegetic narrator, among them the homodiegetic narrator’s assertion that his vision is impaired (TE 8), which suggests that this is Collis speaking, whose fading sight the text emphasises in the last part of the novel. The metafictional reference to the writing of the text (TE 18) and the fact that the narrator’s reference to other characters always leaves out Collis further speaks to this. A variety of critics also assume that the homodiegetic narrator is in fact Collis, cf. e.g. Claire Alexander (63) or Sandra Pouchet Paquet (Novels 32).
subject of the ‘I’, here, moreover performs the ‘I’ of narrative as always only a shifter, as subject of the enunciation without signifying it (Lacan, *Écrits* 677).\(^{148}\)

In displaying, as Easthope states, the process of its own enunciation, the text also “disrupts the fixity of its reader as subject of the enounced” and thereby undermines readers’ “identification with the hero as position privileged within the represented” (45), which, seeing Collis as artist-hero, posits a comment on the desire for the (biographical) author so prevalent in postcolonial literary criticism. The fantasmatic split from a homogenous ‘We’ and from character in the narration to narrator parallels the subject’s differentiation in the mirror stage, yet the formation of an artistic *gestalt* as autonomous individual is interrupted, as the narrative reincorporates Collis into the collective of the characters. This deferring, pre-empting even of the formation of artistic subjectivity and the “Quest for self” (Beebe 6), withholding – contrary to the classical trajectory of the *Künstlerroman* – a distinct and coherent identity from where to begin one’s journey and also a conclusion of this process, culminates in the final chapter, “Another Time”. Here, in circular fashion, the writer-protagonist is returned to the liminal stage he occupied at the outset, now emphasised by Collis gazing out the window at the imminent dawn of a new day, after having rejected ‘his’ people, some of the West Indians who need assistance (*TE* 282). As such, in portraying the artist’s agon through demands for representativeness the narrative draws on the artistic myth of the figure of Daedalus, so prominently taken up by James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, in figuring the artist as self-fashioned outsider who flees social responsibilities and seeks distance to society (Flinspach 180–181);\(^{149}\) a fact that will be repeated throughout the text, also by means of spatial configurations. The depletion of the structural cohesion of the quest-motif by emphasising the circular nature of the journey can, with Laura Mulvey’s reading of the Oedipal trajectory in narrative, be conceived as the artist’s remaining within a “static mother-child symbiosis” (169–175) and as a refusal to accept societal and cultural conventions in an upheaval of the *Bildungs* narrative and its ideologies. The various references to ‘womb’ in the novel also attest to that and portray the artist as desiring an alternative means of representation that transcends fixed differences.

As demonstrated, it is then not just the narrative that entraps Collis, but the schizophrenic relationship between hetero- and homodiegetic narration also renders Collis’s interruptions as the ‘real’ that hinders the organising principle, the heterodiegetic voice, from streamlining into a linear, coherent account and as a linguistic disorder. In this way, the artist is precisely figured as the element that *hinders* the process of creating order, and the schizophrenic position

\(^{148}\) Here, I dispute Forbes’s claim that the “ubiquitous third-person narrative voice” constitutes “a kind of masculine voice of final authority” (183).
\(^{149}\) Flinspach discusses the Daedalus myth in more detail (cf. 179–183). For my purpose, I follow her assumption that it is the motif of flight that this figure symbolically embodies (182).
foregrounded with Collis serves as probing the rejection of the law. A further example illustrates this. A characteristic of the schizophrenic is that s/he generally takes everything too literal (Mellard 56), and this also applies to Collis, for whom subjects more and more become objects and organs lose their signification, they become literal matter. Thus, Collis was looking at Frederick, trying to see whether he could say what precisely Frederick was. Frederick, The word ran about his head. Then he saw the object which he could not define. […] Collis was looking for his eyes but it seemed that he had forgotten what an eye was. He saw the objects of dull glass evenly balanced on either side of Frederick’s nose, but he could no longer recognise Frederick’s eyes. (TE 224)

The function of narrative schizophrenia is paralleled in the novel by the trope of blindness, which also characterises the narrator/character Collis, whose vision increasingly fails. As for Lacan, schizophrenia, as a psychotic structure, describes the “failure of the paternal metaphor” (Écrits 479) and a desire to retreat to the pre-mirror stage, these strategies negotiate issues of recognition and misrecognition and the ontological status of knowledge, and this has ramifications for the writer, who is tasked with creating knowledge and history. The over-identification with the signifier without understanding, as is eminent in Collis’s dwelling on the literality of things – such as the ‘dull glass’ for the eye in the quotation above – shows the arbitrariness of the signifier/signified relationship and the ordering function language has and thereby performs a compromising of the artist’s tool on the structural level.

In positing language and text as beyond the author’s conscious control, Lamming anticipates a poststructuralist notion of authorship and representation that would become canonical theory only from the late 1970s onwards and pursues an alternative form of artistic creation in which the artist never emerges as stable or coherent subject and as such pre-empts the notion of the West Indian artist as ‘prophet’ for ‘his’ people. Here, my reading strongly disputes Joshua Esty’s assessment of the narrative voice: he reads Lamming’s narrative ambiguity as a testimony of “the agonized production in the novel of a private and interior self, threatened materially by racism” and the first person voice as “developing a refined and resolute sense of his selfhood against the backdrop of postcolonial migration” (208), a reading that, while it has merit in going beyond an otherwise mournful tone that is prevalent in critical assessments of the narrative voice, is to me indicative of a general misunderstanding of the novel’s central concern, i.e. the question of who writes and with what authority, and it also neglects that the narrative voice is much less authoritative than assumed.

The novel’s negotiations of ‘space’ as closely intertwined with the adumbration of Collis’s becoming-author and its frustration, visible in analogies of sexual initiation and of engendering the text, which is the subject of my next chapter, similarly draw on the idea of the

150 For an overview over the reception of poststructuralist theories in Britain see Anthony Easthope (1988).
artist’s split between autonomy and heteronomy and also contribute to Lamming’s anti-essentialist strategy. As Imre Szeman notes in this vein, “The Emigrants is only accidentally about emigration” but more presciently about “possibilities of space” (182). Szeman elaborates on this with regard to the West Indian nation in the context of federation, yet I contend that spatial semantics are closely identified with artistic subject formation. While the artist’s journey is not conceived as a Bildungsreise in the tradition of the Romantic artist novel tradition (Feulner 229), the different spaces through which the writer moves reflect the artist subject’s position in the literary field, oscillating between social engagement or radical isolation (227).

In foregrounding ‘space’ and ‘matter’, the text demystifies literary authority as tied to the imagination of an ingenious subject by emphasising how artistic subjectivity is formed through shifts in different spaces, such as the ship and its micro-spaces, the various locations in the metropolis, and even the lavatory.151

To understand subjectivity as formed in relation to socially constructed spaces and objects, it serves to recall Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage as capturing the subject spatially (Écrits 77). The function of the mirror stage in terms of space is to locate the subject in a “relationship between […] the Innenwelt and the Umwelt” (78). Put simply, the mirror image suggests that the ‘here’ of the ‘I’ is actually ‘there’ in the mirror, which is why the subject is also always disrupted spatially. Its insertion into the social order thus rests not on a conscious desire to access it, but in its space being constituted as “the space of an Other’s desire”, which takes place visually in the mirror stage (Noyes 67). In the various spaces the novel portrays, which are also coded in terms of gender, race, and class, as I will elaborate on later, Collis undergoes a transformation from autonomous author, as formerly published poet, to involuntary ‘engaged’ writer, in being interpellated into masculine-coded processes of nation building, to a fantasmatic ‘screen’ for upholding the myth of a liberal Britain, and the textual positions of Collis here also indicate shifts in the cultural sphere.

The ship’s deck, as most public space on the ship, illustrates how authorial subjectivity in the text is formed in relation to the Other – it functions as a laboratory of an incipient multicultural society in Britain and of probing answers to the Che Vuoi of the socio-cultural sphere. The deck here constitutes an incipient postcolonial ‘contact zone’,152 as it features the

151 As such, the text would lend itself to a reading in light of various ‘turns’ – such as spatial and material – that have gained foothold in cultural theory since the 1970s. The ‘spatial turn’, or ‘topological turn’, in cultural theory refers to a reassessment of the meanings space and place carry for subject formation. Sociologist Henri Lefebvre, human geographer Edward W. Soja, and literary scholar Fredric Jameson, for instance, have stated that ‘space’ has been neglected in favour of ‘time’ in Western modernity and argued that postmodernity has witnessed a “spatialization of the temporal” (Jameson, Postmodernism 156). Major insights from the turn to space are the structuring of subjectivity and the subject’s relation to the world through spatial configurations, not against them. 152 Here, I use a revised notion of Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of the contact zone, which she defines as a place of colonial encounters. In my use, it still refers to a zone where “peoples geographically and historically separated
few encounters between the West Indian passengers with other emigrants and the English passengers. Considering the deck as resonant with the cultural sphere, its description as a place of “ruthless exposure” (TE 91) renders it a competitive place: as emblematic of the authorial subject’s confrontation with the Other’s desire, it also symbolises the rules and demands of the literary field and the ‘black’ diaspora. For the writer, it carries both the connotations of entering it as passive, feminised colonial ‘other’, but it is also a liminal space that promises authorial individuation in Britain, as Collis’s “[n]ervous and excited” state and him being “the first to be fully dressed and on the deck” (TE 99) emphasises.

Collis’s encounter with the Yugoslav illustrates this most tellingly. The ship’s deck as a “spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 7), foreshadows the pressure on the author to choose his allegiances in Britain based on a shared ethnic and classed ‘otherness’. Collis, here, is crucial for understanding how the signification of ‘race’ has changed in the post-war decades and comes to intersect with ‘class’, where “[r]ace is the modality in which class is lived” and the “medium in which class relations are experienced”, to cite Stuart Hall et al. again (386). Collis is initially ignorant of class divisions in England when talking with the Yugoslav on the ship about a factory visible in the distance: “It’s a working class district,’ the man said, and Collis […] fe[lt] vaguely that he was being drawn into something he didn’t understand” (TE 99). Yet the microcosmic cultural sphere on the ship’s deck suggests that these are the key parameters that will demarcate identification – and literary production – in Britain. The first time readers find out about Collis’s profession is through a reproach by the Yugoslav, whose assessment of Collis’s understanding of literature as non-instrumental sounds “like a threat” (TE 102):

“You’re a writer,’ the man said. […] ‘A writer’s work is public property […]. You are articulate not only for yourself, but thousands who’ll never see you in person, but who will know you because the printed page is public property. And if you betray yourself, you can betray thousands, too. To be trivial, dishonest or irresponsible is to be criminal.’ (TE 100–101)

The Yugoslav here assumes the position of a Marxist critic, for whom the value of the literary work lies in its unveiling of the historical and economic conditions of class relations, come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 6), but, as referring to various actors within the cultural field of Britain, does not maintain the binary coloniser/colonised.

This is most evident in the fact that the emigrants, who otherwise often dwell in the ship’s underground dormitory, are figured as passive, blind “objects”, “[s]prawled on the deck” (TE 81–83) in this public space. This foreshadows “the feminized space of erasure” they will inhabit in England (Forbes 205) and suggests that they will be inconsequential to the socio-political public sphere in Britain, a fact that is undergirded by their dwelling mostly in basement rooms and hostels in the novel’s second chapter, “Rooms and Residents”.

The Yugoslav is aligned with a Marxist subject position in the text, a position that, as Ellis states, is typical for Lamming: “Lamming’s perspective on literary narrative and the writer as hougan is an interesting mixture of Haitian cosmology and Marxist literary theory” (“Transatlantic” 74). Yet I dispute Ellis’s assessment that Lamming thereby appraises “the social function of art” and sees writing as having “an educative pedagogic role”
emphasised in him reading Collis’s poem with “clinical detachment” (TE 101), and denigrates the autonomy of artistic production. In an allusion to the Daedalus myth that speaks to an anxiety of engagement, the Yugoslav approaches Collis for his sacrilegious abuse of his artistic skills (Neumann 77). Collis, confronted with the responsibility to his potentially thousands of readers, in turn, seeks escape to the underground dormitory, the space of privacy and associated with the womb (TE 91), from where he then vanishes altogether in a reverse Oedipal development, mirrored in a shift in focalisation from internal, through Collis, to zero focalisation. The vanishing of Collis’s individual point of view reflects a writerly anxiety of forfeiting autonomy in light of demands that emphasise ‘local colour’ and an aesthetic of the folk in the contemporaneous order of West Indian literature, and the retreat to the womb-like space also indicates a forfeiting of literary paternity.

Lamming here exercises a clever pun on the incongruous discourses that structure writing in the immediate post-Windrush period by tying the writer’s ‘failure’ to the incommensurability of differing political and aesthetic demands and desires: engaged versus autonomous, realist – as favoured by institutions such as Caribbean Voices – versus the hope that the West Indian writers would revitalise the British literary landscape and provide “a dash of sensibility” and “experiment” (Wyndham, qtd. in Kalliney 116). Collis, here, embodies a split between the myth of the ‘Sacred Fount’, i.e. art necessitating participation in society, and the ‘Ivory Tower’, the artist as indifferently pondering his material. The text never fully resolves the ambivalent stance between a Marxist idea(l) of literature as reflecting societal conditions, emphasised in Collis’s closeness to the Yugoslav, who is, as far as readers get to know, Collis’s only known reader, to whom he is bound in “a dangerous secrecy” (TE 276), and an ideal of a detached l’art pour l’art, for which Collis is likewise approached by Frederick, an Englishman, as “just look[ing] in” without caring: “You encounter us, use us, put us aside as it suits you, but you never really participate” (TE 256).155 Concomitant with the fantasy of the artist’s inevitable split between life and art and the supposed incommensurate duality of these poles, which is also visible in criticism of Lamming’s work, where Lamming is alternatively read as ‘literary activist’ (Dalleo 154) or his work as “defend[ing] the autonomy of the artist” (Kalliney, Commonwealth 135), Collis also finds no solace in the imaginary of artistic autonomy: his self-chosen status outside society is not romanticised, as for example in form of the impoverished artist-bohemian. After

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155 The myth of transcending the split between life and art is referenced multiple times later in the novel, where Collis is approached by fellow emigrants and by Frederick and their suspicion that he writes about them (e.g. TE 100; 102; 256).
arriving in England as a published poet, he must resort to a variety of factory jobs which see him faring catastrophically at each one (TE 206–207) before taking a part-time job writing blurbs for records (TE 207). Yet what the text achieves here is accentuating the struggle to go beyond reproducing an “essence of society” (Hammer 91; original emphasis). It is in this framework that Lamming’s negotiations of feminine and masculine principles of creation, which hint at the precarious status of masculinity and femininity within the ‘nation text’ which the next chapter focuses on, must be understood.

7.1.2 ‘Make a Man O’ Yuhself’: Engendering the ‘New Nation’

The novel’s emphasis on telling and listening to stories constantly foregrounds the desire for narrative, which is, next to the writer Collis, diffused to different characters. Curdella Forbes implicitly points to the heightened textual awareness of the role of language for (masculine) subject formation by stating that the men’s talk in various locales – the ship, the basement rooms – constitute frantic attempts to “speak themselves into being” (203), yet contrary to her analysis, I do not consider this as an endorsement of the colonial subjects’ search for “their own indigenous reality” (203), but see speech and story-telling processes as part of the textual erotics and, as they are distinguished according to gender, illustrated as probing the ‘text of the nation’ within and against a phallogocentric order. Authorial self-fashioning and authority in Lamming’s text here rests on inhabiting the ambivalences in the literary field, rather than being outright subversive. Lamming connects the “ideological project of ‘nation-building and identity making’” (Silva 15) – for instance regarding the discourse of a common West Indian nation in which the writer, as C.L.R. James and other Caribbean critics have emphasised, has a crucial role to play – with myths of male creation and thereby stages this project as inherently agonistic, while ultimately underlining the idea(l) of writerly emancipation as necessitating the conformity to masculine norms.157

In attesting to these intricacies, my reading diverges from the largely negative evaluation of the negotiations of gender and sexuality in the novel that figures its portrayal of masculinity, gender relations, and matters of sexuality in terms of crisis, as predominantly conservative, even reactionary, and restricted to matters of colonial dominance, Western exploitation and

156 TE 61

157 Szeman has read The Emigrants as the most explicit attempt to “imagin[e] the space that the Federation would have to occupy” (179–180). The short-lived West Indies Federation (1958–1962) had been idealised by Caribbean intellectuals, such as C.L.R. James, as “the means and the only means whereby the West Indies and British Guiana can accomplish the transition from colonialism to national independence” and the Caribbean peoples’ necessary way into “the modern community of nations” (James, “Federation” 90; emphasis removed). James’s envisioning of large-scale restructuring as the basis of the “new nation” (90) – in terms of economy, politics, and social life – also emphasises the role of literature, as intrinsic part of “social thought” (104), where the artist’s task is to “renew his contacts with the native roots” (106).
depravity, and postcolonial resistance. Joshua Esty’s assessment of the sexual episodes in the novel as “a crystalline and rather Fanonian narrative instance of the psychosexual damage inflicted by colonialism on both sides of the divide” (208) is exemplary here. In this vein, the sexual encounters among West Indians characters in the novel are commonly interpreted as an exertion of sexual dominance over women, whose portrayals are almost unanimously seen as problematic. What these readings neglect, however, is the conscious staging of the artist’s necessary mastery of the Oedipal conflict to ‘become a (literary) man’ in Britain, epitomised in the text’s master signifier of ‘making a man of oneself’, and its textual ramifications, which, as the novels shows, at once hails all male subjects according to this law while it remains itself devoid of concrete meaning and merely a repeated truism. Authorial self-fashioning, here, centres particularly on the ‘phallus’ as treacherous tool for literary authority and for perpetuating a discourse of the nation as gendered. As such, the text’s probing of gendered myths of creation also anxiously negotiates the author as becoming-'father' of a new Caribbean literary tradition.

This is visible from the outset, where the homodiegetic narrator, who, as I have stated, is associated with Collis, muses on his ‘post-colonial’ and literary freedom by contrasting an established from a ‘new’, yet to emerge literary tradition through the phallus as measure stick. Citing the fantasy of sexual initiation as a prerequisite for literary creation, the narrator compares his reading of V.S. Pritchett’s The Living Novel, which he considers “alive, though dead. This freedom was simply dead” (TE 8–9), with the newly acquired freedom of the “lately emancipated colonials”, which was “private and personal”, like […] [a man’s] penis” (TE 8). The novel premises the encounter of ‘dead’ literature as initiating the departure for England. The narrator-cum-writer’s literal phallus is here evoked in line with the pen-as-phallus metaphor, as a tool with which “he articulates the length of his freedom” (Page 30) and which may infuse the novel, and literature, with ‘new’ life and thus break new cultural ground, resonant with the literary field’s drawing on the ‘invigoration’ of a British literary sphere through the impulse of Caribbean artists and an increased interest in Commonwealth writing, seen as a “necessary stimulus to decadent metropolitan culture” (Wyndham 122). The narrator’s initial words function as a yardstick through which to understand the negotiations of forging of a new literary tradition and becoming a ‘literary father’: heterosexual prowess and privacy/autonomy, thereby drawing on the staple trope of the heroic artist genius.

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158 A. J. Simoes da Silva, for instance, argues that despite the fact that The Emigrants offers “one of the fairest representation of women to be found in his work” (109), their suffering is, in contrast to the men’s, largely “politically meaningless” (112). Curdella Forbes argues in the opposite direction but emerges from the same premise by stating that “The Emigrants displays Lamming’s cruder representations of women, and this despite the sophisticated ways in which the feminine is implied in the novel’s posited epistemology of the body” (203–204).
Yet these mythemes, here resonant with discourses of literary autonomy, which are in the 1950s associated with experimental or modernist literary practices,\(^\text{159}\) are rendered as providing only treacherous fantasies for the Caribbean writer. For once, Collis-cum-narrator’s gaze on the female character Queenie’s body at the novel’s outset – in a quasi-invocation of the muse – in voyeuristic fashion “as an object with its own secret resources that reduced all interest to a sheer delight in the presence of the object” (\textit{TE} 23) reverberates uneasily in the writer’s disintegration of sight later, where Collis is reduced to seeing \textit{only} objects (\textit{TE} 224; 275) which he “could not define” (\textit{TE} 224) anymore. Further, as character he is himself objectified by the narrator, described as “heavy black flesh that lay on the deck” (\textit{TE} 82). Forbes defines this as the inhibition of “real seeing, which is a right relation to language (where language includes langue, parole and the body’s signification)” which “constantly escapes the emigrants” (205), but in terms of the text’s overall trajectory it amounts to a staging of the inhibition of the artist’s successful sexual experience as premise for a “movement from society towards art” (Rivera Godoy-Benesch 70). The instance mentioned above hints at a reason for this: the Caribbean subject’s subjectification to discourses of hypersexualisation, which determine sexual initiation as always already colonially inscribed. The sudden, exhibitionistic introduction of the narrator’s penis to the novel – his ‘private parts’ – illustrates this over-sexualisation and plays with the voyeuristic (white) gaze on part of the readers on the black man’s phallus, reminiscent of the ‘scrutiny’ of the colonial writer’s work by a white, paternalistic literary establishment.\(^\text{160}\) The narrator’s claim alerts to the debates surrounding masculinity in 1950s Britain, as most crucial factor via which the emigrants were distinguished from the British (Collins 392), and introduces it as a contested site. Lamming here ironically hyperbolises the fetishisation of the ‘other’s’ sexuality by literally ‘parading’ the phallus as a “shibboleth of white \textit{jouissance}” (Wapeemukwa 87) in front of the reader and thereby exposes the – disavowed – fact that the hypersexualisation of the ‘other’ stems from a repressed desire on part of the British ‘self’.

Yet the dwelling on the privacy of his genitals here also connects writing with phallic \textit{jouissance}, a revelling in the authority the phallus as most powerful signifier promises. In line with this, the pen-as-phallus metaphor is then implicated in perpetuating the existing order. The connection of writerly and sexual desire is evident on further planes throughout the novel. Collis’s aim, here in his form as writer-character, is to “make a man out of himself” (\textit{TE} 74) in England. Subsequently, desire for once manifests very literally, both as a rather openly

\(^{159}\) As Brown highlights, in contrast to later postcolonial criticism the 1950s reception of West Indian writers saw modernism not yet as problematic because of its attachment to European and imperialist ideologies, but modernist practices were first and foremost seen as “a practice opposed to traditional notions of authority and power” (“Exile” 677).

\(^{160}\) While being a recurring motif in the novel, this becomes most obvious and tragic in Dickson’s encounter with his landlady and her sister, a scene I will elaborate on in chapter 7.1.4.
acknowledged desire for the women on the ship as well as Collis’s more subdued homoerotic desire for Dickson,\textsuperscript{161} and the former form is often performed in homosocial settings and dialogues that function as bonding rituals. Yet masculinity is here neither rendered subject to crisis, nor idealised but rather, in a move anticipatory of poststructuralist conceptions, emphasised as performative and established in language, which amounts to its de-essentialisation and renders doubtful readings that emphasise the novel’s masculinist bent.\textsuperscript{162} This is most visible in the text’s engagement of notions of (literary) nation building. Both on the ship in chapter one and in the various basement rooms in chapter two, in rooms rendered as womb-like, readers are presented with lengthy dialogues between the – mostly male – emigrants that thematically focus on global politics, nation building in the wake of colonial disintegration, the ambivalent connection of citizenship and Britishness, which centre on topics like the implication of the signifier “West Indian” (\textit{TE} 65–66) and the ramifications of CUKC citizenship (\textit{TE} 67), the role of education, or their shared “unity and brotherhood” with people from Africa (\textit{TE} 131). In the conversations, where Collis is sometimes present, but never participates, resonating with the detached writer observing from a distance, the increasing unification of various diasporas under the moniker ‘black’, which will come to dominate cultural politics from the 1960s onwards, is already incipient.\textsuperscript{163}

Next to the setting, the formal propensities also initially engage the narrative of the nation as male. Yet the novel also undermines this by exposing the creation of literature as hinging on a “culturally preconstructed meaning” based on sexual difference (Lauretis, \textit{Alice} 138), while simultaneously emphasising it as a necessary fantasy for coming into writing. This takes place through the exaggeration of the phallic power of speech. The subject’s unconscious as ‘discourse of the Other’ is most prevalent in the novel’s emphasis on speech and the writer protagonist Collis’s relation to other characters through the scopic and invocatory field. ‘Phallic power’, as tied to writerly emancipation, is especially associated with the discourse of the character known as ‘Governor’. As emblem of a “proto-colonial” masculinity (Page 27) and “sexual potency” (30), he constitutes both an objet petit a, with Collis’s eyes and ears oriented

\textsuperscript{161} Cf. for instance the scene between both in the ship’s dormitory (\textit{TE} 30–31). Simon Gikandi interprets the tension between Collis and Dickson as “a reflection of the sense of insecurity which all the colonized share, in particular the fear of being seen or known” (94), an assessment that falls, however, short when paying attention to the novel’s preoccupation with writing and ‘making legible’ the ‘other’.

\textsuperscript{162} Cf. on this notion for instance Procter (“Dwelling” 29).

\textsuperscript{163} A similar awareness of the homogenisation of various diasporas and its institutionalisation through, in Althusser’s terms, ideological state apparatuses is indicated by multiple references to the generalising ‘your people’ in the novel by representatives of various institutions, such as Mr. Pearson as representative of the labour market, or a policeman.
towards him, but also a possible confrontation with the real, as the writer recoils from the Governor’s “loud masculinity” (TE 38–39), which speaks to a foreclosure of an ‘excessive’ sexuality as detrimental to art.

With the Governor, the novel probes the mytheme of creative power as tied to sexual potency, particularly as regards the creation of the text of the West Indian nation. In this figure, masculinity and the power to narrate are equated, while the text simultaneously exposes masculinity through him as narrative script only. A story told by him about his wife, the “legthrower” (TE 44), shows how the text stages and hyperbolically satirises narrative as “fundamental orgastic rhythm of tumescence and detumescence, of tension and resolution, of intensification to the point of climax and consummation” (Scholes 26). In line with Scholes’s definition of a ‘masculine’ form of narrative, the group surrounding the Governor remind of Sedgwick’s notion of homosocial bonds as “intense but nonsexual bonds with other men” (Storr 41) that band together via “women […] as the conduits through which those bonds are expressed” (41). Here, the subject’s falling in line with the phallic signifier is rendered as inevitable, as the sexual innuendos that mark the Governor’s story, given in direct speech and phallic in nature, define the listening group: the group “grew loud” and, “releasing the enjoyment which it gave them”, they “shook with merriment” (TE 44), sat “erect” (TE 45) and “listen[ed] with a kind of greed” (TE 46). Following this pattern of tumescence/detumescence, which the novel in general draws on heavily, the story, ultimately, left them “a trifle disappointed” (TE 45–46). The narrative here not only cites, but metafictionally exposes an Oedipal structure, where the men accept the castration through language and adhere to the master signifier ‘becoming man’. This renders (hyper)masculinity a ritual, performed only through language, and the story moreover posits the Governor as the subject of the joke by revealing his wife’s infidelity (TE 46–47). The text foregrounds the Governor’s narrative power, which even trumps his sexual prowess and leads to an appraisal of his masculinity – through Collis’s focalisation, the Governor is repeatedly rendered as “a hell of a man” (TE 44; 47). In an upending of myths of creation that rest on the transformation of sexual into creative potency, the voice-as-phallus has trumped the actual phallus, i.e. the Governor’s sexual power, as it is precisely the failing of the latter that creates the story. The heterodiegetic narrator’s assessment here is later repeated by Higgins – “[t]he Governor is a hell of a man” (TE 80) – and has become collective knowledge and itself symbolic, and the character’s repetition of the

164 Collis is at first “peering” at the Governor, then listening to the men’s remarks about “the width of the Governor’s torso, and the muscular surge of the body” (TE 39). During the Governor’s story, Collis “was sitting at the edge of his bunk”, and in his perception the Governor is “a hell of a man” (TE 44).
heterodiegetic narrator’s assessment illustrates the subject’s acting according to knowledge without knowing why, i.e. its interpellation into the symbolic order.

This falls in line with the text’s overall probing of the writer’s engendering of the text of the West Indian diaspora, which is implicated in gendered stereotypes from both a British and Caribbean context, and the role language plays herein. In terms of speech, the characters are indicative of this rigid spectrum of possible subject positions, resonant with the aforementioned poles of ‘reputation’ and ‘respectability’. Thus, where some are associated with the former through public sexual boasting, like the Governor, others are emblematic of an excessive mimicry of English ideals, such as Dickson, whose British accent is rendered as preposterous through Collis’s focalisation (TE 57). The limited scope of masculinities available for Caribbean men and the perpetuation of it through literature is problematised through the positionality of the writer subject Collis, through which the text evidences a sense of unease, yet inevitability of the ‘new’ narrative – that is, the Windrush generation’s and the diasporic Caribbean subject’s story – emerging as phallogocentric, and this is most notable in the text’s contrasting of two homosocial groups and the writer protagonist’s positionality in them, which also resonates with notions of artistic autonomy versus heteronomy.

In the first short scene, Collis and Miss Bis overhear a group of West Indians talking on the Golden Image. The text here, both in layout and structure, imitates a drama scene (TE 58–70), with the names of the speakers and the roles clearly indicated, and thereby self-consciously performs the ‘drama of nationhood’ as masculine (Boehmer, “Flora Nwapa” 6). Yet whereas the heterodiegetic narrator acknowledges that “there was a woman with them” (TE 58), Lilian, said only woman in the group, is given no role as dramatis persona and has, so the text suggests, no role to play in the ‘drama of the new nation’. Female subject positions are hence excluded from this passage, as is, crucially, Collis as writer, who, the text suggests, has not yet carved out his role in literary nation building; this scene figures Collis and Miss Bis as adjacent to, but not participating in the group speaking. The men’s conversation has not only subdued Lilian’s role, but also eclipsed Collis and Miss Bis to the extent that readers are left unsure as to the content of their talk, until it is given by the heterodiegetic narrator later. Intermittently, the respective character’s affectation by the ‘conversation’ is mediated through internal focalisation, which foregrounds the perceived growth the talk has initiated for the individual, corresponding to the notion of Bildung. In this vein, the stringing together of points of view, more monologic than dialogic in nature, in the male group proceeds in form of a Hegelian dialectic that suggests a shift of perception and deepening of knowledge, ultimately arriving at a synthesis in form of a ‘positive reason’, where a “unity of opposites” (Inwood 82; emphasis removed) is achieved through the character known as Jamaican evoking the unifying signifier.
‘West Indian’ (TE 65–66) and by relating their search to a universal, shared history of humanity – “people the world over always searchin’ and’ feelin’, from time immemorial” (TE 66), inscribing their journey into a fantasy of teleological progress.¹⁶⁵

Leaving Collis and Miss Bis out of this circle, the text demonstrates an awareness that the identification of the writer with nation building as a profoundly male endeavour and, in resonance with C.L.R. James’s vision, steeped in Western European reason and aesthetics (James, “The Artist” 177) will result in obliterating or misrepresenting the gendered ‘other’ and thereby exposes the disavowal of difference that underlies this universalism. Yet to come into writing, the text suggests, the writer subject must ultimately subscribe to an epistemology that rests on sexual differentiation and hierarchisation. Consequently, the text reinstalls the opposition of the mythical male subject and the feminine obstacle and has Collis subsequently fall in line with an Oedipal logic of narrative. Throughout the text, artistic autonomy and heteronomy are demarcated according to the position of the phallus, where having the phallus suggests autonomy and privacy and being the phallus being subject to heteronomous concerns. Most telling here is the reference to Miss Bis’s background. Her ‘story’, contrary to the men’s more public role, only comprises the scandal of her being seduced and abandoned by the English Fred, a story which “became public property” by being turned into a calypso (TE 72). Whereas the narrator at the novel’s outset can maintain the fantasy of (artistic) freedom and of sexuality as private and draw from it the vigour to ‘rewrite’ the ‘dead’ novel, for Miss Bis, the private is always already public, her yielding “her defences” (TE 71) transform her both into a sexual and literary object.

Miss Bis here serves as a negative foil to Collis and the subject position associated with her as an obstacle he must overcome. In foregrounding the anxiety of the personal story as public property, her fate also anticipates the claim the Yugoslav will later make to Collis: “A writer’s work is public property” (TE 101). Collis’s claim that he had heard the calypso but “hadn’t hoped to meet the woman” (TE 72) momentarily topples the separation of art and life, the fictional and ‘reality’, and threatens the inhibition of the Oedipal trajectory of the writer moving into autonomy. Similar to Miss Bis’s seduction and abandonment, turning the ‘private’ public, as a suggested loss of control over one’s story, the text suggests, suspends Collis between arousal and terror (TE 101–102) and threatens feminisation, as both Miss Bis and Collis are about to lose control over ‘their’ stories.¹⁶⁶ The text here figures the feminine as abject from the nation story, which will parallel Collis’s positionality later on in the Pearson’s

¹⁶⁵ This is further visible in the emigrants’ continuous subscription to the master signifier ‘education’.

¹⁶⁶ Crucially, with the reference to the Yugoslav this ‘loss’ and concomitant forfeiting of ‘male power’ are intertwined with Marxist conceptions of literature.
house, and frames the anxiety to ‘become’ instead of ‘write’ a story in a gendered vocabulary, drawing on the binary of man-as-active/woman-as-passive. Collis’s subsequent statement that he “wasn’t sure he wanted to see Miss Bis again” (TE 72) indicates a protection against feminisation, which is aligned with the compromising of writerly autonomy through the encroaching of heteronomous concerns, and a position-taking that defends against art’s “subjugation to political directives […] or even to aesthetic and ethical demands” (Bourdieu, Rules 220), that is, the appropriation of his work by the public.

As such, Collis then also falls in line with the ‘masculine’ narrative: in an instance of a repetition with difference, the text rehearses the male script again, and this time, it is Collis’s presence and focalisation that frames the talk, being drawn to the group as he “was sure their talk was relevant to him” (TE 74), suggesting the script springs from his mind. To ensure the writer’s role in the ‘national narrative’, he now adheres to the text’s master signifier of becoming-man and the desire of the Other: “Whether their desires were the same he was committed to much the same choice as the others. He wanted to make a man out of himself” (TE 74). The dialogue here appears almost metafictional, and its ties to Collis render this equivalent to the writer musing on the presentation of his material and a narcissistic introspection of probing (and abandoning) various ways of reproducing a collective feeling. Moreover, Collis’s initial goal to ‘make a man of himself’, which introduces the ‘script’, repeats Higgin’s words, who first uttered this notion, and constitutes an identification with a fantasy of (male) social mobility through education and personal effort, as transpires in Higgin’s speech: “‘Education an’ qualification an’ distinction is the order o’ de day. In ev’ry walk o’ life on this earth if a man can’t show his papers he ain’t got a dog’s chance’. […] You want to give yuh life some purpose […] [and] achieve somethin’ however little’.” (TE 60–61). Collis’s imaginary identification with these ideologemes speaks to the “insistence of the letter” (Evans 167), and the subject position aligned with him is characterised by the inescapability of this dogma. Writerly self-fashioning – after all, Collis’s position as writer is more and more acknowledged by the other characters as the novel progresses – is suggested as contingent on the identification with the desire of the Other, that is, the masculine-inflected demands that structure the literary field and aspects of nation building: the fact that the Governor, of whose ‘loud masculinity’ Collis had recoiled before, later uses – as he thinks – Collis’s room for a sexual encounter and “signalled him to enter”, whereby Collis “felt his feet take him forward into the room straight

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167 Collis’s listening as probing of material is also emphasised in the earlier reference to his “rehearsing the story which the Englishwoman on the upper deck had started to relate in detail to the doctor” (TE 71; emphasis added).
ahead as the Governor had indicated” (TE 182), speaks to Collis’s falling in line with this idea(l) of masculinity.\footnote{Later, Collis even assumes the position of the Law himself, with “his action dictating theirs”, i.e. those of the other characters (TE 274), and Dickson now afraid of Collis’s eyes (TE 274). Here, the liminal stage of Collis as writer is again emphasised, as it is precisely at the time of arrival in England that his subscription to this order has taken place.}

The necessity of fathoming the ‘new’ literary tradition as male and as laying claim to a literary legacy, as fathering it, is most evident in yet another spatial metaphor: the linking of the ship itself – ‘penetrating’ towards Britain and implying the sowing of “cultural and economic seed in the city” (Forbes 207) – to the authorial subject. Like the literary text characterised by, as Scholes has it, tumescence and detumescence, the ship’s journey to England follows this pattern and thus also reflects the writing process:

The ship’s pace seemed to quicken to a pace that was reckless. It cut cruelly through the water as though it had found a new pleasure in its power and possession. The rumble of the engine would not subside and the waters opened to the thrusting keel as the ship cut accurately through the receiving surface. Receptivity was strained to the utmost as though every nerve had been exposed to the invading pleasures for the ecstasy of a single moment held, and kept and squeezed till the energy had spent itself, and desire dwindled to a limp and harmless thing. (TE 91–92).

There are numerous analogies between the ship and the writer; the receptivity and the cutting through the surface (of a page) with ‘new pleasure’ and power mirror the writer entering, ‘writing back’ to an inherited tradition, the ‘rumbling’ of creative energy and the phallic imagery of the last line echo the logos spermatikos as constitutive of male generative power and the artist as genius, as sexual and literary begetter (Battersby 38). The space of the ship reflects the artistic voyage, as I have shown before, which here also implies the Bildungs motif of a progression towards individualisation and the fantasy of autonomous creation in Britain, and its journey resembles a metaphorical, in Louise Bennet’s words, ‘colonisation in reverse’,\footnote{Jamaican poet Louise Bennett’s poem “Colonization in Reverse” (1966) is one of the central texts that negotiate the beginning of the West Indian diaspora in Britain.} and the optimism of the image suggests that a West Indian literary tradition can be founded on the pillars of anti-colonial activism, counter-canonical ‘writing back’, and the identification with the master signifier ‘making a man of oneself’ through education. In foregrounding the operations of the symbolic order, with the primacy of the masculine, the text perpetuates gender hierarchies but also makes their formation legible as process.

Yet the text also probes what could be termed a feminine principle of creation and a desire for the ‘other’ jouissance as a possible traversal of the fantasy of male engendering and of the nation-text as masculine. This is metaphorised in chapter two, where the narrative shifts to a female community and interrogates the place ‘the feminine’ will be given in textualisations of West Indian diasporic experience – both in the cultural sphere, as the ‘first wave’ of West Indian
writing in Britain is now described as male-centred, and as aesthetic principle, in terms of unsettling the narrative boundaries instigated by the Name-of-the-Father and hyperbolised in the schematic ‘script’ the men’s conversation follows. The character Collis is crucially absent from this scene, but implicitly present through this character’s alignment with the narrative voice, and as such the introduction of the female community as a “womb which the world […] was not aware of” (TE 148) repeats an artistic desire to retreat to the pre-symbolic, to a state of undifferentiation in search of aesthetic innovation. The ‘dialogue’ in the female community, a scene at the hairdresser’s, exhibits crucial formal differences to the narration of male communities in the text and suggests a possible aesthetic traversal of the imaginary of the nation as (exclusively) male and its text as phallogocentric, more so as the content is somewhat similar to that in the men’s circle. Here, I emphatically dispute James Procter’s assessment of the “male and female communities replicat[ing] one another in terms of space and narration” (Dwelling 40), as this claim neglects the formal intricacies of the scenes and their implications for the imagination of diasporic subject formation in the intersection of gender and authorship.

The passage is introduced by the heterodiegetic narrator’s emphasis on a disembodied voice, whose exact quantification is left uncertain: “There were four or five of them. One voice in four or five keys” (TE 149). Emphasising the voice as undifferentiated and the uncertainty as to its quantity suggests an element of excess that transcends the signification system. The female community is firmly located in the realm of the invocatory and guides the reader’s desire for knowledge through this drive which has, in the male setting, been repeatedly frustrated. Hearing can be understood as countering the “fetishisation of the scopic” (Ramanathan 110) and posits another form of subject formation, hinting at a “time before law, before the symbolic took one’s breath away and appropriated it into language under its authority of separation” (Cixous, “Sorties” 93). The writer Collis’s absence from this scene is crucial, his development as falling in line with the master signifier’s demands renders him representative of the “deaf, masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine” (“Sorties” 92). The text’s probing of the association of the feminine and the voice as an imaginary evocation of the discourse of the mother – in Cixous’s understanding not “the role but the ‘mother’ as no-name”, as emblematic of an unknown “void” (“Sorties” 94), is mirrored in the following in the fact that the dialogues that follow are not distinguished according to speaker, individual voices by means of linguistic idiosyncrasies are not discernible, and the dialogues do not contain verba dicendi, nor a focalising instance, creating an aura of immediacy and a withdrawal from the writer’s male gaze:

170 “Collis and Miss Bis listened but could hear little of what they said”; “Collis […] waited for Miss Bis to speak” (TE 58).
The poor girl bawl for murder. The child head was on fire. They had to throw buckets o’ cold water all over the child.

Doris Grant.
That’s right. The same girl. And a lovely head o’ hair she had in those days.
She never catch herself again.
She went up to be a nun.
That’s right. She became a nun, and a nice promisin’ girl she was.
She was to marry Tom Phelps, the boy from the Customs. (TE 149)

While the text here, over five pages, probes writing and subject formation beyond the “phallic mystification” (“Sorties” 93), the textual subject positions aligned with the female ‘other’ remain ambivalent, as the text also denies women the degree of individuality given to the male characters before. What is telling, however, is the different formal treatment of similar topics as in the male community: the text here formally performs what has been imagined in the former scene only in terms of content – the unification of various nations – and viewpoints – into one.

While the text foregrounds this in terms of gossip, seemingly evoking, according to Procter, a domestic scene (“Descending” 29), it is by no means trivial or emptied of socio-political relevance, as Patty Sotirin’s definition of gossip as a subversive minoritarian discourse that potentially undermines and unsettles “conventional relations of propriety, hierarchy and reason with impulsive, often illogical, sometimes destructive energies” (124) shows.¹⁷¹ Moreover, the conversation in the female community also proceeds dialectically in its presentation of an array of diasporic experience. While it overtly focuses on the topic of hairdressing and the complexities of dating, it, quite subtly, interweaves socio-political intricacies of economic hardships faced by black women (TE 150), sexual politics, the exoticisation of black women (TE 151–152), or the uneasy unification of diasporas under the moniker ‘black’ (TE 152–153). The non-hierarchical structure, both in terms of form as well as the equal weight given to different – domestic and public – topics, is also a potentially ethical strategy that reorients readers’ knowledge: contrasting it with the masculine realm as a script into which the female ‘surplus’ cannot be integrated triggers a possible reorientation of perspectives on grand narratives such as ‘nation building’, which will later become a crucial part of the ‘grand narrative’ of Windrush, and a discerning of their exclusive character.

As Lamming arguably draws on and emphasises the binary between genders by presenting each homogeneously gendered communities and distinguishes them through different narrative forms, the group of women, here, can indeed be read as, as Ettinger has it, “as personification of the feminine”, that is, that “which cannot be included in the Other” and which is, “paradoxically and for the same reasons, the Other par excellence” (112–113). Thus,

¹⁷¹ This is, however, not to imply that there are no hierarchies within the group itself: in a later episode in the hairdresser’s salon, the African woman Krawnula is, for instance, excluded as not belonging to the West Indian group, and the conversation in the scene above also turns quiet when Queenie, a stranger, enters.
for the author’s gaining access to culture, it constitutes an attempt to go beyond the “masculine-paternal […] as only agent of culture” (112) and corresponds with a probing of different forms of representation – in other words, the episode metafictionally also takes on muse-like character in infusing the ‘male’ text with inspiration. Lamming’s probing of the feminine principle attempts to “remove divisions between epistemes that shape West Indian thought and sensibility” (Forbes 212) and hints at the necessity of a non-hierarchical, non-patrilineal form of writing which the text, however, only indicates but leaves incipient. Yet Collis as writer-character, too, is more and more inflicted by ‘undifferentiation’, his individuation as writer results in his loss of sight and the impossibility to distinguish subject from object (TE 275), and his gaze therefore, arguably, also comes to be structured by the feminine principle. With the liminal ending, this is, however, not celebrated, but left incipit: Lamming figures the writer as reluctant, but inevitable participant in the dominant order, which speaks to the writer’s position as anxious pioneer.

7.1.3 Cultural Entrapments and Frustrations of the ‘Not Yet’

The determination of artistic subject formation through spatial configurations and the text’s anti-essentialist stance becomes most visible in the narrative’s emphasis on the problematic origins of a West Indian literature. The text renders these as based on a misrecognition of icons of British culture, which troubles a patrilineal transmission of literary authority and also renders (demands of) counter-canonical writing inherently problematic. This puts into question the ‘new vision’ the artist is to fathom. *The Emigrants* infers, in C.L.R. James’s words, the “great artist” as “the fruit of a long national tradition social and to some degree artistic”, the basis of which is, for James, “western European” (“The Artist” 177), and thus a West Indian literary tradition as always already fragile ground, as the canon is figured, in a counter-Arnoldian conception of literature, as having already lost its supposed intrinsic cultural value. Central here is the staging of Collis’s agonistic positionality in the British public sphere, the Caribbean-British encounter, which is most pronounced in the encounter with the Pearsons in London. Collis returns as character and focaliser in chapter two, “Rooms and Residents”, the chapter most occupied with different forms of spatial configurations,\(^{172}\) where he visits Mr. Pearson, a supervisor at a company which often employs the new West Indian arrivals, and his wife. The position of this scene in the novel is crucial, as it is placed between two episodes that narrate West Indian communality from which Collis, the writer, is each absent, which speaks to the

\(^{172}\) For more on the cultural politics of ‘dwelling’ and their interpretation for notions of belonging, see James Procter’s *Dwelling Places* (2003) and Emily Cuming’s *Housing, Class, and Gender* (2016; esp. 73–122).
text’s probing of literary authority outside the dogma of West Indian representativeness and an identification with the order of Britishness that figures as promising writerly autonomy.

With the interruption of the preceding barber shop scene, focalisation shifts from the collective to Collis by picturing him initially in the Pearsons’ lavatory as a “place of privacy” (TE 138), as an ironic citing of the ‘ivory tower’ myth. Strikingly, this happens in the scene which most overtly engages with gaining access to British culture and the literary canon. This episode stages a fantasmatic negotiation of the artist as pioneer, as isolated prophet of a cross-cultural vision and foregrounds the artistic agon of forging the ‘not yet’ by problematising the artist’s gaze. With the Pearson’s house as heavily associated with British cultural values and the canon, Collis, in this episode, quite literally is the first to enter what Walcott termed the “house of literature” (Another Life 77), a materialisation of the patrilineal literary tradition that the West Indian writer has to engage and overcome in order to enter the literary public sphere, and a signifier of masculinity through the text’s emphasis on connotations of ownership, autonomy, and ‘natural’ belonging, which is contrasted with Collis’s precarious mode of dwelling as potentially emasculating. The liminality of the West Indian writer is again emphasised here, as the text suggest that to the British (literary) sphere, he also constitutes an a priori abject. Accordingly, the Pearson’s home is figured as a manifestation of a barred entry into England and British culture, as the room, a “womb”, even “an entire climate” that “nourishe[s]” the Pearsons (TE 139), simultaneously seems a rebuke to Collis.

While this has been read as standing metonymically for the encounter between England and its colonial ‘others’ and the cultural ‘clash’ as embodied in Pearson and Collis as caused by their being “trapped by inherited colonial attitudes and postures” (Paquet, Novels 40), my reading is more attuned to Page’s claim that this likewise implies that Collis itself penetrates this ‘womb’, which implies that the “need to rebuke in itself also indicates the disturbance of the settled, authoritative subject” (33). The analogy between the ‘hostile environment’ of the drawing room and the geography of Britain itself, where Pearson is fully ‘at home’ and Collis rejected, underestimates the complexity of this scene and of the literary sphere, where West

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173 The discourse of the autonomisation of art, concomitant notions of social climbing, and the flight into imaginary solutions often appear in form of the house in many Anglo-Caribbean novels. Here, notions of proprietorship vs. uncertain accommodation or different semantic spaces within the house serve as projection screens for performing interpretations of and answers to the Other’s desire, that is, to different authorial demands and artist ideals. The equation of the house with literature has a long tradition in Caribbean writing. Walcott in his poetic autobiography Another Life compares his rocky road to literary success to having “entered the house of literature as a houseboy” (77). Brathwaite, too, compares the novel to a house and highlights it as a problematic topos in West Indian literature: “One of the main problems facing the West Indian writer is how to write a novel about houses. A house suggests clearly defined boundaries: physical, emotional, traditional. The traditional English/European novel is a ‘house’ and is usually, in one way or another, about houses” (“Houses” 199), and the house is often a metaphor via which belonging and exclusion (from literature) are negotiated.

174 Cf. the narrator’s description of the room as “a persistent rebuke to the rudimentary shelter which Collis had found at the hostel” (TE 139).
Indian writers were also desired for the hopes of rejuvenation vested in them. Collis’s entering the ‘house of literature’ through the position of the abject, figured in the lavatory scene, not only associates his literary production with excrement and reinforces the racial ‘purity’ of Britishness, as abjoints function, in Kristeva’s terms, as “safeguards”, as “the primers of my culture” (Powers 2). It also points towards the fragility of this notion of ‘culture’, as the testing of a place of ‘objectlessness’, of the “jettisoned object” entails the frustration of the Other’s desire for stability and coherence, a move “toward the place where meaning collapses” (Powers 2), a place of a before-difference (12). In occupying the place of the abject, Collis’s entrance here is figured as that entering which stands in-between subject and object of British culture and hints at the incomplete separation of self and other and troubles identity. Yet I do not see Collis here as merely demonstrating that the ‘borders’ of British culture become porous through the arrival of the emigrants and the scene only an allegory of the boundary between coloniser/colonised. Rather, a look at the intricacies of cultural formation between ‘the canon’ and ‘new media’, between being subject and object reveals that Britishness as supposed stable signifier which informs Collis’s fantasmatic identifications is an a priori misrecognition. This undermines both the ‘stable’ binary of coloniser/colonised and amounts to a de-essentialising of British and West Indian identities, and attests to a shift in the British cultural landscape and the anxiety of established cultural values becoming increasingly questioned through new media and practices and through demands from raced and classed ‘others’.

Pearson, the agent of incorporating the new emigrants into the metropolis’ order, constitutes the ‘symbolic white father’ (Hall, “Why Fanon” 353), the embodiment of the Name-of-the-Father, a social and cultural paradigm in whose image the subject comes to be formed, as manifests through Collis’s focalisation: “He was one who quickly defined the other”, proceeded “to make social intercourse an encounter between a definition and a response. […] He was a fixed occasion, harmless as death until some urgency like the telephone call informed it with danger” (TE 142). Yet the curious reference to the telephone call as dangerous element here also points towards the fragility of this order: while the exact content remains hidden, it is inferred that one of his West Indian employees had ‘misbehaved’. As uncanny element, the telephone call invades the order and stability of the middle-class home as the real; it becomes, in a Freudian sense un-heimlich175 by emphasising how the interpellation of the emigrants into the existing order and their submission to the law is deficient, as is, consequently, the affirmation of the British ‘self’ through its distinction from the West Indian ‘other’. Brown parenthetically remarks that the telephone call hints at “the dehumanizing demands of capital”

175 For Freud, the uncanny is “ein von alters her Vertrautes, das […] nur durch den Prozeß der Verdrängung entfremdet worden ist” (“Das Unheimliche” 314).
(Modernism 92), yet it is precisely in this sense and with regard to the intersection of class and race where the call becomes most insightful. In Pearson’s absence and under the lingering uncanniness of the interruption, Collis scrutinises his bookshelf, which features an array of works that serve as ‘embodiment’ of notions of Britishness:

The room was a silent pressure. Collis noticed the small bookcase against the wall, and tried to read the titles. The books had a decorative aspect like those rare commodities that are only meant to be looked at. He could barely read the titles at the top. David Copperfield and The Pickwick Papers, The Works of Anthony Trollope, Pride and Prejudice. And the Bible. And at the bottom, laid on their sides like weary performers, were two bound collections of Punch. There was nothing more to see. The pressure has become unbearable. He raised himself from the chair, snapped his fingers at Mr. Pearson and said: ‘I’d like to go to the lavatory.’ (TE 142)

The canon here is merely decorative, a material reminder of an idealised British past sutured by a shared idea of British cultural values, and the displayed books take on a fetishistic character, suggesting cultural universalism by disavowing difference – of class, gender, or race. This renders the middle-class home as cultural guardian, indeed, the demarcation of the middle class from others through cultural capital and, in line with that, the pretensions of worldliness and tolerance, devoid of substance: like the classics in Pearson’s shelf, Collis’s presence, too, has a merely decorative function and gives Pearson the appearance of liberalism and tolerance.

As emblem of cultural propriety and autonomy, the canon’s existence as only ‘material’ and the books as fetish objects here expose notions of the autonomy of the literary field as a fantasy that fulfils the ideological project of veiling the economic desire of the Other. After the uncanny telephone call, Collis’s imaginary identification with the literary tradition is unsuccessful: Collis self-abjects by withdrawing to the lavatory, which takes readers back to the beginning of the Pearson episode that introduces him there, and the break in of the linear narrative illustrates the subject’s disinterpellation from the fantasy of artistic mobility. As structuring the encounter between Pearson as cultural agent and Collis as aspiring writer from the outset, with the mood palpably worsening after it, it demystifies the notion of a shared, universal cultural capital as guaranteeing access to the order of a British middle class status and an entrance card as British subject, which renders the emigrants’ repeated emphasis on the importance of education I mentioned in the previous chapter a misrecognition. The call foregrounds how the home is already traversed by economic maxims, which necessitate the cheaper labour force of the emigrants. Here, the display and upholding of cultural values, manifest in the Pearsons’ bookshelf, is exposed as ideological tool that serves to create obedient subjects by falsely suggesting social mobility through gaining cultural capital in form of an

176 Cf. on the fetish as a disavowal of difference Bhabha (105–107).
177 While Pearson is figured as gracious and attentive, a deeper understanding or knowledge of the ‘other’ does not take place: “Collis understood that he did not then exist for Mr Pearson” (TE 142).
178 After the call is terminated, Pearson abandons all pretensions towards civility by asking “[w]hy do so many of your people come here?” (TE 141).
English education. From the outset of the visit, then, the cultural values of Englishness are seen as infiltrated by material demands, which is emphasised in the increasing reification (Verdinglichung) of both Collis and his fellow emigrants.

Under these premises, the text renders authorial and masculine ego-formation through fantasies of surpassing the literary predecessors, i.e. the canon, in an Oedipal struggle through which a ‘new’, strong poet will emerge – which is figured as a prerequisite for the West Indian writer and his invention of a “powerful artistic tradition that could be called West Indian” (James, “The Artist” 177) – as a priori foreclosed. Collis’s stance vis-à-vis the canon and, in comparison, the interaction with the ‘new’ media are telling here. The books Collis gazes on contribute to the novel’s negotiation of the literary field and are part of its narcissistic strategy of self-observation via and transformation of creational myths by exposing their illusory nature. They assume a metafictional function by evoking various concerns regarding authorship and its gendered, raced, and classed dimension and indicate specific notions of masculinity and Britishness into which the minority author is interpellated. As the emphasis is on their appearance and materiality, more telling than the works’ contents, here, are their titles, the only aspect that Collis’s gaze grasps, and the names of works and authors mentioned thus resemble Foucauldian ‘author functions’ – that is, authors and their works that serve as metonyms for specific discourses surrounding modalities and ideologies of authorship. They take on the function of fantasy by implying artistic mobility, male literary prowess, and cultural capital, which are continuously traversed in the interaction between Collis and Pearson and the impact of spaces and objects on the writer.

Accordingly, Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice reverberates with Pearson’s prejudiced attitude towards Collis and transposes and extends the novel’s anxieties surrounding the maintaining of class differences in the nineteenth century to the middle-class’s othering of the (black) working class in 1950s Britain. The extension of ‘prejudice’ towards the ‘other’ here combines both racial and classed aspects, as the arrival of the Windrush immigrants threatened not only the blurring of boundaries of race, but also of class. Simultaneously, the post-Windrush years witnessed a strategical discursive privileging of the white working class, where the “separate spheres” of Britishness (Paul 112) also extended to their separation as ‘deserving’ from the immigrants as ‘undeserving’ (Gunaratnam 131). The ‘idealisation’ of the white working class is tellingly embodied by Pearson, who exhibits a ‘hard’ masculinity that is

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179 Foucault names four distinct characteristics of ‘author functions’, most important is his definition of it as not referring, “purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy” (“Author” 309).

180 Many of the Windrush generation, as Lamming’s novel also repeatedly emphasises, considered themselves belonging to the middle class in their home countries but were considered working class in Britain.
rendered as lacking essence: “His limbs were muscular, without the organic strength of the muscle. The muscles decorated the arm like those impractical coins with which an old ex-serviceman decorates himself” (TE 142). The mere decorative aspect of Pearson’s muscularity hints at masculine self-fashioning through the appropriation of a working-class masculinity that suggests strength and virility without the hardships of it, and in the body’s resonance with the canon as likewise decorative only, the British middle-class habitus to which Collis seeks access is dismantled as hypocritical and precluded as artistic subjectivity.

Artistic self-fashioning as inferred from Collis’s gaze on Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, which constitutes an prime example of the nineteenth-century British Künstlerroman as one of the first “specific fictional representations of the novelist as hero” (Salmon, “Farewell” 138), foregrounds the individual artist and his maturation as ideal by suggesting a fantasmatism identification with the notion of an Oedipally structured artistic quest that leads to potentially inhabiting a British form of ‘manhood’, especially so in that it centres on the ‘orphan’ as ‘making a man’ out of himself, which echoes the situation of the minority writer as ‘rootless’ or culturally ‘bastardised’ and the ensuing identification with this master signifier. Dickens’s and the other works are most interesting for the shift in conceptions of authorship they announce, which resonates with the minority author’s situation, and for the subversion of the myth of the artist as (white, male) genius they effect. Contrary to Edmondson’s assessment of West Indian literature, I argue that the foregrounded subject position here, in the text’s exposing of a trenchant awareness of class differences and the economic underpinnings of authorship, is not aligned with a fantasy of the Victorian predecessor’s uniqueness (42), but with a discourse of recognising authorship as “productive labour”, which counters mystifications of the profession as “non-alienated labour” (Salmon, Formation 15). In this way, the mentioned titles are productive fantasies in that they serve to express the racialised (writer) subject’s disproportional affection by matters of class: both the serialisation of *David Copperfield* and *The Pickwick Papers* in monthly instalments and *Punch* as weekly magazine as well as the work of Trollope, while all middle-class in nature, arguably align with the Caribbean writer’s position as they attest to a larger change in the literary field. Here, the author now becomes a professional worker implied in mass production, akin to the journalist, and authorship reconceived as “hard work” (Simon 42), marked by “strenuous labor and moral earnestness” which stripped it “of the aura of Romantic idealism” (Salmon, “Farewell” 139) and severs the

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181 Of all the books mentioned, it is only *Punch* that seems to have been read with frequency, and it is even foregrounded as bound, once again emphasising the importance of exhibition.

182 This connection is also resonant with Lamming’s character ‘Strange Man’, another writer figure and journalist.
“usual combination of genius with art” (Simon 42).\textsuperscript{183} This is also indicated in the fact that the books are referred to as ‘commodities’. Trollope’s mentioning likewise nods to the impossibility of a fantasmatic imagination with the auctorial genius and poetic notions of prophetism, as he is also closely associated with the emerging authorial subjectivity of the professional writer, committed to economic success and “trained on the sales figures” (Dever & Niles 1), who stands for the demystification of Romantic authorship.

Collis’s gaze on these books and the resulting transportation of a (disavowed) Victorian cultural discourse\textsuperscript{184} into the context of an emerging Caribbean literature serves to demystify authors as “secular cultural prophets” (Salmon, “Farewell” 143) and suggests a fantasmatic imagination not with the supposed values of the canon, but with the fissures in authority, masculinity, and Englishness it represents, which structure Collis’s perception and the fragmentation of his gaze later on, but also the novel as a whole.\textsuperscript{185} The ‘pressure’ Collis feels when gazing on this canon, however, also shows that Caribbean authorial self-fashioning aligned with this discourse embodied in the nineteenth-century forebears is not a fantasy that can be sustained: as Brouillette states with regard to contemporary postcolonial fiction, writers are still interpellated into a romantic author function (Postcolonial 73) that continues to repress economic realities. Moreover, the ‘pressure’ must also be understood in terms of the myth of creation-as-male, as the professionalisation of authorship was also viewed as a strategy of masculinisation of the hitherto ‘feminine’ genre of the novel (Salmon, “Farewell” 145), which parallels the supposed masculine nature of earlier West Indian writing and the uncertain status of the feminine in writing functionalised for nation building.

Yet both Dickens and Trollope also hint at the anxieties of maintaining gender boundaries and by no means serve to signify a stable masculine tradition on which author/ity is grounded. While Dickens renders the artist’s formation as grounded in universalism and masculinity, in a classical analogy of pen-as-penis (Houston 216) and the belief in the “special nature of the male creator” (215), the subject models it offers for the writer are ambiguous: it already implies “a breaking of the rigid gender rules of Victorian society” (215) through rendering the writer curiously androgynous in an attempt to “conceal the material, elitist, masculinist nature of his

\textsuperscript{183} Richard Salmon argues with respect to Dickens that his focus on the self-formation of his artist-protagonist is “indicative of a broader historico-cultural shift from the ‘Ideal’ to the ‘Practical’, from the undisciplined poetic imagination of the eighteenth-century/Romantic past to the trammeled literary labor of the Victorian professional author” (“Farewell” 138).

\textsuperscript{184} As Salmon states, while the myth of the genius still prevailed in the Victorian era, it is now “increasingly recognised that many Victorian writers openly embraced the ‘truth’ of authorship’s function as a mode of productive labour while, at the same time, campaigning to elevate its professional status” (Formation 15).

\textsuperscript{185} It is also in this context of culture assuming quasi-religious connotations, most emblematic in Matthew Arnold’s investing of literature with “moral and spiritual significance which aligned it with the immaterial and the religious” (John 3) that the reference to the Bible among the other works to my view gains its significance.
profession by explicitly associating all of his success with a ‘female’ side of himself” (223). This novel in particular then exposes the submission of the feminine – both literally and as writing principle – as ideological tool, and in the novel’s emphasis on writing the self into being via these coordinates, the novel bears a striking resemblance to Lamming’s work, which probes and problematises, as my previous chapter has shown, precisely the inspiration drawn from and submission of the feminine to write the ‘new’ nation into being. As the episode in the hairdressers follows the Pearson episode, on a superstructure this can be read precisely as a fantasmatic probing of the artist’s ‘feminine side’ in line with these works. Trollope’s ‘detour’ from the linear, masculine trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, by modelling his image on the mother instead of the father (Aguirre 577–578), points in the same direction.

The pressure Collis senses in view of the canon speaks to the incommensurate desires for artistic position-taking into which the writer is interpellated. Yet curiously, while it still serves rather as medium through which the immigrant writer’s condition in Britain can be expressed, evident in Collis’s positionality somewhat resonating with these discourses, he is rendered as excluded from other media. This applies to media like the telephone, television, or photography, all associated with vision and hearing and a mimetic representation of reality, which have taken over the function of *prodesse et delectare* that was once the writer’s and which thereby hint at a substitution of literature’s role, which serves to critically interrogate the author-artist as ‘visionary’ and the mode of expression and aesthetics suited to reinstall him. Collis’s desire and gaze is firmly oriented towards the TV and, resonating with Scholes’s tumescence, he forestalls the encounter with it as “last event which should not be hurried” (*TE* 145) while Pearson seeks to interest Collis in his garden. Both spaces, the room with the TV and the garden, are represented as polar opposites, culminating in Pearson offering Collis a choice between both (*TE* 145). The television as Collis’s objet petit a, Pearson’s attempt to lure him away from it, and Collis becoming the *object* of the TV’s ‘gaze’ later (*TE* 146) are indicative of the desire of the Other and of the ideological projects that dominate the cultural landscape and of the writer having to carve out space in this tense field. Here, the minority writer’s identification with popular culture, especially television, is inhibited, and this is insightful: in the 1950s, while retrospectively often stigmatised as a ‘dull’ and conservative period in its nostalgic rehashing of the war, TV increasingly took on the role of representing a shift in class conceptions, where “patterns of social deference, which had been so much in

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186 David Copperfield, Dicken’s protagonist, is often recognised as ‘feminised’; I here draw on Gail Turley Houston’s analysis exemplary.

187 Here, Lamming’s text differs markedly from later texts by e.g. Samuel Selvon or David Dabydeen, which refer to other media, particularly film, as complementary authorial tools. This is indebted to a tradition of black British film that in 1954 does not yet exist.
evidence in class society and the cultural forms relating to it, showed signs of breakdown” and unquestioned “obeisance to authority could no longer be taken for granted” (Harper & Porter 1).188 The foreclosure of access to this medium speaks to the minority writer’s entrapment in an untraversable fantasy of universal ‘Britishness’, which West Indian writers in the 1950s needed to strengthen while simultaneously being incorporated as ‘others’, and a notion of culture geared towards the “preservation, or the restoration, of an originally better state of affairs” (Nairn 66), i.e. a nostalgic strengthening of hegemonic structures, which is increasingly under threat by other media and raced or classed ‘others’.189 In turn, the writer’s fantasy of a utopian vision and imagining a ‘not-yet’ are thereby traversed, which also speaks to the impossibility of fantasies to “co-exist peacefully” (Žižek, Looking 168).

Pearson’s insistence on the ‘garden’ exposes this ideological project of dividing the racial ‘other’ from the working class further, and here the garden functions as a space determined by the semantics of reclusion and renewal, as locus amoenus, which echoes Naipaul’s later novel: while the telephone call signifies an interruption by economic realities, which has palpably altered the relations between the men, Pearson envisions the garden as “a natural opportunity for making a fresh start with Collis” (TE 143) and to diminish his recollection of the call. Concomitantly, it is also the place Pearson visits to “emphasise the distinction between his office and his home” (TE 143), and his “growing […] anxiety” (TE 144) in the face of Collis’s unreceptiveness to it speaks to a middle-class anxiety of forfeiting hegemonic status through an inter-racially united working-class.

Yet the novel also frustrates ‘hopes’ in new media, which further illustrates the artist’s entrapment in demands for representability. Collis’s perception of the TV then changes to disappointment when it shows a cricket match, and here the connotations of the TV now assuming agency, staring ‘back’ with “ruthless persistence” and trapping Collis in a “conspiracy” (TE 146) are telling. Both a symbol of colonial rule and anticolonial resistance, the broadcasted cricket match speaks to their infiltration of the promises of new technologies and of the possibility of subjectivities outside the modalities of this spectrum. The TV’s address to Collis with “cold, calculated arrogance” firmly interpellates the writer in this order – “it said: ‘This is what you do.’” (TE 146) – and leads Collis to wonder whether “he shouldn’t have

188 Cf. on these developments also Hockenhull (18–19) and for the social problem films of the 1950s Krug’s article “Basil Dearden’s Violent Playground” (2022).

189 Florence Sutchliffe-Brathwaite points towards the formative influence of cultural critics like Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart and their “celebration” of working-class culture and the ‘ordinary’ people on British television by the mid-1950s, while this also needs to be problematised as perpetuating the nostalgic idea of an idealised and homogenised working class (68–69).

190 The most famous mediation on cricket is of course offered by C.L.R. James’s memoir Beyond a Boundary (1963), which takes the sport as origin to discuss anti-colonialism in the Caribbean in the 1950s and early 1960s. Originally imposed as a tool of British colonialism, cricket took on an important role in postcolonial resistance.
chosen to go to the garden” (TE 147). Crucial in this array of medial and spatial intersections, which expose the subject as always determined by the Other’s desire, is also Collis’s dread that Mr. Pearson will turn on the radio (TE 145), as it reflects the role radio, particularly in form of programmes such as *Caribbean Voices*, took in interpelling authors into rigid race and class categories and in confining representation. Collis’s reification by the television then also anticipates his later inability to distinguish subject from object and the fragmentation of the fellow immigrants. In this context, Collis’s ‘flight’ to the lavatory as ironic ‘ivory tower’ can be read as a hyperbolic, almost parodistic negotiation of the trope of the artist’s isolation from society and social responsibility in another referencing of the Daedalus myth. As a place of abjection and resonating with the real, Collis’s withdrawal suggests a failure of ego identification in the imaginary of the writer as a neo- Wordsworthian ‘man speaking to men’; the, as C.L.R. James has it, “supreme artist” who forges a national tradition by “sum[ing] up the past and […] open[ing] out the way to the future” (“The Artist” 177).

The episode at the Pearsons’ encapsulates Lamming’s ‘portrait’ of the artist as uneasily placed between discourses of literary autonomy, demands for writerly engagement, and the realisation of the literary field as always already ideologically fraught. In shifting the writer subject Collis metonymically through identifications with models that embody these discourses, he not only hints at the breadth of desires that influence writing, but also renders the writer as perpetually unfinished.

**7.1.4 Against Incorporation: Frustrating the Reader’s Gaze**

While Lamming’s text continuously problematises the author’s authority, it takes readers to task for ‘becoming pioneers’ by enacting a strategy of opacity that serves to veil a voyeuristic gaze on the ‘other’. Lamming’s text is acutely aware of the kind of reading it demands and the different readerly expectations it rises. ‘Reading’, as a theme, is introduced early on in the novel, crucially by Collis, the writer. His asking Dickson about his reading (TE 29) triggers the central clash between the characters that culminates in Dickson physical attack of Collis (TE 31) and Dickson’s confronting Collis about his writing later on (TE 102). The text shows an awareness of ‘reading’ as preceding writing, in Barthes’s sense, and this foregrounds the text’s insistence on making ‘writerly’ readers out of the text’s recipients. Brown has pointed out the benefits of a “reception-oriented vantage” to Lamming’s work, which “can espy in Lamming’s attempts to disrupt narrative a mechanism designed to short-circuit any easy attempt by readers to process the descriptions of Caribbean characters and situations in an objectivizing, anthropological way”, with Lamming’s experimental style here functioning as a strategy that
counters any consumption of his novels as simple entertainment (Migrant 84).\footnote{Early reviews of Lamming’s work phrased this less favourably: A TLS reviewer, for instance, finds that Lamming’s prose “has always been heavy and dense. Sentences have to be re-read several times before their meaning is clear, partly because words are used strangely” (Calder-Marshall, “Time” 669), and The Emigrants, in particular, “contained compartments of symbolism whose style jarred and confused the reader” (669). For a more detailed account of the early reception of Lamming’s work and the notion of ‘difficulty’, see Brown (Migrant 78–84).} I take my cue from Brown, but what I wish to show in this chapter is how Lamming’s ‘labyrinthian’ narrative negotiations are precisely an attempt to continuously tantalise and frustrate readers’ desires in order to effect readerly reorientation and responsibility, and how these thereby further undermine the myth of the authorial genius.

From the outset, readers parallel the writer subject Collis in being entrapped in a narrative and ideological maze. The narrator’s credo “We were all waiting for something to happen”, repeated various times in slightly altered variations throughout chapter one (TE 5; 6; 7; 10; 11; 12), refers to the characters’ state of stasis, but also perfectly describes readers’ experience of reading: they are suspended in a state of uncertainty and confronted with the continuous deferral of the story’s progress and the withholding of an ‘Oedipal denouement’ in form of a revelation of the narrator’s and characters’ identities and relation to one another, whereby any form of authenticating intimacy (Sommer 157) is withheld. ‘Reading’ the ‘other’ is hence complicated from the outset, and in this, readers are interpellated into both the position of the emigrants and that of Collis, who likewise cannot ‘read’ his fellow immigrants anymore. This “deferred disclosure” (Nair 175) serves to sustain readers’ desire to know, while it simultaneously never fully satisfies it, in a complex dynamic of what Brooks calls narrative forepleasure.

Crucial here is the writer subject’s enigmatic presence, mirrored both in the complex narrative layers and his liminal positionality as demonstrated before. In constantly slipping subject positions between Collis as narrator and character in a heterodiegetic narrative, Lamming prevents readers from obtaining a clear ‘portrait of the artist’ other than the effect he has on other characters, or an insight into Collis’s artistic formation outside of the parameters that render his idea of authorship as wholly determined by the Other’s desire, nor do readers witness a produced text. Neither the novel’s other characters, like the Pearsons as the ‘embodiment’ of British values or the Redheads as successful ‘mimickers’ of the English, nor Collis’s fellow emigrants, exemplified in Miss Bis, can provide knowledge of Collis (TE 208–210). Collis, in reference to his status as writer, is also denied by Pearson (TE 208), confused with Higgins (TE 209–210), and rendered as unattainable, as the Yugoslav’s questioning of Dickson about Collis’s whereabouts exemplifies:

‘Did you remember a chap, was a writer, by the name of Collis?’ Dickson looked puzzled. […] ‘I’ve tried to get him three times at the Mozamba,’ the man said. […] ‘Would you remember
Collis if you saw him?” Dickson asked. ‘Sure I would,’ the man said. ‘But he’s never there when I go, though they say he comes often.’ (TE 269)

Collis as writer of the ‘new’ nation – both in a West Indian or British sense – is continuously sought, but also foreclosed, either through a constant deferral of his presence or the characters’ withdrawing from Collis in a fear of being fixed by his gaze. Collis constitutes himself an objet petit a for the other characters, an imaginary object of desire whose attainment would, however, entail their symbolic death and aphanisis, i.e. their being written and thus petrified. This Thanatic structure, interspersed with structures of Eros in form of various sexual encounters so as to halt the movement towards conclusion, also extends to the reader – or critic, whose desire for Collis – i.e. the author – as meaning-making instance is also continuously spurred and frustrated and would, as terminating the openess of meaning, also result in the text’s ‘death’. Therefore, the reader, as Forbes describes it, “joins the artist in the project of self-fashioning, of deciphering that infinity of genealogical traces that history has deposited in us without leaving an inventory” (211). In the alteration between structuring episodes around the author figure and submerging it, the text stages a notion akin to Barthes’s ‘birth’ of the reader necessitating the author’s ‘death’ and undermines the author as centre of meaning.

As regards reader address, Lamming’s text here intersperses the codes of the Künstlerroman with those of the detective novel. The deferred revelation of Miss Bis/Una Solomon’s ‘secret’, as “a quasi-detective story” (Page 30), best illustrates how the text frustrates readerly pleasures of recognition and an Oedipal search for origins, casts readers’ glance back at earlier passages, and demands a continuous rereading, while ultimately withholding intimacy. Ursula Bis’s – named Miss Bis and reinventing herself as Una Solomon in England – ‘scandalous’ story of breaking up her engagement with a young solicitor, “several shades darker” than her (TE 71) for the Englishman Fred, and the latter’s abandonment of her was turned into a calypso, upon which her family turned her out (TE 258). While readers, in a “comedy of unperceived errors” (Page 31), are introduced to Miss Bis’s background early on through Collis’s ‘rehearsing’ of her story (TE 71), and simultaneously get to know another character in England named Frederick, whom Ursula/Una encounters there and who wants to marry her, it is only at the novel’s end that we find out about Miss Bis’s ‘new’ identity as Una Solomon and about Fred/Frederick’s being identical. Here, readers are put in Fred/Frederick’s position, who does not recognise Una for Ursula. The rendering of Miss Bis’s ‘transformation’ into Una, in a quasi-mirror stage scenario of assuming a gestalt, closely echoes readers’ experience, her repeating her name functions metafictionally as an appellation to read her as Una and shed preconceived knowledge, and assume distance from the writer Collis, who associates her only with her ‘scandal’: “… never Ursula Bis. Wipe the name out. Now you’re beginning again, forget it. You’re Una Solomon. Una. […] And forget the past since he wants
to forget his past. […] Una, not Ursula. Solomon, not Bis. Una, Una …” (*TE* 244). Una/Miss Bis stands exemplary of a larger pattern of disruptive narrative mechanisms that frustrate a consumption of the ‘other’ “in an objectifying, anthropological way” (Brown, “Exile” 684), for the deferral of objet petit a, i.e. readers’ desire to obtain ‘authentic’ knowledge of the ‘other’.

Lamming’s text makes a strong claim for reader involvement and response-ability and confronts a ‘touristic’ consciousness and gaze, to use Brouillette’s term (*Postcolonial* 17–18), on the West Indian characters and to ‘otherness’. It interrupts a mere pleasurable consumption of ‘their stories’: this happens through contrasting the writer’s and readers’ view by simultaneously interpelling the latter into and exposing the errors of the writer’s perception, thus constantly questioning his authority. As regards the above-mentioned character constellation, readers are initially aligned with Collis and command the same degree of knowledge, and assume Collis’s position in an ‘Oedipal denouement’, a gradual unveiling of the couple’s origin story. In an exchange with Frederick, where Frederick shows Collis a photo of Miss Bis/Una, unaware of their identity, Collis has a vague sense of recognition, and his thoughts turn to Miss Bis (*TE* 257). Tellingly, Frederick then relates Miss Bis’s story in Trinidad and the calypso, for which he feels guilt and wants to make amends by marrying Una, a story Collis has heard first hand from Miss Bis on the ship, yet now “Collis […] listened without any show of understanding” (*TE* 258) while readers are now aware of the self-sameness of Una/Miss Bis and have, to some extent, uncovered the “darkness at the beginning” (Bloch, “Detective” 255).\(^{192}\) Frederick’s earlier reproach to Collis, the author, then functions as a metafictional reproach to readers and confronts them as detached consumers – and even quasi-detectives, as the association with ‘spies’ indicates: “People like you just look in […] You’re spies. […] You don’t care about me, Peggy, Azi, Queenie. You don’t care about anybody. […] You encounter us, use us, put us aside as it suits you, but you never really participate. Isn’t it true?” (*TE* 256). The equation of the author’s and the reader’s perception, of Collis’s and ours, and the gradual superiority of readers’ knowledge is made manifest several times in the text, for instance in another, metafictional reference, which emphasises Collis and Frederick as textual constructs, there for readers’ consumption – “Collis looked at Frederick like a man under sentence” (*TE* 256) – as readers now look both at Collis and Frederick literally ‘under sentence’, seeing the errors in both their ways. In contrast to the characters and their assimilation of the ‘other’ to their respective fantasies – the possibility of rectifying one’s faults in Frederick’s case

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\(^{192}\) Whereas the photograph triggered a vague memory in Collis, the oral story leaves no impression at all, a fact that further illustrates the change in status of authorship by means of new media.
and the desire for detachment in Collis’s case – readers’ fantasies of knowing the ‘other’ are constantly undermined.193

As Brown states, Lamming’s fiction aims to resist “the British request for clarity and coherence” which is implied in the naturalisation of the colonial relation (“Exile” 678) – in Barthes’s words, the “law of the Signified” (S/Z 8). This fact is most obvious in the novel’s foregrounding of the material, the body as “element in excess”, “the site of the transgression effected by the narrative”, to cite Barthes again (S/Z 28; original emphasis), as a further manifestation of textual gaps and the threat of the real. The corporeal in Emigrants serves to interrupt narrative denouement and to trigger an ethical reading by maintaining readers’ distance from their objects of desire (Sommer 31) and from turning difference into sameness. Here, Collis’s fragmentation of the gaze, resulting in the increasing inability to divide subject from object and his ‘taking literal’ of the body, constitutes an important poetological comment as to how we should approach the text-as-body and regarding the desired utopian vision of the artist. The fragmentation of vision has so far been almost unanimously read as precarious,194 but Nicole Rizzuto’s elaborations on realism, form, and politics in Caribbean migration narratives provide a crucial counterpoint here. While Rizzuto reads the problematisation of vision as a response to the empiricism and objectivity inherent to post-war metropolitan realism (392), I take my cue from her observation that it is blindness that is figured as enabling and that visual lapses in The Emigrants constitute a means of transforming ways of seeing (392–394). The aforementioned fragmentary gaze can then be connected with processes of subjectification, i.e. of creating and assuming new subject positions. Indicating both an instance of returning to the corps morcelé in the mirror stage and the ‘loss’ of selfhood and cultural certainty in form of a blissful reading, both of which contradict authorial fantasies of a utopian formation and revelation of “the human” (Bloch, “Artist” 276; original emphasis), Collis’s ‘failing’ as writer – i.e. the inhibition of literalising his surroundings through his deteriorating vision – foreshadows an ethics of how to relate to the ‘other’. Thus, Collis had in the last four or five weeks had an unusual experience. Sometimes he felt as though he might lose his normal sight. It was as though his imagination had taken control of his vision, and faces lost their ordinary outline. He wouldn’t recognise the nose as nose, or the eye as eye. The organs kept their form, but somehow lost their reference. They became objects. (TE 219)

193 The characters’ identities and their relationships are in fact rendered so puzzling throughout the text that criticism, too, seems confused: Simon Gikandi, for instance, states that Una Solomon and another female character in the novel, Queenie, are identical (98).
194 Cf. e.g. Ellis (“Foreign” 219), Paquet (Novels 35), or Ball (Imagining 117), although the latter, in reading ‘blindness’ as an expression of the narrative’s refusal to represent a “visually distinctive London”, also acknowledges that in this might lie a “form of resistance: a refusal to substantiate or legitimize a city still steeped in the architectonics of imperial power” (117).
Collis’s fragmentation of the ‘other’ and the futility to form a whole, his inability to coordinate signifier and signified, emerging from the formation of subjectivity in the mirror stage and the assumption of a specular image in the imaginary, functions metafictionally and poetologically, as it suggests a return to the ‘fragmented body’, i.e. to question causalities and coherences, and re-start the signifying process. Beyond the imaginary assumption of wholeness, the subject – or rather Collis’s object here – is temporarily liberated from incorporations into rigid confinements as regards gender, race, or sexuality. In the text this, for instance, manifests in the fact that both the Yugoslav and Dickson are now “grey” (TE 274) instead of white and black. Collis’s inability to infuse the ‘other’ with meaning, and this becomes even clearer when realising that Collis cannot reconcile Fred/Frederick’s ‘identities’, when read with Barthes’s conception of the text-as-body, is reflected in the structure of the text, as Réda Bensmaïa states in The Barthes Effect (1987): “the body is neither a simple origin nor a substance, but the site of atopia: the site where one can change ‘postures’ and ‘perspectives’ endlessly without any of them being obliged to submit to a hierarchy or unified subject” (16). At the novel’s end, the text-body parallels the writer’s gaze, yet not in a fantasy of an ideal convergence of both as is typical for the Künstlerroman, but in their becoming increasingly fraught and fragmented. This is most emphasised in a scene that textually performs Dickson’s increasing mental affliction in England, here caused by a reduction of the ‘other’ to a fantasy of racial fetishism and the hypersexualisation of the black ‘other’ (TE 262–267), through a fragmentation of the narrative. In this instance where the textual garment literally gapes, to paraphrase Barthes, allowing a glimpse at the ‘real’ of the text-body, and the text withholds a linear narration of Dickson’s traumatic experience, the ‘other’s’ incorporation into the text – and the (British) self – is frustrated and readers are tasked with filling the gaps.195

The ‘erotics’ of suspending a sense of selfhood are then even more manifest in a metafictional intrusion by an extradiegetic narrator, who submits the writer to another instance – a possible author figure? – functioning as a metaphorical big Other on a diegetic level once removed. Collis and his fellow emigrants are rendered as objects, “shapes of land growing out of the deck”, as informed merely by habit, yet when this is suspended – “without a relation” – they “couldn’t see” (TE 82):

It seemed possible that the habit which informed a man of the objects he had been trained to encounter might be replaced by some other habit new and different in its nature, and therefore creating a new and different meaning and function for those objects. […] By interrupting a process which made them other than what they seemed sprawled on the deck it would have been possible to convert them into objects. You might even have gone on referring to the object as

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195 A scene that works similarly is the dance scene on the ship (TE 93–94), an erotic scene where bodies are rendered as undistinguishable and as speaking ‘for themselves’, cf. Gerlsbeck, “Fragmentations” (231).
Collis or Higgins or Tornado. It would have made no difference at all to the heavy black flesh that lay on the deck. (TE 82)

While this scene has been read in terms of the colonial subject’s alienation and crisis (Szeman 192), evidencing that the “precarious community” is “not anchored in time” (Rizzuto 397), I claim that it is emblematic of the novel’s strategy to pre-empt the ‘essential’ emigrant subject by foregrounding the processes of writing and reading – characters, a text – and of creating knowledge. Gikandi more aptly states that readers are denied access to “an original experience in which the self has primacy over the language it uses; indeed, we are caught in a hermeneutical tug-of-war between a self groping to understand its existential situation and a world of forms beyond the control of this subject” (93). The metafictional urge to ‘create a new and different meaning’ resounds with the writerly text as a “galaxy of signifiers” without beginning and being accessible “by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one” (Barthes S/Z 5-6). The first sentence, moreover, also points towards masculinity as established through convention and constituted as a position within a differential matrix. In referencing a general ‘you’, readers are made aware by the narrator that what we read, his ‘subjects’, are emerging only ever temporarily through a metonymic shifting of meaning. Characters are thus illustrated as constructs, and the text foregrounds ‘alterity’ as ontological basis of the subject and the subject as wholly determined by the Other’s desire and by language, manifest in the extra-diegetic author figure.

The novel then stages ethical forms of relating to ‘otherness’, particularly in form of countering the absorption of the ‘other’ and the enactment of a necessity to remain obscure. Pearson, for instance, here functions as a disidentificatory model for the reader. Attempting to “get a clearer picture” of Collis (TE 208), he mirrors readers’ desire, becoming a ‘reader’, or rather listener, himself in listening to Miss Bis’s talk about Collis. Yet when Pearson, in turn, is questioned about Collis, he pretends not to know his name (TE 208–209), in a Conradian allusion lying to his ‘intended’ by guarding his knowledge. Pearson resembles the, in Brouillette’s terms, reader as elitist “traveller or anti-tourist”, who, in distinguishing himself from the ‘basic tourist’, “claims access to knowledge of the ‘truth’ of what she ‘beholds’” (Postcolonial 18) and distinguishes himself from other tourists ‘looking in’. The text’s positing of the emigrants as obscure to the English, not being ‘seen clearly’, which is already evident at their arrival in England where they are entering the city through a screen of smoke (TE 125), is then not (just) an expression of the emigrants’ confusion in the metropolis, lost in confronting a “territory without definitive landmarks”, as Forbes has it (203), but is rather a programmatic of obscurity that shields the emigrants from the English – and the ‘other’ from the readers’ – subjectifying gaze.
7.2 The Artist Re-Mythologised: Wilson Harris’s *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965)

Of all novels discussed herein, Guyanese-British author Wilson Harris’s *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965)\(^\text{196}\) demonstrates the most overt and programmatic negotiation of the legacy of the European artist novel, its aesthetics and ideologies, which it conceives as resting on and perpetuated through enduring binary divisions such as for instance male/female, white/black, or culture/nature. Due to Harris’s general experimental approach to philosophical ideas and myths, from South American, Hindu-Indian, and classical mythology, Gregory Shaw proposes to consider his oeuvre as a whole as an “unfolding cycle” (“The Novelist” 142), yet I will focus on a close reading of *Scarecrow*, as works that treat Harris’s oeuvre more comprehensively evidence a tendency to reinscribe his work into a myth of universality (cf. e.g. Maes-Jelinek, *Labyrinth*). Sandra Drake puts it most aptly when she states that “Harris is never an easy writer” and his idiosyncrasy might easily deter readers, but that his importance lies in the fact that he writes not simply “from a tradition of English fiction or min[es] the riches of a single Caribbean tradition, whether Afro-Caribbean, Indian-Guyanese, or Amerindian”, but “involves them all” (xiii). Issues of art and creation occupy many of Harris’s other novels, yet *Scarecrow* stands out for various reasons. While his other work often outspokenly engages mythical characters and themes, this is done more subtly in *Scarecrow*. In focusing on the artistic journey and the psychic transformation of the narrator, henceforth N., and with experience in this novel “wholly interiorised” (Maes-Jelinek, *Labyrinth* 139), the novel moreover reads almost like a psychoanalytic tour-de-force. According to Drake, Harris’s undermining of linearity, space, and time shows that the “potent forces of unconscious memory and desire” are at the heart of his fiction (5), yet in her monograph on Harris’s work she leaves out *Scarecrow* from her close readings. As Hena Maes-Jelinek (*Labyrinth* 139), Jean-Pierre Durix (88), and Nathaniel Mackey (633) point out, the novel opens a new phase in Harris’s oeuvre by advancing a more theoretical and philosophical treatment of memory, time, and creation, rendering it particularly apt to enquire into the aesthetic programme it envisions.

Literary criticism seems torn regarding Harris’s work, as Shaw summarises: “Critical response to Harris has frequently alternated between puzzlement and mystification and generally assumes that the unique experience and vision are sufficient justification for a shockingly experimental style” (“The Novelist” 142). A rather acerbic commentary in this regard is put forward by Orlando Patterson in a *TLS* review of the novel. Tellingly titled “Confusion in Words”, Harris is faulted for lacking both “genius and luck” in “getting inside the structure of the language” to put words “to a greater end”, as “he does not find it possible

\(^{196}\) References to *The Eye of the Scarecrow* refer to the 2011 Peepal Tree Press edition and are henceforth abbreviated as ‘*ES*’. All emphases and capitalisation trace back to the author Harris unless stated otherwise.
to relate words to each other in the conventional manner required by the grammar of the language” (1121). Younger readings, however, are enchanted by its emphasis on what might be called ‘hybridity’. Alan Riach in 2008 claims that the novel demonstrates an urge “towards recognising the need for openness to the partial and transforming nature we are part of” (“Other” n.p.), and Maes-Jelinek’s Labyrinth of Universality (2006) states that Harris, “through this in-depth cross-culturality, this crossfertilization of old worlds and new worlds” has “imaginatively opened the way to a new, authentic Caribbean fiction” (Labyrinth xxvi).

My reading pursues yet another way: this chapter puts forward the argument that Harris’s aesthetics of paradoxes and contrasts, visible in a dialectical progression between seemingly unbridgeable opposites, serves as a conscious strategy of (re-)mythification, an ideological project that rests on the vision of a ‘new’, postcolonial artist, comprising a metaphysical gift that can unify these into a universal vision. Harris’s refraction of structural items of the Künstlerroman and Western artistic mythemes to negotiate the colonised artist’s role in a changed world, I propose, reinstalls the artist-hero in form of a combination of the savant, following the tradition of the poeta doctus, who unites technical and scientific knowledge (Hoffmann & Langer 142), a subjectivity aligned with N.’s friend and antagonist L—, and the artist as bearer of a higher truth, following the reframing of the poeta vates in the genius tradition as artist who commands a privileged insight, is self-creative, and able to envision a ‘universality’ of experience and a utopian imagination of the “unborn folk” (ES 67).

Contrary to e.g. Lamming, Harris firmly retains the belief in the artist’s special role. Although spanning only around eighty pages, the novel’s non-linear narrative and extreme obscurity complicates an easy summary of its story and plot, but an attempt shall still be made here. Scarecrow consists of three books and is framed by the narrator-writer’s diary entries in London in 1963/64, in which he recollects incidents from his childhood that are embedded in various historical moments of crisis and struggle in Guyana. The narrative’s centre is the (again unnamed) narrator’s journey on a surveying mission into the Guyanese interior for

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197 The reception of Harris’s novel hence illustrates the developments and preferences within the field of Postcolonial Studies itself.

198 This counters the assessment of ‘universality’ in Harris’s novel in scholarly literature, which follows the text’s trajectory in assuming that the text ultimately achieves it. Cf. for instance Maes-Jelinek (Labyrinth) or Mitchell (“Introduction”). ‘Universality’ is often accompanied by the assessment of Harris’s work as ‘metaphysical’ or ‘visionary’, cf. Paul Sharrad’s assessment of Harris as “visionary witness of history” (94) who, with his experimental and symbolic style of writing, creates a “fictional memory” (97), or John Moss’s claim that Harris bridges the gap to a vision of an alternative reality (29) and gives his characters a “metaphysical significance” (34).

199 The novel’s connection to the genre of the Künstlerroman, particularly in its German origin, is not as far-fetched as one might think: Harris’s drawing on nineteenth-century German philosophy has been noted by Shaw (“Metamorphoses” 156) and by C.L.R. James, who sees Harris as unique among the post-1945 Caribbean novelists because he “writes as one educated in a German university, and has studied the philosophy of Heidegger and Jaspers; he writes English as if his native language were German” (“Discovering” 78).
the search of an abandoned mining town, Raven’s Head, where large deposits of gold are presumed. The journey is led by N.’s childhood friend, the engineer L—. The text generically blends journal entries, letters, and ultimately Idiot Nameless’s ‘Manifesto’. The ending is then also set in London, in “Night’s Bridge”, a pun on Knightsbridge, positioning the author-protagonist in the ‘imperial centre’ from which he looks back to his youth and early adulthood in the then-colony of British Guiana. This setup of looking back and outward is close to Dabydeen’s later novel and emphasises the continuous concern to negotiate the West’s gaze on the post-colonial ‘margins’. Structurally, however, this framework positions Guyana in the centre and London on the margins, marking an interesting inversion of colonial discourse.

While Wilson Harris’s oeuvre is well discussed in scholarly literature, not least as his essays constitute an important contribution to Caribbean literary criticism, there is a peculiar silence surrounding his sixth novel, which has not attracted much scholarly attention. This cannot simply be reduced to its experimental style, as that also applies to his more vividly discussed works, such as his first novel The Palace of the Peacock (1960). Most of all, the theme of gender and sexuality has as of yet not attracted sufficient attention in Harris’s work and Scarecrow in particular, which might be due to the fact that its complex entanglement with notions of artistic creation would complicate the above-mentioned accolades. Further, while Maes-Jelinek states that Harris’s art is “specifically Caribbean, rooted in both Guyana’s landscape and history” (Labyrinth xvi), ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ as differential categories are likewise marginalised in discussions of Harris’s text, suggesting that critics follow the text in its postulation of a ‘universal’ vision and take its achievement for granted.

The artist theme, the central concern of the text, while recognised as a major focus, is treated in surprisingly superficial fashion. Acknowledged in critical literature is the opposition between the two quasi-artist figures of the text, the narrator N. and L—, the former a writer, the latter an engineer. Mackey, for instance, sees them “personify[ing] two opposing novelistic tendencies (the persuasive and the dialectical, respectively)” (643), resulting ultimately in a

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200 This journey is the reason for N.’s frequent comparison to Wilson Harris himself and readings of the text as veiled autobiography (cf. e.g. Tew, “Experimental” 207), as Harris, too, was a surveyor in Guyana in the 1940s and 1950s.
201 Harris’s most important essays are collected in Tradition, the Writer and Society (1967), Explorations (1981), and The Womb of Space (1983).
202 Readings of Harris’s other works in this light are similarly rare. Vera M. Kutzinski’s short article on race, sexuality, and gender in Harris’s later fiction, Kerry Lee Johnson’s analysis of the female body in The Carnival Trilogy (“Translations”), Joyce Adler’s essay on female figures in Harris’s work, and Shona Jackson’s analysis of Palace of the Peacock in light of gender are the exemptions. Prathna Lor’s master thesis attempts a queer reading of Palace. As this list shows, Scarecrow is exempt from these discussions, as is masculinity as central focus. Where gender does feature, it is rather read in line with the dominant criticism of the early phase of West Indian literature as male-centred, cf. for instance Jackson, who states that even though blurring male-female distinctions, Palace “appears to be a highly masculinized reconstruction of a Caribbean psychic subjectivity achieved through a renarrativization of a moment of oppression that Harris's text cannot reconcile” (47–48).
rejection of realist modes of representation (635). The text does indeed outspokenly dismiss realism, obvious in its enigmatic narrative structure and near absence of plot, yet I wish to qualify this as a conscious attempt at self-mythologisation and thus part of Harris’s artist novel strategy. Maes-Jelinek’s appraisal of Harris’s “self-reflexive narrative” that progresses “toward an open and dynamic condition” (”From Living” 249) also neglects the fact that this is a self-fashioning strategy, grounded on claiming the “authority of alterity” (Dalleo 157). A more detailed engagement of the artist theme is found in Durix’s aforementioned study The Writer Written, which dedicates a chapter to Harris’s novel. Durix reads Scarecrow in the context of metafiction and as centrally occupied with “unveil[ing] the hidden layers of reality” (101) through the instrument of paradox. While Durix’s focus on the recurrency of images, the twin motif, or the novel’s intermingling of creation and theory is at times insightful, it is flawed in its conclusion, respectively the premise from which the study emerges – that there is an “essence” to be reached through these processes (104) – and in neglecting the text’s narcissistic strategy, as the chapter takes the novel’s statements on creation at face value.

The scarcity of research then seems grounded on precisely the idiosyncratic re-fashioning of atherial myths, which questions but also reinstalls the artist as comprising a superior insight, but, as the outlined criticism indicates, does not qualify in terms of a more outspokenly ‘political’ message. Harris not so much subverts, but reinstalls hegemonic cultural representations, akin to what Hal Foster’s has identified as an inherent difficulty to “myth-critical art” (175), where attempts to “shake the sign, contest the code” may serve only to “manipulate signifiers within it and so replicate rather than dismantle its logic” (175) through a ‘fetishism of the signifiers’ (175). In other words, Harris’s overall strategy to withdraw the artist from the symbolic, through an anticipation of poststructuralist conceptions of authorship and a probing of anti-logocentric speech, ultimately upholds its very foundations.

### 7.2.1 Universal Visions: Artistic Dualisms and Utopian Aspirations

Harris’s novel portrays artistic authority as resting on a conscious occupation of a position of marginality in the literary field and enacted through a performance of anti-(phal)logocentric writing as well as fantasies of atherial self-begetting, the latter a typical trope of the genius discourse. The staging of the artist’s dual nature – via characters, aesthetic ideals, and conceptions of the author – here provides the fantasmatic ground for fashioning a subjectivity

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203 The theme of myth in Harris’s work has recently gained more attention. Madeleine Scherer has analysed Harris’s younger work in regard to his reception of the classical underworld narrative (katabasis) and finds that “Harris seemed to believe that certain structures serve as building blocks to a continuing transcultural imagination – although he favoured the interpretation that this process occurs within a collective unconscious, not through intentional schematic adaptations” (214). I agree with Scherer on this point, and in this light, the artist novel genre provides so apt a framework for analysis, as, due to its narcissistic nature, it is especially suited for tracing how generic myths, as supra-individual structures, are both consciously cited but also amount to a re-mythification.
rooted in notions of self-creation, originality, and universality, and ultimately a utopian capacity. At the heart of the novel’s mobilisation of this mytheme is the question of how to render cultural difference and to bring about the “conception” of the “unborn folk” (*ES* 67), as N. later calls it. Harris’s novel firmly believes in the writer’s ‘visionary capacity’ to conceive and express the Caribbean subject’s situatedness within a continuum of colonial exploitation and a post-colonial, capitalist restructuring of the Global South, most evident in the impact of modernisation on the Guyanese landscape, for which L— and his engineering expedition stand symbolically. The text references this with both the strike of the sugar cane workers and the attempts to map the hinterland by the expedition that N. and L— join in an “unendurable search” for the “undisclosed astronomical wealth of the jungle” (*ES* 68–69). N., in turn, is narrating in retrospect from the ‘centre’, his diary is written in London, which mirrors the writer’s consideration of how to integrate cultural difference into the metropolis, or, rather, make it consumable for metropolitan readers.

While the text hardly ever outspokenly comments on ethnic and much less on diasporic concerns, the artist’s attempt at a synthesis of different knowledges and contexts filters through the novel as central concern. The very first episode N. presents readers with, of “1948 Water Street” (*ES* 32), entangles Guyana and Britain in a (post)colonial, capitalist continuum of exploitation and class struggle and raises questions of writerly responsibility in this regard. While this chapter overtly focuses on the 1948 sugar cane worker’s strike in what was then British Guiana, N.’s reference to 1948 as “uncertain forerunner of private upheaval and public change in the decades which followed”, a “year of local climax for some, universal anticlimax for others” (*ES* 32), evokes various discourses in the novel and resonates with the contemporary context. For once, 1948 is also the year when N. goes on his journey with L—, the ‘upheaval’ then also refers to the initiation of the artist’s journey. From a particularly British point of view, 1948 also brings to mind the docking of the SS *Empire Windrush* in Tilbury, which entailed ‘private upheavals’ not only for the immigrants, among them artists like Harris, who arrived in England in 1959, but also ‘public change’ as regards the subsequent redefinition of Britain as ‘imagined community’ as well as shifts in the public literary sphere; aspects to which N., writing in 1963, looks back.

Writing of Wilson Harris and Edouard Glissant, Michael Dash has stated that their “assertion of the links between humanity and cosmos, in their demythification of omniscience

204 In this regard, younger criticism is especially interested in Harris’s ecological negotiations, cf. e.g. Michael Niblett, who reads *Scarecrow* through a “world-ecology perspective” (“Abstract” 82).

205 Niblett has outlined the history and relevance of the 1948 strike in the context of Guyana’s ecology in Harris’s novel (“Abstract” 94–95). The strike had its origins in an increase in workload due to sugar companies driving up productivity, which led to violent conflicts, in which five strikers were ultimately killed by the police.
and ‘articulacy’, the ways in which issues that have long preoccupied the Caribbean writer are now a major philosophical issue in post-modernist thought” (“In Search” 19), and I contend that the same applies to notions of subjectivity and authorship in Harris’s novel, but that ‘demythification’ is staged narcissistically here. As such, the novel fantasises the – male – author’s ‘death’, for instance, on multiple planes as a prerequisite of the ‘birth’ of the ‘new’ author: it takes place on a more literal level in N. and L—’s ‘vanishing’ in Book Three, “Raven’s Head”. In terms of structure, after the relatively straightforward accounts of N. as initially diarist and the focus on more tangible phenomena, such as the 1948 strike, the narrative rehearses similar episodes on more and more abstract levels and, in Book Three, without N. as anchor point, on to an ultimately “wholly inward, abstract, or structural reconstruction of experience” (Maes-Jelinek, Labyrinth 155), so much so that readers are uncertain as to particular time frames and the ‘identity’ of the characters. This culminates with the enigmatic manifesto, now written by “Idiot Nameless” as a ‘spectre’ of N. On the level of speech, N.’s repeated resorting to the passive mode and ascribing agency to the images likewise undermines the author by emphasising that memory makes the author its subject rather than the author being in control of its textualisation, exemplary in N.’s musings on writing as, for instance, “one is bound to marvel at the stubborn renascence and proliferation of the past returning out of every desired goal of nothingness, out of the pitiful seed of vanquished memory […]” (ES 43), or “a funeral procession returns to my mind’s eye like the beginnings of a swollen flood” (ES 35). Harris’s blurring of seeing subject and seen object resembles Lacan’s split between the eye and the gaze and here indicates the separation from objet petit a, from becoming, in Barthes’s sense, Author with a capital ‘A’ – in other words, the text suggests a continuous slippage of the author’s control over his material by making the author-narrator rather its object.206

The text’s attempts to expose and undermine the phallus as structuring principle is manifest in repeated associations of writing with the phallus, for instance in N.’s musing on the Guyana landscape, here the Demerara river, which is rendered as trapping N.’s gaze, ‘luring’ him to fix it in writing: “the crest of a wave occasionally flickered as if it sought a pencil of relief (or was it extinction?)” (ES 34). In equating writing and extinction and both with the phallus – the reference to the pencil here also reminds of Gilbert and Gubar’s linking of the penis with the pen – triggers images of autoeroticism and criticises the attempt to foreclose the feminine to create a posterity to which the authorial subject can lay claim and thus conflates representing history with phallic jouissance. Further, the constant association of mimesis with phallic images that serve to hold the immeasurable at bay –

206 The enactment of this split whereby power is conferred to the object rather than the subject of the gaze also has ramifications for N.’s masculine subject status, as chapter 7.2.3 will highlight.
It is this frail visionary organization of memory – one thing against another, and everything apparently laying siege to nothing (while nothing seems to extend into the immaterial capacity and absorption of everything) – which highlights the transient figures of the insensible past into ideal erections against chaos, standing within a measureless ground plan of spiritual recognitions, intimacies and identities… (ES 34; emphasis added)

– but which are already emptied out, ‘frail’, ‘nothing’, ‘transient’, envisions a foreclosure of this mode of writing as phallogocentric, which is in line with the text’s occupation, even mystification, of the feminine, as I will elaborate on later.

While aiming to stage the author – in various guises and transformations of the writer-narrator – as ‘Idiot’, ‘Scarecrow’, or, most frequently, as ghost returning to different episodes or ‘text bodies’ (cf. ES 32; 37; 42–43), who renounces any claim to knowledge and certainty, the text still draws on myths of the author as ‘creator-god’, as divinely inspired poeta vates.

While N. posits his artistic vision as “an open dialogue within which a free construction of events will emerge” (ES 31), reminiscent of Barthes’s ‘birth of the reader’, the novel’s beginning almost hyperbolically cites various staple tropes that render the artist as sublime being. Beginning his writing on Christmas – Harris’s diarist N. starts his diary on the “25th/26th December 1963” (ES 31) – already constitutes a reference to the author as creator-god, a literal alter deus and “second Maker, a just Prometheus under Jove” (Shaftesbury 93) and evokes Christ, respectively Adam, as author models, thereby drawing on the “motif of the autonomous hero” (Kellman 2).207 With the diary entries, readers follow the genesis of the text and are introduced to the events the book will contain:

Now as I make this – the first entry in this Journal – the winter sky of London travels through the window and falls upon the page before me like the blank fleece of a wayward flock, wayward yet still shepherded by the overcast sun, all shorn to spread in such an absent moment an intimate landscape and illumination. (ES 31)

Together with the symbolism of Christmas, the evocation of the sublime in this scene initiates a discourse of writing as quasi-metaphysical and divinely inspired, with the artist envisioned as exceptional being to whom the task of revealing the ‘intimate landscape’ is given, and N.’s later narration of his experience in the Guyanese interior is an attempt at just that.

Reading beyond the text’s overt programmatic of positing the author as needing to relinquish his authority – of ultimately establishing, as the text has it at the end, a “‘negative’ identity” (ES 110) – and enquiring into the ideologies it is invested in demonstrates a belief in the notion of authorial responsibility, while it questions the origin on which to ground such a form of ‘engaged writing’. N.’s repeated mantra “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (ES 38; 46; 93–94; 105), a reference to John 14.2, where Jesus speaks to Peter after the Last

207 While this might at first seem counterintuitive, Steven Kellman, in discussing Otto Rank’s elaborations on the Oedipus myth, states that Jesus, in theological terms, “is preaching the early Christian heresy of modalism, the doctrine that the Son of God and the Father are identical” (2). Mackey, on the other hand, has called the Scarecrow a Christlike figure which “mediates between guilt and innocence, complicity and estrangement” (650).
Supper and promises he will go ahead and prepare the coming kingdom for his disciples, is a strategy of artistic self-sacralisation. The ‘trace’ of the phrase, woven through the book like a red thread and typical for its “evocative association of images” (Moss 36), serves as a narrative fantasy of artistic prophetism and holds together an increasingly fragmented and convoluted narrative, it functions as a ‘spectre’ of authorial self-assurance. Emblematic here is the Manifesto as laying out a ‘programme’ for a new vision. Its association with N., later Scarecrow (ES 93–94), and then Idiot Nameless (ES 105), both author ‘spectres’ of N. and simultaneously announcements and annulments of “the ego’s estrangement” (Mackey 648–649), speaks to the transformation, but ultimate retention of this myth. The specific contexts in which the credo occurs is telling here, as it figures the (postcolonial) author as prophet of and for those disenfranchised through imperialism and its continuing effects in an attempt to envision the ‘unborn’, that is, silent ‘folk’: in the first instance, for example, N. conjures up an image of a procession of sugar cane strikers (ES 38), in the second that of his grandfather’s tenants, who are all in array with their rent and living precariously (ES 46). The connection to imperial rule is here subtly interwoven through N.’s preceding memory of the Governor of the colony and the fact that the grandfather’s property is located in Waterloo Street.

The text’s subscription to the fantasy of the artist’s ability to envision the ‘unborn folk’, resting on the mythemes of genesis and the author as divine being, is most prominent in Book Two, tellingly called “Genesis”. At the beginning of this book, the artist’s ‘journey’ has taken readers back to the narrator’s childhood and his release from the hospital, a memory introduced as him being reborn (ES 40), with a new “purchase of reality” (ES 51), whereupon he and L— meet and fashion figurines out of mud. This book most profoundly enacts a fantasmatic imagination of the artist as bearer of utopia who, divinely inspired, is able to transcend differences and create something new, by rehearsing two contrasting aesthetic ideals. With N., the subjectivity favoured by the text in comparison to that associated with the rational L—, who constitutes the poeta doctus, the ‘craftsman’ to N.’s envisaged visionary creation, the text stages a Promethean “formation of the human” (Bloch, “Artist” 276; original emphasis). Programmatically, the chapter also begins with a verse from Genesis 2.6, which concurs with N.’s conception: “There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground…” (ES 53). This of course also evokes discourses of the “Author God” (Barthes, “Death” 146) by referencing God’s

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208 The passage in context reads: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14.2; original emphasis). The novel’s focus on the ‘house’ also evokes issues of canonisation (cf. Walcott’s ‘house of literature’).
creation of Adam, and of literature as theological activity by “assign[ing] a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text)” (147).

Whereas N. envisions his art as anti-mimetic and non-instrumental, attempting to overcome a “dead tide of self-indulgent realism” (ES 33) and the artwork thus as creating the conditions for commitment in Adornoian fashion by pointing “beyond […] its aesthetic complexion, which it does only by virtue of that aesthetic complexion” (Aesthetic 248), his friend L— constitutes a challenge to this artistic vision. L—, associated with science, technology, and capitalist rationalism, i.e. a Western teleology of progress, is in every respect N.’s opposite and reminds him of “something I did not wish to see” (ES 32). Their relationship for large parts resembles Wordsworth’s distinction of the “Poet” and the “Man of Science” and subscribes to his notion that only the first is able to “connect[…] us with our fellow beings” (“Preface” 606). N. becomes L—’s reader and, using Bloom’s terms, attempts a poetic misprision in form of a “corrective movement” (14) by visually appropriating his creation and envisioning himself as ‘translator’ (ES 55) of the unsatisfactory figure L— has produced by bestowing “a curious revelation of mystical sorrow” onto L—’s “lifeless and unreal” creation (ES 56). In setting the author as articulator of the Caribbean subject’s revolution central, N. self-fashions as true genius with a “more than usual organic sensibility” (Wordsworth, “Preface” 598). The necessity to become “cold and strange, a religious stranger to all previous knowledge of emotion”, whereby which “emotion […] became new, liberating, oblique” in order to circumvent the infliction of harm on his literary subjects (ES 56) here also recalls the poet’s distinction “from other men by greater promptness to think and feel without external excitement” (Wordsworth, “Preface” 604).

While the text goes to great lengths to suggests the narrator’s transformation and to emphasise anti-logocentrism as central principle, these Romantic mythemes are retained through their opposition with L—’s creation as embodiment of the poet’s “slavish and mechanical” situation (Wordsworth, “Preface” 604), a position the text discourages. As such, Durix’s statement that N. and L— are “complementary instruments of a common desire to explore the unknown” (Durix 92) rings true in so far as the text’s contrasting of both constitutes the precondition for the artist’s resulting ‘universal vision’, which in turn forms part of his sublimity. Crucially, whereas L—’s creation is rendered as bodily – his hands “broke and moulded the earth” and “were growing to take themselves entirely for granted” (ES 55), N.’s creation is entirely dependent on his imaginative faculties, taking place only in his mind. In dividing ‘art’ from ‘skill’, the novel posits a quite conventional discourse of the exceptional artist hero possessing an aura of ingenuity (Neumann 132), this is also emphasised by the subscription to the Cartesian privileging of mind over body.
N.’s ‘rewriting’ of L—’s creation in Book Two also reverberates metafictionally. It suggests that Harris’s novel itself constitutes a revision of an existing canon, a reanimation of a “dead creature” (ES 55), as applies, for instance, also to the form of the Künstlerroman genre and the Caribbean writer’s infusion of it with the ‘mystical sorrow’ of those hitherto excluded from this European tradition, providing the “inarticulate protest in the ground of apparent lifelessness” (ES 56). Harris not only trusts in the artist’s capacity to give a voice to the silenced subaltern but, like Lamming, whose narrator’s journey, too, is figured as inspired by a belief in the infusion of the ‘dead novel’ with new literary inspiration (TE 8–9), foregrounds the (post)colonial subject’s invaluable aesthetic contribution to the British literary landscape. In contrast to Lamming, he imagines the artist as yet unrecognised genius, which is grounded on the zeitgeist’s preference of a realist aesthetic. This is also visible in the fact that L— and his ‘lifeless creation’ are simultaneously posited as emblematic of a “sober and matchless good sense, judgment, responsibility” (ES 56), vis-à-vis which N. self-fashions as rebellious, as “striking unpredictable one” (ES 56). In other words, L— is posited as the ‘convenient postcolonial subject’ that is firmly under the law, resonant with the Caribbean writer corresponding to the dominant regime of representation: “he fulfilled the most negative role of all – the self-imposed ratification of every closed sentence I could not truly accept”, with N. attempting to uncover “the furthest point and agency of reason and the source of an active responsible spiritual (L—loathed the word) tradition still” (ES 72).

The text’s contrasting of L— as equated with the ‘closed sentence’ and as representative of the law, the ‘norm’, and N. as outsider and signifier that disturbs the ‘closed sentence’ serves as a narcissistic strategy of authorial self-fashioning and demonstrates that the author’s symbolic capital can likewise be generated from the occupation of a position of alterity within the literary field. In line with Harris’s denouncing of the inferior artistic vision as masculine and the revaluation of the feminine, the subject of the following subchapters, L—, the artistic subjectivity the text devalues, is constantly associated with the phallic signifier in the text and subject to N.’s displacement. The fact that his features appear “shattered” and elicit “[t]he incredible image of a scarecrow” (ES 32), reminiscent of the fragmented body before the entry into the mirror stage, speaks to N.’s foreclosure of this artistic model and a refusal to become subject in L—’s image, but likewise imply a threat to N.’s own gestalt. The text thereby enacts a ‘Tiresian’ struggle over the gender of creation, which resonates with seeking distinction from the ‘masculine realism’ (Kalliney, Commonwealth 116) that dominates the period’s literary field.

It is crucial that Harris should employ these contrasting discourses, embodied in L— and N., in 1965, yet his fashioning of the writer as someone “carrying sensation into the midst of
the objects of the Science” (Wordsworth, “Preface” 606–607) and ‘healing’ that which has been destroyed (606) displays a revaluation of art as able to counter the alienation and exploitation of the Caribbean subject in the context of socio-economic transformations and capitalist modernisation, both locally, in Guyana, and globally. Scarecrow refers to these in the diary entries that cite the great crises of the twentieth century: these are the strike of the sugar workers in 1948 in chapter 2, as exemplary of the colonial-capitalist exploitation of Guyana, and the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s in chapter 3, whose economic repercussions also strengthened opposition to colonial rule in the Caribbean (Adi 96). From a British point of view, ‘crisis’ here comprises decolonisation and the imminent independence of Guyana in the narrator’s present (chapter 1 and Postscript),209 which was also a time of social unrest in Guyana (Niblett, “Abstract” 94).

N. and L— are then to be conceived as two forms of ego-identification, as two possible artistic answers to the desire of the Other, which brings different discourses that structure the artist’s positionality into vision. Thereby, the text stages the artist’s ‘split’, which serves to elevate the artist as metaphysical, as inventing and commanding universal insights. The novel’s structure mirrors this: where Book One centres on N., Book Two introduces L— as an antithesis to his vision, a dialectical other who disturbs the subject’s coherence, but who is a prerequisite for N.’s ultimately universal vision. Book Three continues this dissolution of unity and here also extends to N. as narrator. Yet while this might be interpreted as the text’s renouncing authority altogether, it is in fact N. who ‘survives’ – in transformed form as ‘Idiot Nameless’, whereas L— remains only as receiver of Idiot’s Manifesto (ES 95–97). The rivalling vision, i.e. L— as ‘craftsman’, has now been reduced to the position of reader, thus elevating N.’s vision, and with it the author as quasi-divine seer: while the emphasis is on the void, the silent, the immaterial, the manifesto nevertheless retains the poet as able to express just that by gaining inspiration from turning inward and by foregrounding properties of language, a fact that then also characterises Scarecrow:

Language is one’s medium of the vision of consciousness. […] language alone can express […] the sheer – the ultimate ‘silent’ and ‘immaterial’ complexity of arousal. […] [T]he stuff of one’s essential understanding of the reality of the original Word, the Well of Silence […] is concerned with a genuine sourcelessness, a fluid logic of image. So that any genuine act of possession by one’s inner eye is a subtle dispersal of illusory fact, dispossession of one’s outer or physical eye. (ES 105)

The conscious strategy of evoking dualisms the author then synthesises must be understood within the novel’s socio-cultural context and the increasing politicisation of artistic work from

209 Guyana gained independence in 1966 and is since 1970 called “Co-Operative Republic of Guyana”. Albeit being geographically part of South America, it is counted as part of the Anglophone Caribbean (the mainland Caribbean region) due to its colonial history.
the 1960s onwards, the denouncing of experimental style as detrimental to the project of imagining a ‘positive blackness’, and the rising compartmentalisation of Anglo-Caribbean and other ‘minority’ literatures. In this context, the focus on ‘universality’ and the artist’s ‘special role’, which overtly informs Harris’s text, amounts to the novel’s ‘fundamental fantasy’: a belief in the power of the artist to bridge the diverging desires within the literary field and to emerge with a ‘new’ authority.

### 7.2.2 Hindered Journeys, Absent Fathers: Challenging the Oedipal Narrative

The novel’s staging of an artistic subjectivity oppositional to the phallogocentrism that characterises literary tradition is most prominent in the narcissistic engagement of the artistic quest and the concomitant notion of Bildung. Strategies of authorial self-fashioning here entail the positing and pre-empting of the Oedipal trajectory on which masculine and authorial subject formation hinge by metaphorising it as a hindered journey. As will become clear in the following subchapters, an imaginary identification of the artist with the feminine here serves to circumvent patterns of literary filiation in staging a position of alterity, which, in perpetuating the myth of the artist as radical outsider, but extraordinarily gifted, continues the refraction and reinstallation of the genius discourse. The Manifesto’s claim for the “abortive classical grain or ground” needing a “truer return to the womb of subjection” (ES 106) is in this regard programmatic for the text’s engagement of classical myths and mythemes. The novel cites the libidinally structured teleological artistic journey from ignorance to knowledge in an overt engagement and exposure of the Oedipus myth as a structural trope that establishes the masculine mythical subject via the feminine obstacle. Thematically, this takes place in a fantasy of patricide, in a symbolic ‘killing’ of the (authorial) father, and the circumvention of the incest prohibition that hinders the unity with the (M)other(’s body), as presumed source of artistic inspiration and locus of the desirable jouissance. On the level of discourse, following Lacan, it consists of rejecting linguistic castration caused by the paternal function – in other words, it exposes the phallus as signifier and the mythical narrative of masculinity on which cultural production hinges. The author’s authority is here envisioned as recovering a mode of expression beyond sexual differentiation and dominant regimes of representation, which are figured as bound to Western principles of enlightenment, modernity, and progress.

The novel’s very first sentence already introduces the quest mytheme as premising self-cultivation in N.’s writing of a journey to Edinburgh in his diary, which is described as ‘ancient’

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210 The staging of dualisms is also characteristic of many of Harris’s other novels, where, like in Scarecrow, this extends to an emphasis on the ‘chasm’ between materialism and spiritualism, science and mythology, or technology and nature. Harris’s ninth tale Ascent to Omai (1970), another artist novel, for instance, is quite similar to Scarecrow in this and many other regards.
and thereby connects to the ancient, mysterious city of Raven Head that will form the centre of the novel and the artistic quest. The employment of this trope, most visible in form of a journey to the Guyanese interior, negotiates an insecure (artistic) origin and the parameters of Western literary tradition. Both N. and L—’s desires are oriented towards Raven’s Head, where supposedly “fantastic gold deposits lay” (ES 70). This desire to journey to the Guyanese interior is initiated by ‘typical’ master signifiers: where L—’s motif for the expedition is gold, N.’s is the search for his father, more precisely, the search for his father’s innocence, as it turns out that N.’s father had been convicted of murder and executed in the jungle. These motivations that underlie the novel’s central journey echo the determining factors for the author’s journey into literary success by positing the discourses of capitalism (money) and the infallibility of patriarchal structures and patrilineality (the father’s innocence) as central parameters that determine the literary field and within which authorial self-fashioning must carve out space.

In relating N. and L—’s journey, the novel cites various intertexts, most prominently those of the travel writing genre, and thereby reflects on its own situatedness in literary tradition and aspects of literary paternity by citing discourses of a heroic travelling masculinity that hinges on mastering the feminine (Goodman 14). While the journey into the Guyanese interior and N.’s stepfather’s ‘drowning’ there (ES 62) as well as the overall linguistic impression of ‘ineffability’ also evokes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, insightful is the novel’s structural allusion to the imperial Romance, a genre that, drawing on narrative linearity and closure, suggests the achievement of a “more genuine, more masculine Britishness” through “a detour through the savage Other” (Daly 19) and thus masculine self-assertion through “allegorized journeys into the self” (Showalter 82).211 With the two men, N. and L—, being led into the ‘heart’ of the country by a woman, the enigmatic Hebra, Harris’s rendering of the artistic journey reminds of H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) and the quasi-mythical journey of a group of men surrounding Allan Quartermain into the African interior. In Haggard’s novel, the male travellers explore a mysterious landscape called ‘Sheba’s Breast’, named after a map of the landscape where the territory takes the form of the body of a headless woman, and are led into the hidden mines, where treasures of gold are supposed, by the native woman Gagool. Harris’s strategy of ‘completing’ Haggard’s text and his map, in providing the missing ‘head’ (Raven’s Head) for Haggard’s map of the headless ‘Sheba’s Breast’, can be read as a poetological comment: like the missing head on the colonial writer’s map, the ‘native’ writer, here, is figured as the missing piece in the literary tradition, and, in contributing the most

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211 The imperial romance, or “male quest romance” (Showalter 81) was seen as an antidote to the more femininely coded domestic novels of the late nineteenth century and a general ‘crisis of masculinity’, where the romance “could at once purify British fiction of foreign contaminants and remasculinize it” (Daly 19; original emphasis). For the distinguishing features of this genre, see Richard F. Patteson (1978).
important element with the head, constitutes not just its integration, but its refinement. Crucially, this refinement hinges on ‘completing’ the female. This move illustrates the overall image of the late- or postcolonial artist Harris’s work evokes in a nutshell. In providing less a revision than a supplement, the native writer inscribes himself into a tradition, providing valuable infusion, but ultimately falls short in suspending its underlying ideologies, an aspect Harris’s reinstallation of the poeta vates in form of an aesthetics of genius has already shown.\(^{212}\)

Similarly, the men’s journey to the town of Raven’s Head, like in Haggard’s romance, never fully manages to subvert its Oedipal inflection. In profoundly libidinous terms, the jungle and the landscape, and later the native woman, figure as necessary obstacles the men have to surmount, to ‘penetrate’, in an attempt to master excess. Yet Harris’s text cites this self-reflexively and thereby highlights the gaps that already permeate Haggard’s text, e.g. in form of the anxiety and non-essence of a gentleman masculinity that is revealed as performative.\(^{213}\)

Most importantly, it interrogates the intertext’s “contradictions in the colonial effort to discipline female sexuality and labor, both in the European metropolis and in the colonies”, as Anne McClintock’s famous reading of the novella states (233). Here, Harris’s novel exposes the sexual nature of the quest and the exploitation of the – now Amerindian – female. Particularly, it negotiates the conflict “between male and female generative power” (233) by relegating this to the level of literary production. As McClintock further claims, Haggard’s “poetics of male authorship is not just a poetics of creativity but a poetics of possession and control over the issue of posterity” that “involves the production of a hierarchy of power” (235), and it is in this context that the novel’s central metaphors of birth and gestation, abortion and interruption I will elaborate on later gain their significance.

The quest mytheme in Harris’s novel is tied to a further myth: the journey the text calls forth as fantasy to sustain the artistic subject’s quest for the ‘self’, as hinted at in L—’s search for gold, is a journey for El Dorado. For the Caribbean novel in general, as Norval Edwards states, this “conquistadorial leitmotif” is “the most potent example […] of a re-visionary engagement with history”, as it offers “a way out of the stasis of History” through “an imaginative recuperation of a catastrophic past” (11). In Scarecrow, El Dorado is the enigmatic place of Raven’s Head with its supposed gold deposits, which, as Maes-Jelinek rightly points out, comes to be identified “with the elusive and fluctuating ground of art” itself (Labyrinth

\(^{212}\) As Hoffmann and Langer contend, the aspect of the artist’s special role and privileged insight into a higher poetic truth inherent to the poeta vates model of antiquity experienced a resurgence and reformulation with the aesthetics of genius from the eighteenth century onwards (141).

\(^{213}\) Masculinity, thus, is already fraught in Rider Haggard’s romance, as it needs to be sustained by various technical props, such as false teeth, a glass eye, or guns (Haggard 72–74) and hinges on the illusion of ‘white magic’ and the exploitation of cultural misunderstanding in the characters’ presenting rifles as “magic tubes” (75) to the Africans.
and is concomitantly impossible to reach: “(There were two Raven’s Heads according to oral tradition.) In the second place not only did these mushroom settlements spring up overnight, they disappeared as rapidly” (ES 70). The text here installs and traverses the fantasy of origin: with N.’s relinquishing of his objet petit a, i.e. finding Raven’s Head and there proof of his father’s innocence and of his ancestry, the successful journey as symbol of male artistic self-formation is presented as a priori fraught, which coincides with the increasingly convoluted structure of the narrative that undermines a linear trajectory. While Durix here is right to state that “language for Wilson Harris is inevitably linked with a search for the origins, for its own origins” (103), he essentialises it by tying it to notions of a “genuine creation” (100), a position that echoes the framing and reception of postcolonial or minor literatures that rests on the idea of reclaiming identity scripts, which ultimately reaffirms difference. Rather, Harris’s staging of the failed journey constitutes an attempt to prevent from reaching objet petit a, which would result in the subject’s aphanisis, the fading of (sexual) desire. As this desire is so intricately tied to writing and imagining the ‘unborn folk’, the Blochian ‘not-yet’, yielding it by completing the journey would entail the reinstallation of a nostalgic discourse of “chivalrous masculinity” (Haschemi Yekani 11) and the artist as emerging with(in) the dominant aesthetic discourse.

The text enacts the interruption of the artist’s inscription into a Western, masculine concept of Bildung in various ways, and the certainty of origin, history, and the past, as ontological foundations on which to ground artistic development, is further complicated through various metaphors of ‘family’, through probing a variety of (substitute) parents. This forms a central part of the novel’s engagement of questions of literary filiation and the source and legitimation of writerly authority, but ultimately prepares the grounds for the writer’s emergence as self-begetting. Harris’s text enquires self-reflexively into these aspects and into cultural structures by enacting a ‘textual neurosis’ – probing how “fundamentally patriarchal traditions elevate the male principle and represent the female principle under a masculine ideal”, where any “psychic inversion of such principles can threaten the whole weight of the superstructure that supports them” (Clark 134). While the imaginary father here initiates and sustains the journey, the associated fantasy of ‘origin’ is already traversed, as filial relationships in the novel are never traceable in a direct lineage, which speaks to a strategic evocation of ‘bastardisation’ as a strategy of self-legitimisation and -begetting. The most prominent male relations of kinship are those of stepson/stepfather (with N. recreating his stepfathers journey to the jungle in an allusion to Conrad’s Marlow/Kurtz) and

Contrary to the symbolic father, who is congruent with the paternal function and the imposition of the law, the imaginary father is the “composite of all the imaginary constructs that the subject builds up in fantasy around the figure of the father” (Evans 62–63).
grandson/grandfather (e.g. ES 82). The patrilineal relations are thus always already marked by a gap, leaving, for instance, N.’s real father a vacancy in his story that he attempts to reach in a metonymic shift to possible substitutes.

N. sustains the myth of literary paternity and principles of filiation by assuming different paternal ‘masks’ throughout the text and probes their authority, which is indicative of the author’s fantasmatic imagination with a literary predecessor. At times, he is for instance identified with his stepfather. In the jungle, N. relates, “L— and I suddenly stumbled upon the faint but ‘timeless’ footprints of a self-created self – the stepfather for whom my mother wept (as if she had been weeping for me as well as for him all the time)” (ES 62). On various instances, N. is envisioning his becoming (his own) father, implying the desire to lay ground to a literary tradition, but this happens only in a ‘distorted’ form of becoming-stepfather. Next to his stepfather’s vanishing because of N.’s “unwelcome” attachment to his mother (ES 70), in perplexing shifts and a blurring of the boundaries between the textual subjects, N. dreams of killing his stepfather (ES 62) and a displaced version of his own mother, that is, L—’s mother, who then becomes his mother. Due to the convolution of the narrative, it is worth quoting this passage in detail:

But even as I struggled to find a way of new conviction other than the ancient idle of protest I knew the changeless ground of it all would yield ultimately, of its own accord, when it succeeded in marrying the fearful strength of the past to the infant freedom of choice which was still weak in the conviction of the present and the future: my own impulsive reign of eagerness and repulsive light of action grew brutally fitful and restrictive as the uncertain spring of day – I was pushing her […] – pushing her, nevertheless, even as I had involuntarily pushed him, her son, into the canal and to the brink of his (and her) total self-acceptance, total responsibility for my bewildered self belonging to both sides of the blanket, illegitimate one of present speculation and legitimate reinforcement to escape from the prison of past knowledge. I found myself pushing her into the streaming bedclothes and into my own cupboard and skeleton of shadow […]. I heard myself shout […] that it was all my fault, plunging forward before it was too late to pull her out and draw her up into my own gauge of budding self-deception, self-knowledge and hanging extremity, my illusion of freedom. She rose and I was established in him, in his phallic technical right, the dead man’s living right, thereby abolishing the necessity for him at one stroke. (The news arrived yesterday that her engineer had been drowned – the police were investigating …) I turned away from his subjective memory to fulfil our mutual engagement: but it was my own mother – and no scapegoat of woman – who had come into the room and was lying beside me. (ES 60–61)

Reading almost hyperbolically Freudian, the comments on subjectivity and creation inherent to this passage need unpacking. For once, the narrator’s comparison of the “fearful strength of the past”, comparable to the hold of a (violent) literary tradition that has excluded otherness, to the “infant freedom” echoes the idea of paternity on the level of language and writing, evident of a struggle with the Law of the Father, the inhibiting and perseverant function of the père-sévère

215 Curiously, N.’s reference to his “hanging extremity, my illusion of freedom” conjures up comparisons to The Emigrants, where the narrator equates privacy and autonomy with the privacy of his penis (TE 8). These recurring images seem to demonstrate an awareness of authorship as male prerogative and, as in both cases this is unmasked as an illusion, an attempt to revoke the same.
(Lacan, “Lettre” 318). It illustrates the desire for a means of creation outside of or before the law. As the progression in his view shows, however, the subject’s interpellation into the Law and castration is inevitable, as N., too, “grew brutally fitful and restrictive”, which happens at the expense of holding the feminine principle at bay – of killing the mother. Citing both the sexual and death drive, Eros and Thanatos, the drowning and the rescue of the mother coincide with a thinly veiled fantasy of sexual intercourse with her, visible in him belonging to “both sides of the blanket” and finding himself “pushing her into the streaming bedclothes” (ES 61). The fantasy of bedding the mother, repeated later again in N.’s wish to “cut him [the stepfather] from us altogether and to divest her of the burden of such an unreal and yet cruel dragging presence” (ES 62), more explicitly spells out N.’s desire to assume his (step)fathers position and the awareness that the father exists as function only.

The dream of substituting his stepfather is, as such, more indicative of the agonistic inevitability of (masculine) poetic influence that structures literary tradition and leaves the Oedipal trajectory rather intact. As the stroke in the quotation above – ‘abolishing the necessity for him at one stroke’ – can also be read as a stroke of the pen, the text suggests an attempt to replace one’s ancestor(s), to ‘over-write’ them and to assume writerly authority through eliminating the predecessor, but also, in this passage, the female.216 N. is, moreover, rendered speechless after the imagination of the incestuous union (ES 61), which is only remedied after the unity with the mother is declared “unendurable” (ES 61), implying the reinstation of the paternal function, whereupon N. emerges with a more stable sense of subjecthood, being “able to voice an individual borderline existence […] of having glimpsed […] implications of the breakdown of nightmare rule” (ES 62). Both his stepfather and his mother are here subject to drowning, the similarity in semantics rendering the narrator’s struggle metaphorically the author’s agon between male and female principles of writing. But as an instance of forbidden desire and a renouncing of the symbolic castration, overstepping “the boundary […] of the father and his incest taboo” beyond which “man’s desire never goes” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 106) suggests a temporary suspension of the concept of ‘man’ and disturbance of the symbolic order.

This, then, also has ramifications for notions of canon formation that are based on the genealogical principle of literary inheritance, as the paternal images the text engages almost satirically undermine the myth of potent authorship that rests on structures of filiation, more so as father/son figures are further continuously associated with stasis. Yet this staging of hindered desire and a renouncing of the symbolic castration, overstepping “the boundary […] of the father and his incest taboo” beyond which “man’s desire never goes” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 106) suggests a temporary suspension of the concept of ‘man’ and disturbance of the symbolic order.

216 Evans states further that “what distinguishes the symbolic order of culture from the imaginary order of nature is the inscription of a line of male descent” (62). In this light, the evocation of father figures, and of a patrilineal literary tradition, is also an attempt to hold the (female) realm of nature at bay.
father figures should be read as a narcissistic strategy, i.e. as demarcating the desired form of writing, and the mytheme of literary paternity is cited to gain literary authority from a consciously assumed authorial opposition. The fact that the father’s inhibiting function is also continuously associated with L—, who is likewise described as phallic barrier, associates the denigrated form of artistry with L—’s realist principle of creation and L— as ‘skilled’, instead of ‘inspired’ artist. N., thus, establishes himself as ‘fatherless hero’, a prerequisite for his artistic self-generation. The textual threat to the ‘superstructure’, metaphorically enacted by N.’s disobedience to the Law of the Father, constitutes an attempt to dismantle the Oedipal structure and to reverse – sexual, racial, and other – differentiation. In N.’s incessant focus on how to render the past, this reads as a probing of how to circumvent forging Caribbean history into a grand narrative, which would entail the maintaining of a “rationalist […] subject-object division” (Jackson, “Recalcitrant” 58) and reinscribe raced, sexed, and gendered essentialisms. In this fashion, Harris’s text also aims to posit a counter-vision to demands from critics like C.L.R. James, who envision the Caribbean artist as forever ‘embattled’ in an Oedipal struggle with their European predecessors and hence as continuing a patrilineal tradition.

7.2.3 Tiresian Visions: Fantasies of Self-Begetting and Becoming M(O)ther

Harris’s portrayal of the author figure as ‘fatherless hero’ prepares the ground for apotheosising the artist as self-generating hero. While Scarecrow programmatically undermines the authority of the – male – author and interrupts fantasies of patrilineality, this does not amount to an ultimate yielding of authority to the text or the reader but, as the focus on structures of begetting will illustrate, to replace the Western, androcentric author with a ‘new’ myth of a universal (postcolonial) author-hero who bridges the difference between male and female. Harris’s opposition to notions of ‘filiation’ and the author and/as ‘father’, via which a conscious position of artistic outsiderdom in the literary sphere is fashioned, constitutes a prerequisite for the text’s mythical restructuration via the feminine, figured in form of femininely coded tropes of ‘womb’ and ‘gestation’ and the attempt to refigure the artist’s as ‘trans’ – that is, trans-sexual and trans-visionary, particularly through a textual dialectic between the Oedipal myth and that of Tiresias, or rather the traversal of Oedipal fantasies through mythemes associated with this figure.217 Tiresias, the blind Theban prophet who appears e.g. in Homer’s Odyssey and who changed ‘skin’, i.e. sex, every seven years, can here be considered an intertextual allusion to T.S. Eliot’s

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217 Several of Harris’s later novels in fact employ this figure more openly, e.g. The Four Banks of the River of Space (1990), The Resurrection on Sorrow Hill (1993), or The Ghost of Memory (2006). Cf. in this regard the most recent discussion of some of Harris’s other novels by Scherer, who has pointed out the spectral occurrence of Tiresias in The Ghost of Memory (257–261).
The Waste Land, which features the Greek prophet as an artist. Harris draws on this myth for fashioning the artist, in the poèta vates tradition, as ‘oracle’ and comprising a unifying vision:

T.S. Eliot presented Tiresias, the Greek prophet, as an image of the artist with all the males melting into one character and all the females into another, and Tiresias combining the two sexes and ‘uniting all the rest’ (Eliot’s note to 1.218). As such, Tiresias is the image of the artist with encyclopedic knowledge, a secular Logos figure of a type who has oracular, prophetic knowledge of all life […]. Tiresias, […] (Eliot suggests) knows from experience. […] This is a Tiresias in the mode of romance, the image of the artist who not only knows but also understands what he knows, who has the human equivalent of oracular knowledge. (Suboczewski 116)

According to Ed Madden, “[t]here is something very queer about Tiresias” – not just in his status as “mythic transsexual”, but also in the “crossing of epistemological and ontological boundaries” (12). The Tiresian mythography is tied in with “the sexualization of acts of signification and the signification of sex as itself a signifying system” (16) and offers a “fantasy of performative power that simultaneously depends upon and denies sexual meaning” in order “to attain larger or more universalizing powers of vision” (14–15).

Harris’s work, which incessantly dwells on gendered myths of creation and figures the eponymous Scarecrow as bi-gendered ‘IT’, draws one naturally to this figure, as Tiresias is, after all, ‘beyond’ the gender binary, and it is precisely the symbolism of “know[ing] about men’s and women’s pleasure” and thus being able “see into the future” (Garber 165), i.e. the transcension of differences for envisioning the ‘unborn folk’ that authorship in the text is invested with. Further, this myth envisions ‘blindness’ as inspiring, and this will become relevant in the analysis of Harris’s staging of the encounter with the Muse. From a Caribbean point of view, Eliot’s figuring of Tiresias as, as quoted above, ‘uniting all the rest’ can conceptually also be extended to the negotiation of transcending cultural and racial binaries. Here, again, the text apotheosises the artist by envisioning him able to unify the literary field’s different demands and desires, such as conceiving the ‘unborn folk’ while circumventing conventional modes of representation and essentialisms. While tracing the Tiresias motif in Harris’s novel in detail is not my aim here, after all, Scarecrow does, in contradistinction to some of Harris’s other work not feature this figure outspokenly but more subtly employs its mythemes, I contend that considering it as structural pattern, analogous to the citing of the Oedipus myth I have discussed before, it illuminates how Harris fashions the author as diviner and mediator who “transcends a whole series of apparently irreducible fundamental oppositions” (Brisson 124) to emerge with encyclopaedic knowledge. It constitutes an artistic fantasy that is employed as underlying theme and narrative structure and as a strategy for artistic self-mythologisation through figuring the poet as commanding “a feminine sensibility within

218 Harris’s engagement with Eliot has been noted in Moss’s “William Blake” and Sharrad’s “The Art of Memory”. 219Interestingly, Lacan, too, engages this figure in Seminar X, Anxiety, in fact he even calls Tiresias “the patron saint of the psychoanalysts”, to elaborate on the superior jouissance of women (183–184).
the body of a male prophet” (Madden 17), as able to ‘father’ and ‘mother’ a text, and, in an ultimate fantasy of traversing tradition and self-fashioning as genius, ‘birthing’ himself.

Isotopies of birth and pregnancy speak to the author’s desire for a radical auto-conception and self-begetting and amount to an artistic fantasy of appropriating the female, i.e. maternal power. Harris here re-stages the Kantian tradition of the genius who sets his own rules (Feulner 13), but does so in installing the author as (m)other by probing the gendered and non-human other in an attempt to synthesise Caribbean and British traditions and knowledges. As such, the journey into the Guyanese interior, equivalent to N.’s artistic progress, itself is described as an “expedition to the lost womb of a mining town, nine months’ journey from Water Street into the jungle of conception” (ES 63), equating the ‘native land’ with the female ‘other’. While Durix, for instance, has pointed out the ‘womb’ as a metaphor for creation as well (99), scholars have not paid attention to the obvious gender implications here. With the proliferation of tropes of pregnancy, gestation, and abortion, the text cites a “conventional trope of writing as pregnancy or childbirth – that conceit of conception which assigns to male authors the maternal power of generation in the (re)production of textual progeny” (Aiken 5), which entails the danger of “re recuperate[ing] a potentially destabilizing energy into a phallocentric order through a symbolic usurpation of woman’s generative power” (4). Yet in heavily foregrounding maternity, it also attests to the author’s search for a means of representation beyond the Law of the Father, for ameliorating the subject’s primordial loss and a retrieval of that pre-linguistic unit which is associated with the mother – in Barthes’s terms, the artist does not look for language, but the “mother tongue”, which is associated with the body’s – i.e. the text’s – “disfiguration” (Pleasure 37; original emphasis), which is here a striving to infuse Western, androcentric writing with the Amerindian feminine.

The emphasis on ‘becoming-(m)other’, which is evoked to characterise the “birth of poetry” (ES 106), is most manifest in Book Three and particularly Idiot’s manifesto. Here, both the trope of genesis and the writer’s gender identity are continuously blurred through a metonymical sliding between signifiers – moving incessantly between “penetration”, “pushed”, “midwife”, “contraction”, “womb”, “misconception”, “abortive”, “pregnant distance”. The Scarecrow is here imagined as both male and female: “He sat in his cell-like parent sculpture, pregnant witness; the feminine clay of his hands moved the pawns on a draughtsboard” (ES 220). According to the myth, Tiresias, while living as a woman, also gave birth to his child Manto.


It is suggested that Idiot Nameless is also the Scarecrow, as the narrator most closely associated with Idiot claims that he has “invested” himself with it (ES 100). In the manifesto, Idiot also proclaims a ‘new writing’ that goes beyond “an imitation of a preservative fluid” and returns the “abortive classical grain” to “the womb of subjection, subjective error and will” (ES 106).
100). Likewise, preceding the emergence of Idiot Nameless’s manifesto, the narrator dreads “the sheer limitless contraction he was experiencing” and which “he had summoned all unreflecting upon himself” (ES 103). Notions of prematurity and interruption continuously filter through these metaphors, which also counter the idea of a linear artistic journey. But the predominant emphasis on metaphors of genesis and pregnancy in their ‘unfulfilled’ state do not (only), as the text wants to suggest, posit the author as consciously surrendering control to the text and thus to the reader. Rather, they speak to a profound anxiety of authorship under the condition of diaspora. The manifesto, after all, refers to the “Unborn State of Exile” (ES 105) and is written in London. The anxiety of prematurity here also reflects the Caribbean writer’s situation in the British literary sphere. While the text is otherwise rather obscure regarding notions of race, ethnicity, and the role of the author vis-à-vis ‘his’ community, the manifesto features a self-reflexive moment where the writer ponders these questions more openly. Idiot here “pored over the ‘black’ portrait” (ES 111) which also forms the end of the manifesto: “nothing remained but to grope in the uncanny realm of forgotten portrait” (ES 113). Suggesting a metafictional perspective, the scene has the writer pondering how to represent the Caribbean history and diaspora and demonstrates an awareness of an increasing pressure within the literary field and the writer’s functionalisation for positing a counter-discourse to colonial misrepresentations as well as for fashioning positive ‘black’ images and stories. The emphasis on the writer-as-child or in the womb (ES 100) and the text as needing to return to the womb (ES 106) in this context also speaks to a wish for retreating into an imaginary symbiosis with the M(Other) as a place of imagined undifferentiation and the repression of cultural difference as influencing creation.

Harris’s enactment of ‘birth’ as continuous process here fulfils many of the criteria Kellman has used to describe ‘self-begetting’ narratives, which draw on the illusion of being simultaneously parent and child, author and text in a fantasy of “immortality, of timeless personal omnipotence” (8). Through merging the product and process of creation and the resulting circularity and self-reflexivity, the self-begetting novel culminates in “personal rebirth” (8), concomitant with the ‘birth’ of the author. Contrary to Lamming’s and Dabydeen’s novels, but similar to Naipaul’s and, arguably, to some extent Selvon’s texts, readers then witness both the process of writing and the actual book, as the diary entries foreground the immediacy of the process, and the chapters up to the “partial witness of the confession” (ES 95) amount to a final written product: “Dear L—, I am now in the position to send you this partial witness of the confession I have been promising so long to make – The Eye of the Scarecrow” (ES 95). This also suggests the culmination of development and emergence of the author. In distinction to Kellman’s understanding of the self that is born as a coherent, agential author, in
Harris’s case the ‘self’, while figured as agential, is more obscure and emerges from refractions of N., L—, Idiot, and Scarecrow and is, crucially, gender-ambiguous, which somewhat undermines the connection of male pregnancy to a schemata of patrilineage (Aiken 5). Adhering to the mytheme of Tiresian creation, conception and ‘birth’ are not fully rendered within heterosexual confines: the text has not been brought full circle by N., but by a ‘distorted’ form of N. – “Idiot Nameless” – a writer figure who arises after the crash in the jungle as ‘split’ persona. In the wake of the crash, the narrative ‘I’ gives way to ‘he’ (ES 92), and ‘he’ becomes split into ‘HE’ and ‘IT’, and the latter is associated with the eponymous Scarecrow. This ‘becoming-other’ of the narrator makes him a patchwork persona that is gender-ambiguous, looking forward and backward, and it is brought about by assuming the position of the (m)other. The book is even symbolically ‘birthed’ on the level of story time, attesting to Barthes’s conception of the writer as “someone who plays with his mother’s body” (Pleasure 37): the nine months between the novel’s beginning and the final Postscript of ‘Idiot Nameless’ – the actual writing spans the period from 25th/26th December 1963 to 25th September 1964 – have readers witness the ‘gestation period’ of the artistic process and product, the beginning of the novel at Christmas further foregrounds the importance of birth and, through its religious overtones, bestows an almost metaphysical sense upon the creation of literature.

Harris then foregrounds the ‘quest’ for the feminine principle and, as will become clear, the non-heteronormative to probe an ‘outside’ of dominant modes of representation by rehearsing the position of the gendered and sexual ‘other’. The dominating images of ‘rupture’, missing or displaced fathers are also aligned with a textual ‘excess’ that corresponds with the feminine principle, and its attempted appropriation speaks to the writer’s self-fashioning as ‘other’ in the literary field. Harris’s text is most obviously an ‘erotic’ text, both in the citing of sexual imagery and the narrative’s progressing in libidinous terms. As such, N.’s aforementioned vision of the figurine out of mud, the “‘dead’ figure” (ES 57), which is initially also rendered in Oedipal terms, highlights the sexual narrative’s functioning as a mediator for various other forms of desire and their metonymic displacement: “Blobs of breasts, the breasts of mother earth” trigger memories of N.’s “own flesh-and-blood mother” (ES 57), which in turn awakens the “first tinge of nutriment – desire and self-disgust” and draw his gaze from “misconceived parent” to a naked woman (ES 57). Echoing the artist’s separation from his parents and at the same time his sexual initiation, tropes of the Bildungs narrative, this simultaneously also foreshadows the text’s probing of the pre-symbolic. Where ‘mother earth’ and his mother are semantically aligned, both are also rendered as impenetrable: His mother’s face is only a shadow and the earth veils “herself” from his gaze (ES 57), whereby the male gaze on his female object that promises creation is problematised. While the novel here initially
cites a conventional discourse of the female muse as inspiring creation, the emphasis on the metonymic sliding between different objets petit a also renders the (excess) female element beyond the writer’s control.

This points towards an anxiety of authorship as ‘consuming’ the (raced or gendered) other through representation, a point which becomes most obvious in N. and L—’s encounter with Hebra, the text’s muse figure. In the novel, the arrival of Hebra, an Amerindian woman, described as ‘prostitute’ and closely associated with the land, particularly the enigmatic ‘Raven’s Head’, prefigures the actual ‘descendance’ of the muse on N. and is associated with her. Hebra is figured as excess personified, the “grossness of her breasts and the enormity of her buttocks” cause N. to shrink from her: “The thought of such unimaginable boundless freedom, such a paradox of extension born of the limitless subduction of everything within an essential activity, made my head spin” (ES 64–65). Hebra’s description here resonates with the ‘feminine principle’ of writing as producing effects and impressions of interminability, as a “surplus declaration[] of existence that cause[s] conflict” (Copjec, Read 231). The reference to the ‘enormous buttocks’, reminiscent of the pseudo-scientific measuring, sexualisation, and spectacularisation of the black (female) body, evokes a colonial practice of mapping the ‘other’ and imports notions of the corporeal grotesque that has been figured as both primitive and sexualised (Ahmed, “Racialized” 53). Crucially, it is precisely the breast and buttocks of the woman as secondary sex characteristics which are threatening to N. His focalising Hebra’s single body parts only and the resulting fragmentation of the female subject constitutes an attempt to counter a “fear of engulfment” (McClintock 27) and suggests a crisis in masculine subjectivity. But Hebra ultimately detracts from being measured, she cannot be ‘explained’ by N.: “However ugly, however grotesque, she remained a fact and therefore a mystery” (ES 65).

Hebra’s description echoes Lacan’s idea of the real – as “the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” (Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality 131); she thus enters – and distorts – N.’s narrative and fantasy of masculine domination. This ‘fear of engulfment’, reminding of Lacan’s findings on separation anxiety and the fear of being engulfed by the overbearing mother, carries connotations of the feminine as ‘devouring’.223

To comprehend this image in terms of authorship, a turn to Gilbert and Gubar is warranted, who state that the author who ‘fathers’ his text must enclose his literary creations on the page (12). The vision of being enclosed by the female, after all, N. awakes next to her and she “enveloped […] [him] with the rule of passion” (ES 66), then speaks both to a fear of, but also desire for relinquishing male literary power. Later, the (now heterodiegetic) narrator

223 As Evan states, the “view of the mother as an engulfing force which threatens to devour the child is also a constant theme in Lacan’s work (see Seminar IV, 195; S17, 118)” (120).
renders N.’s becoming subject to Hebra’s encirclement as productive for a new poetics: “She was his to rule, chop, barter. To do with – on occasions – as he liked. [...] It dawned on him [...] it was he who was becoming the subject of her encirclement. The shock of this robbed him immediately of all feeling of arbitrary possession” (ES 98). This realisation causes HE and IT, as parts of N., to “dislodge themselves from an old, undeviating chain of deadly circumstance” (98), that is, from an urge to eliminate otherness.

To visualise the threat to male security through female immeasurableness, the text resorts to the discourse of the sublime. As the thought of “limitless subduction” makes N.’s “head spin”, he clings “in desperation to the rail of the bridge though it was falling into the river’s snow and sun” and casts his glance on the artificial clearing made in the jungle (E 65). In a classical association of the feminine with the land and nature and that which gives relief, i.e. the markers of culture and cultivation, with the masculine, as the alterations to the land, such as the clearing and the bridge, are associated with N.’s stepfather and L—, the text premises masculinity on the mastery of sublime experience, which also reinstates the artist as genius-hero, as Paul Mattick states with recourse to Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the “higher power of the sublime”, the “heights of art – the territory of genius, one might say [...] are reserved for the male principle” (296).

This mythical connection continues with N.’s actual encounter with the muse:

I saw the muse of place descending hand over hand along the jointed rope [...]. Scarcely moving I now felt encircled by another’s rising flesh, a moving trunk, violent arms and legs, and I bowed the column of my neck at last, remaining blind nevertheless to the end, releasing myself – with the thought I had truly and deeply endured belonging to the other (as the other had truly and deeply endured belonging to me) – from the cable and rail to which both of us still clung like tendrils of flesh to a shaft of bone. (ES 65–66)

The obvious sexual connotations of this passage give an insight into the gendered and sexual hierarchies on which the sublime as a vehicle for male subjectivity rests. Masculine self-assertion, here, depends on the containment and reduction of excess in man’s “sublime vision” (Armstrong 214). The artist’s enduring of the encounter with the overwhelming muse, this passage suggests, depends on resorting to the semantic field of technology, and in the history of ideas, these are ‘masculine’ terms, such as the rising flesh, moving trunk, violent arms and legs, column of the neck, cable, rail, shaft, to hold the overwhelming potential of the feminine

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224 The text here draws on and refracts a classical trope of the masculine travelling discourse, i.e. the sexualisation of landscape and the feminisation of land as “a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy” (McClintock 24).

225 In an article on issues of gender and race in Burke’s and Kant’s theories of the sublime (1996), Meg Armstrong pointedly maps out the function this aesthetic discourse serves, which is also applicable to this scene in Harris’s novel: The sublime “is not simply a moment of terror and privation on the way to a recovery of self-possession and mastery (or recognition of oneself within a transcendent symbolic order); rather, the sublime exceeds this drama of identification and marks the sheer ecstasy of the image of foreign bodies. Making the sublime less terrifying or obscure is the business of aesthetic discourse; in Burke's Enquiry, the aesthetic works to contain passions, direct desire, and steady what is already an unsteady and passionate eye for excess” (214).
at bay. The bridge hence serves as a mediating image – in Lacanian terms, as fantasy for masking the ‘real’ the muse represents. Considering that Hebra/the muse is a native woman here, this is telling: whereas, as Maes-Jelinek states, the muse in Harris’s work is usually figured as mother and of mixed racial descent, which is “obviously meant as a link between the modern and the primitive imagination” (*Labyrinth* 25), Hebra is neither of those, but figures as a more radical, unassimilable ‘other’ and stands for that which the symbolic of not just a European literary tradition, but also of Caribbean history has repressed. Harris figures the writer as seeking creative ‘infusion’ and a different aesthetics through this historically disavowed raced and gendered ‘other’.226

This desire for becoming-other also takes place in terms of sexuality. The above-mentioned bridge, while evoked to grant masculine security, is already undermined in this function. For once, it is itself ambivalently gendered, both phallic and also feminised, a Tiresian object itself. It is described as “both a trapdoor and a poem” (*ES* 64), eliciting associations with the vulva, and this extends to literature, evident in its comparison to a poem. Further, the bridge is ambivalently connected to the male figures which are closest to the narrator: while the bridge was built by N.’s stepfather, the figure most closely associated with engineering is of course L—, which links him semantically with the bridge. This is further emphasised by the following description of L— as “craning his neck backwards” (*ES* 65; emphasis added). Conferring again the language in the extended quotation above, the obvious sexual innuendos – relieved, endured, belonging, shaft, together with the tumescence and detumescence of sexual intercourse – then are also readable as a displaced homosexual desire of N. for L—. The fact that the ‘other’ here remains unnamed – is it the muse? the stepfather? L—?227 – also hints at the ineffability of this desire. Gilbert and Gubar have pointed towards the feminisation of men – in which discourses of homosexuality traditionally also play a role – as an indicator of loss or abuse of literary power (11). This ‘loss’, however, is figured as a prerequisite for a new myth of creation in Harris’s novel, demonstrated in N.’s releasing himself after having truly belonged to the other and vice versa.

Concomitantly, N. is then rendered as completely ‘feminised’: his denial to gaze when standing on the bridge – “I had closed my eyes but I saw the muse of place descending” (*ES* 65) – demonstrates how the novel oscillates between upholding the power of the gaze, and thus the formation of the ‘mythical’ male subject, only to relinquish it. Through the close connection

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226 Maes-Jelinek has briefly mentioned the muse theme in Harris’s novels *Heartland* (1964) and *Tumatumari* (1968) (*Labyrinth* 25). Hebra as muse, albeit killed as a character, ‘survives’ on a structural level by being one dominant association of the enigmatic IT.

227 Mitchell for instance states that the bridge is through its imagery associated with Hebra herself (“Introduction” 22), yet this does not exclude other associations.
of pleasure and pain (exemplified with N.’s ‘enduring’) and the almost-suspension of the symbolic order (“clung like tendrils of flesh to a shaft of bone”) as a requirement for a more profound vision and the seeking of a jouissant principle, which is “at the level at which pain begins to appear” (Braunstein 103). N. again fashions himself as Tiresian figure, whose ‘punishment’ precedes his becoming a seer (Madden 37). The power of N.’s gaze diminishes, as the “daemon”, through associations with the “void”, “baselessness of sensation”, and insubstantiality (ES 65) again connoted femininely, cannot be captured by it, it withdraws from objectification and from providing N. with a secure subject status: “[I]t was folly to open my eyes and look. […] I was bound to founder or wilt, of my own accord, in the self-deceptive voyage of exploratory nature. Either way would be an absurd defeat for the true knowledge I dreamt I embraced and possessed” (ES 66). The refusal to look prohibits the attainment of the objet petit a, i.e. ‘true knowledge’ embodied in the ‘daemon’ as ‘other’, and the latter’s submission to the known.228 As this is rendered through N.’s narration, ‘blindness’, again associated with the myth of Tiresias, as a trope here is narcissistically employed precisely as a means to refuse this process of inscription and to effect a self-othering as condition for a prophetic vision.

In linking the inspirational muse with L—, the artist-muse relationship is for once ‘queered’, which entails shedding authorial power that rests on epistemologies and ideologies of successful procreation, succession, and paternity. Moreover, the desire for creation and the emergence of knowledge are also located at the site of the muse: N.’s desire to create ultimately stems from Hebra’s desire, with her being “prepared to nurse into existence by fair means or foul […] the restoration of her spiritual bridge and sacred mining town” (ES 67), which resounds in N. writing the very novel at hand. N.’s resulting “horror of corruption and longing for vocation” (ES 67) is insightful when considering Hebra as the stand-in for both the land and the native ‘other’ again. As Hebra is equated with the ‘mystery’ of the land, in possession of an inscrutable, “instinctual” knowledge (ES 67),229 the author’s anxiety and ultimate refusal to gaze also speaks to a profound unease of making Guyana’s pre-colonial, indigenous history visible – i.e. legible and consumable – and to submit it to the British public sphere and the forces of the literary market. This refused authorial subject position is again associated with L— as Wordsworthian ‘man of science’, who is derided for “penetrat[ing] through everything” in a “total acceptance of his responsible and her unalterable necessity” (ES 65) but lacking an imaginary capacity. Where the imperial landscape-as-feminine-trope speaks to a society’s

228 A similar scene occurs shortly after in N.’s refusal to look at Hebra (ES 66).
229 To N. and L—, Hebra is in fact ‘inscrutable’: “she gesticulated and pointed in all directions, needling us but apparently failing to sting us in the way she wished” (ES 68).
vulnerability in face of the contact with the unknown, its unsettling, albeit never full subversion, here not only criticises a European imperial discourse, but indicates an already transpired boundary loss as regards gender difference. Regarding the contemporaneous literary sphere, Harris’s novel thereby also denounces the realist techniques of Harris’s contemporaries’ and the “robustly masculine heterosexuality” (Kalliney, Commonwealth 116) that dominates the literary field in the post-war decades and fashions a position of opposition to these.

These analyses of Harris’s Tiresian fantasies of an all-encompassing vision, of appropriating the vision of father and mother, of artist and muse, already hint at one of Harris’s most prevalent textual strategies to recreate an artistic myth: the conscious staging of a ‘becoming-other’ which, resonating with Deleuze and Guattari’s minor discourse, is here preceded by a becoming-woman as “key to all the other becomings” (277) and encompasses various other stages, and it constitutes an attempt to forego “evolution by descent and filiation” (238), i.e. to expose principles of filiation as imaginary, which serves to probe authority from a position of marginality. Harris’s protagonist N. then not only envisions his ‘merging’ with the feminine – in form of the muse, but also of the text as a merging of masculine and feminine principles of creation – but the text also enacts N. becoming the woman. In Book Three, the now heterodiegetic – narrator muses on the entry into the four-gated city Raven’s Head, and the only entry described in more detail here is Hebra’s gate (ES 79). With regard to the symbolism of Raven’s Head as embodiment of the ‘mystery’ of art itself (Maes-Jelinek, Labyrinth 155) and as elusive origin, ‘penetrating’ this mystery is suggested as necessitating the author ‘becoming-woman’, that is, assuming the position of an ‘other’ without incorporating this difference into a coherent version of ‘self’. This interpretation stands in contrast to Michael Mitchell’s reading, who reads the four entries to Raven’s Head as an “archetypal representation of the alchemical lapis, the completed Self where the opposites are reconciled” (“Introduction” 22). Nevertheless, I agree with his assessment that Raven’s Head, as a metonymy for Hebra, “depends on the presence of death” (25), which makes Hebra a manifestation of the death drive and emphasises her function to annihilate the coherent, male subject.

‘Becoming other’ in the novel passes through a variety of stages and subject positions, through different masks, a key term in Harris’s fiction (Sharad 123), and here it is also becoming-woman that lies at the heart of these transformations and of traversing paternal lineages of creation. The metamorphoses, a becoming ‘trans’ as cited with the myth of Tiresias then not only extends to transcending gender binaries, as going beyond androcentrism, but

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230 Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming-other is not to be understood in quantitative terms, but as a questioning of power relations and “a state of domination” (291). ‘Becoming’ is fundamentally anti-filiation (238). ‘Becoming-woman’, which is not referring to woman in a biological or cultural sense, here lies at the heart of becoming-other, as ‘woman’ is the ‘other’ against which the ‘man-standard’ has always been established (291).
species binaries as well, in an anti-anthropocentric stance, i.e. crossing the boundaries between human, animal, and the immaterial. The unnamed character the narrator refers to in Book Three becomes – while still a part of “HE” (ES 98), also visible in the used pronoun ‘he’ – now also “IT” (ES 98), the timeless and, at least partly, genderless Scarecrow. This renders ‘HE’ as masculine pronoun a signifier without fixed meaning. Further, IT itself is associated with Hebra. Interestingly, in literature on Harris’s text, “IT” is mostly interpreted as a negative presence, as void, “represented by a hole in the ground”, a “radical form of absence” (Durix 95). Yet I argue that the textual references as well as these interpretations render it – “IT” – close to the real, as neither a definite subject position nor something representable by a sign, and therefore not fully present in the symbolic. In this vein, notions of forgetting, collapse, and crumbling are performed as integral to becoming other, which passes through becoming-woman, and are opposite to succumbing to a phallic desire to again “erect one’s sovereign of wish-fulfilment” (ES 110). This differs strongly from, for instance, Durix’s claim that for Harris creation requires “a regressive trip up the river of memory” (98). Rather, Harris stages the Blochian notion of the artist as affecting “the involved reader […] [through] suffering and failure” (“Artist” 265), and ‘failure’, for Harris, constitutes another means via which authorial inscription into a patrilineal literary tradition is circumvented and a position of, to recontextualise Huggan’s term, “staged marginality” (Exotic xii) strategically fashioned.

Here, the crash occurring in Book Three must be read as programmatic. This crash prohibits N. and L—’s – who now occur only as displaced presences in the here heterodiegetic narrator and the driver – ‘penetration’ of Raven’s Head, which functions as a metaphor for reaching knowledge and recovering an origin. The smashing of the vehicle that should transport them to the lost town is caused by a tigercat and a cow, both described as female creatures that disturb male certainty and progress (ES 80–81), the vehicle ultimately collides with a “numinous boulder[]”, a “half-feminine, half-bovine obstruction” (ES 81), and the narrator wishes to see – “or feel – with ‘dead’ whiskers, cat” (ES 89). The jungle now becomes a place of masks and animal-human hybrids, inhibiting the driver to move forward and causing the split of his presence as preceding the emergence of the Scarecrow:

He felt a sharp agonized division – a sensation of being drawn convulsively up as well as pulled instantly down into the bodily (or bodiless) mystery of mysteries he dreaded […]. He and the other – unlike and like – stood almost face to face, yet […] masked at the same time, horse or tiger animate cow or brute stone, sovereign or primitive device. (ES 82–83)

231 As N. narrates during the course of their expedition: “I saw the veiled silent reproof and mocking question on Hebra’s black mask of a face which rose between L— and me […] . All at once I dreamed that it – the accumulative ironies of the past, the virtuous rubbish-heap and self-parody of ancestors in death – still sought to warn me” (ES 69–70). This is a connection that Maes-Jelinek also points out (Labyrinth 147).
Crucially, this encounter of the ‘other’ also causes a failure to write and “to surrender his currency and ink of offspring, bloody password into the dark room of noble and ignoble execution” (ES 84). Neither N. nor L—, the text suggests here by equating the unspecified driver with the dreamer N. and the engineer L— (ES 85), are able to penetrate “the barrier which had stopped him”, which “was thin as paper, a logical stamp like a breath of air, suspended portrait, thumbprint, ghostly reflex”, possessing a “power born of extension out of the catastrophic past” (ES 85). What stops the engineer here is no physical barrier, but rather, as the references to ‘thin as paper’ and ‘suspended portrait’ hint at, literature and the canon itself, which conjures up an image of the literary tradition as haunting and inhibiting. The ‘catastrophic past’ refers at once to the actual event of colonisation, but also represents the hold it still has over literature after decolonisation – after all, novels of the Windrush writers are still mostly reduced to their engagement of ‘postcolonial’ issues.

In a remythification of the Caribbean artist as genius in the tradition of the poeta vates, the narrator conjures up a fantasy of a utopian not-yet as contingent on the infusion of the work with the natural, the organic: “the necessity had now been born [...] to feed himself and clothe himself upon eyes of mineral substitution, the artist’s mask, the animal or plant or camouflage and vision” (ES 86). Harris’s text here fashions a new artist myth consisting of a perpetual process of metamorphosis; in fact, this passage reminds strongly of Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of becoming as an anti-Oedipal structure: “becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible”, all of which start with becoming-woman (277). Ultimately, the manifesto not only envisions “a living distinctive otherness” grounded on irreconcilable paradoxes such as “response or lack of response” (ES 110), but suggest that it is the ‘other’ who has written it: A new portrait, Idiot suggests, involves killing L— and reimagining Idiot – N. – as ‘other’, more specifically, as female other: “Do I dream now [...] that you died there on the scaffold [...] whilst I lived and fell and gasped, hand over hand of rope, until my feet touched the floor?” (ES 112). Idiot now more explicitly assumes the position of the muse, the female, Amerindian ‘other’, by echoing the description of her descendence onto the bridge in Book Two. With Idiot being both a remnant of N. and Hebra, his text, The Eye of the Scarecrow, is birthed by a gender- and sex-ambiguous instance, a Tiresias, emerging out of othered presences, and L— as signifier of a more ‘masculine’ discourse of creation ultimately remains only passive addressee, whereas the Scarecrow/Idiot Nameless is suggested to continue probing further “forgotten” portraits (ES 113). As such, Harris’s artist novel mode

232 Cf. Hoffmann and Langer (145) for an explication of the hypostasis of nature as leading category in the genius discourse.
is best summarised as a ‘feminisation’ or ‘trans-ing’ of the *Künstlerroman*’s generic patterns without, however, destabilising the grounds on which they rest.

### 7.2.4 Guiding the ‘other I/Eye’: The Reader as Disciple

Entertaining the possibility of becoming-animal, as also closely related to becoming-woman in terms of its anti-phallogocentric status, not only confuses boundaries between the characters’ identities, but also those between character, narrator, author, reader, and text. Thus, after N. has been split, he seems to occupy two levels of diegesis, as he is musing from “within and without” on himself and the characters through the “conjunctive witness of another eye” (*ES* 83). In a homophonic allusion, the eye here metafictionally suggests another ‘I’, which might be read as the author – or the reader – ‘looking upon’ and paralysing his characters, rendering them “unnaturally poised” (*ES* 83), in representation. The text demonstrates an awareness of its readership, and while it goes to great length to subvert (phal)logocentric writing and envision the writer as ‘other’ and “non-man” (Lauretis, *Alice* 121), its potential for readerly ‘becoming-other’ and the foregrounded reading positionalities in this regard merit closer analysis as well.

As I have indicated above, early reviews were less than enthusiastic about Harris’s enigmatic style and bemoaned its lack of political impact, whereas younger criticism celebrates his opaque style. In this vein, Gregory Shaw, for instance, claims that readers “approach his work with a measure of awe and trepidation, conscious that the conventional signposts of literary interpretation are quite inadequate as a means of guiding one through the complexities of his prose” (“Art” 121). Brigitta Olubas’s description of Harris’s theory of writing/reading recalls Barthes’s writerly text. She claims that Harris “undermine[s] his own final authority as an individual consciousness” (194) to “open up multiple possibilities determined by readings”, and his work’s “producing differences in time allows for the kinds of transformations – political, cultural, imaginative – that Harris sees as important” (194). While Harris’s text would, at a first glance, correspond to Attridge’s claim that it is in fact the experimental text that makes the strongest ethical demand (11), I contend that, in line with my overall argument, Harris’s preoccupation with circumventing logocentrism leads precisely to the reinstation of the myths the text outwardly wants to deconstruct, i.e. that of a hierophantic artist from whom writing flows down “from a higher world of order” which is “fully accessible only to the genius writer and […] could be only partially revealed even to the devout reader” (Perelman 14) by positing the artist as (only) point of reference in an otherwise highly layered and convoluted narrative. As such, Harris’s text interpellates the reader as the *poeta vates*’ disciple, as in need of the author figure as a mediator and translator of the emerging postcolonial nation. To illustrate this,
this chapter will look at three examples that to my view most pronouncedly foreground the reading process Harris envisions.

The first of these pertains to the novel’s rhetorical strategies, particularly the continuous employment of repetitions and the positing of opposites, on which I have already touched above and which could potentially serve as a disinterpellating strategy. Repetitions in the novel function to cast the reader’s glance back to earlier episodes and to cause a reflection on these in different contexts, whereby a reification of meaning is pre-empted. To evaluate the text’s effectiveness of suspending readers’ subjection through repetition, Judith Butler’s elaboration on this strategy as regards gendered identity in her introduction to *Bodies that Matter* (1993) is insightful. In her criticism of Foucault’s misreading of the Lacanian Law and of repetition as a process bringing back that which is self-identical and producing homogenous subjects, she finds that repetition is not subjectivating in Lacan in the way that Foucault implies. In fact, repetition is not only the mark that subjectivation has in some sense failed to occur, but that it is itself a further instance of that failing. That which repeats in the subject is that which is radically excluded from the formation of the subject, that which threatens the boundary and the coherence of the subject itself.

[...] In Lacan, repetition is precisely that which undermines the fantasy of mastery associated with the ego, a ‘resistance of the subject.’ (248–249; FN 19; original emphasis)

Processes of repetition, thematically or structurally, then indicate moments of a potential refusal of the Oedipal trajectory, where subjectivities are not fully inscribed into the symbolic order. In order to be subversive, however, repetition must contain variation (Butler, *Gender* 145), that is, deviate from mere reiteration, as, for instance, Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry and the only ‘partial’ representation of the ‘other’ as inherently menacing illustrates (123). In Harris’s text, repetition is both: differential, but also yielding the self-same, and that is the author as centre of meaning – in other words, as a Thanatic structure it is here inevitably geared towards the text’s ‘death’: the author. While one would assume that Harris’s novel shows features of a writerly text, as his text is certainly demanding in having readers work through the recurrency of images and metaphors in different contexts, it foregrounds the author as metaphorical thread that connects these. Harris’s literary technique here consists of repeating similar images in different contexts by way of metonymic displacement, where one memory triggers another and readers’ desire is sustained through the identification of images through associations.

The text here features numerous examples, a prominent one is that of the recurring image of a funeral procession and two hearse riders. Relating a childhood memory, N. evokes a dream of a “dying procession” of the sugar cane strikers (*ES* 38), a symbol for the continuity of Western exploitation of Guyana in form of the region’s economic modernisation and increase of production. This entailed a “ratcheting up of the exploitation of human and extra-human natures” and was spurred on by the colonial powers in order to keep their hold over the region
In a continuous deferral of images, N.’s dream is then associated with the image of a funeral procession, which came to his mind when seeing the dying Governor of the Colony riding past his grandfather’s house as a child (ES 45), itself presenting an apocalyptic picture of two riders with “faceless expression” (ES 45) and, as Maes-Jelinek puts it most aptly, a “symbol of the moribund British empire” (Labyrinth 142). In turn, this image is associated both with the “poor man’s hearse” (ES 36), which N. remembers from his childhood as carrying the dead “nameless paupers of charity” (ES 37), and with a painting of dying soldiers in the battle of Waterloo (ES 45). For all of these, N. grieves equally and sees them united in a misguided, yet universal pursuit of freedom and consumed by “the rage for an ideal” (ES 38). Thereby, the text weaves in similarities between the coloniser and the colonised, rich and poor and frustrates an easy readerly identification with the oppressed and a ‘rush of sentimentalism’ (Sommer 15).

Further, before N. narrates the dream, this equation of the image of the Guyanese strikers with that of the ‘moribund Empire’ has already been foreshadowed. Visualised “through the conscious mask of winter” in his London home, N. muses on the “nightmare account” of the police’s shooting of the strikers, and presents two stories of hearsay that each blame either the police or the strikers for the escalation (ES 35) through the ambivalent reference to a “questionable union” (ES 36) that could describe both parties. This image is then interrupted by a “clatter of horses’ hooves” and a “sick half-eaten body of leather” (ES 36), which on the level of story succeeds the actual image of the sick governor, as the latter is a memory, but on the level of narrative precedes it. Thereby, readers are cast back and forth between the time of narration and narrated time, temporal and spatial coordinates and certainties as to what came first are blurred and a patchwork of past and present, memory and present experience is created, which envisions the reading process as scarecrow-like in its frustration of any sense of a fixed origin. Thereby, reader’s ‘enjoyment’ of identifying a clear victor/victim divide and thus with the ‘right side’ is interrupted, a potentially ethical strategy.

Yet where this ‘ethics of otherness’ falls short is with regard to the text’s reinstallation of the author as junction of these repeating images, as the novel continuously guides the reader’s gaze towards this instance. This needs explication: while readers are lost in a narrative maze, in metonymic processes of ‘becoming-minor’ that render the text so opaque as to all but preempt understanding without being versed in literary criticism, what the text does emphasise is

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233 Even the paupers are associated with this ‘ideal’ and called “vagrants of the soul” by N. (ES 37).
234 This is also complicated in N. an L—’s journey to the Guyanese hinterland, where questions as to the (post)colonial subject’s complicity are raised as both are imbricated in the exploitation of the land. The blurring of the victor/victim divide is, in fact, a central theme in Harris’s work. On elaborations in this context in Harris’s novel Ascent to Omai, see also Gerlsbeck, “Autoren-Geister” (forthcoming).
that the author is the only instance that connects these images and lends meaning, and here the novel is highly metafictional: the artist is not just implicitly present as inferred instance, but inserted into all of the tableaus created. In this case, this is N.: “as the black solitary hearse grew nearer I was stricken by the devouring faces of the two men, […] totally oblivious to my frenzied countenance […] ; oblivious, too, of the horses’ reins as if these dangled from another’s – my own? – life-giving hands” (ES 37). The following shift to the funeral procession of the strikers, mentioned above and semantically also connected with the horse/hearse riders emphasises this. Here, too, it is the author imagined as ‘holding the reins’: “I had my finger upon a trigger – departed lives fired again to ricochet like bullets within the corridors of the mind” (ES 38). The writer N. repeatedly – “fired again” – implants the image of the departed in the reader’s mind, through the evocation of similar images like the horse, and lays bare the awareness of the control he exercises over his material.

The return to the image of the hearse/horse in Book Three, which starts with a carriage pulled by a horse and has substituted the dead ‘occupants’ of the hearse for the living “old man and young boy” (ES 77), guided by an unnamed driver who is, however, associated with N., also self-reflexively emphasises this focus on the author. As the horse is here described as “dream-ridden” and possessing a “sinister memory” (ES 77), it reminds of the dream and memory of the funeral processions encountered in Book One. Here, too, the text instals an image of a ‘divine’ author manipulating these images, reiterating N.’s fashioning of human figurines out of clay from Book Two: “The horse seemed […] to respond – out of a grateful and fearful desire – to the human, if not divine hand upon its neck and head” (ES 77), the ‘divine hand’ here metafictionally speaks to the multiplicity of meanings the author has invested the image and signifier ‘horse’ with, and the slip between ‘human’ and ‘divine’ reflects the text’s concept of the artist as prophet. I concur with Niblett’s statement that “Harris […] works ultimately to depict not people or objects but the web of relations which determine their existence” (“Abstract” 96), as Harris does, in like fashion, also not imagine a specific reader, yet he foregrounds the author as instance to whom readers turn for identifying these relations.

The second example of the text’s guiding of the reader rather than its effecting a loss of readerly selfhood is the enigmatic last section, “The Black Rooms”. This section constitutes an echo chamber, in which fragments of the preceding text resound, that is, the novel rehearses short vignettes of the novel and reframes the chapters as ‘rooms’. Book One, “The Visionary Company”, becomes “The room of the VISONARY COMPANY”, as does the second Book, “GENESIS” (ES 113–114). The text here draws on the frequent trope of the ‘house of literature’ in Caribbean writing, with the chapters now becoming literal rooms and the novel itself the house. Yet this spatial metaphor also indicates the confinement of readers in a preferred
interpretation of the text: while the text’s outspoken aim, particularly in the last part, is to effect a continuous ‘substitution’ of elements, as the imagery of metamorphosis and the final word in the section “The Black Rooms” – “…substitute…” – suggests (ES 115), the selection presented here is by no means random. In these fragments, passages from the preceding two chapters are repeated verbatim, and a close reading of these illuminate Harris’s staging of repetition with a seeming difference, which amounts, however, not to effecting readerly bliss, but to ‘trap’ readers in the text’s preferred artistic conception: the passages rehearsed here all emphasise the author’s central authority. The first echo, for instance, casts readers’ glance back to the beginning of N.’s diary which, as I have elaborated on above, introduces the author as creator-God, and emphasises his own liminality, his status ‘in-between’ fashioned as a prerequisite for bridging differences. Thus, N. writes “at sunset”, refers to the “half-tree, half-bird” lingering in the sky and the “barrier of absorption between day and night” and the ultimate drawing in of sky and earth “into singular consciousness of each other” (ES 113). The following vignettes then programmatically underline this initial poetics of crossing difference while they simultaneously denounce realism – sometimes outrightly so through the castigation of an “idolatrous realism” as the misguided “pagan scaffold” (ES 114; 41) or referring back to the “joylessness” of the figure L— had fashioned (ES 114; 56), and at other times through emphasising the ‘train of memory’ and the revaluing of associative, rather than mimetic representation. The final “Postscript of Faith”, again written as a letter by Idiot to L—, interpellates readers into the position of the addressed. Here, Idiot ends with a prayer – “Amen. Amen.” (ES 116) – and, as Maes-Jelinek states, seems to provide answers to “the nihilism and despair that had prevailed at the beginning of the quest” (Labyrinth 157). Instead of defamiliarising readers, the text creates a certain intimacy with the artist figure as only means to sustain meaning in an otherwise extremely obscure narrative and thereby also “overtake[s] otherness” (Sommer x), not least through readers’ interpellation into the narrator-artist’s bourgeois habitus.

This last point is most manifest in readers’ following N.’s scopophilic gaze on the impoverished working-class of Guyana. Here, N. ‘arrests’ the poor tenants of his grandfather’s property in a quasi-realist painting, with the figures framed by the door frames and a sombre, dark background: “I became aware of a living frieze of subjective figures occupying the frame of each doorway in which a group stood or sat with the hollow darkness of their room at their back” (ES 46). The narrator’s interpretation then yields a clichéd view on “the poor”: “A slump existed everywhere […] and the minimum portion of work which could be scraped together within the granite circumstance of the poor went to keep the link of harsh body and charitable soul together” (ES 46). Simultaneously demarcated from the narrator’s inferred middle-class
status and ennobled, the tenants also provide the artist with a “creative spark” (ES 48). Phillip Tew in his discussion of 1960s experimental literature finds that like his “avant-garde contemporaries, the fiction of Harris, […] synthesizes class-consciousness with a residual fundamentally anti-elitist and therefore anti-Arnoldian notion of the redemptive and radicalizing capacity of fiction for enhancing social and political consciousness” (“Experimental” 195). Yet the artist’s conscious turn to “[l]ow and rustic life” in a quite Wordsworthian stance (“Preface” 597), the aestheticising of ‘the poor’ and the novel’s overall enigmatic style, which resonates with an educated, middle-class audience, does in fact achieve quite the opposite and rather reinscribes those disenfranchised, which it seeks to envision in a utopian not-yet, as stereotyped and makes them consumable for a metropolitan audience.

Despite the outspoken emphasis on semantic interminability and its foregrounding of the text as text (Roof xxiv), Harris’s novel is then not ‘writerly’ in the sense that “no consequent language […] can be superimposed” upon it (Barthes, S/Z 4; original emphasis), and falls somewhat short of making the reader “a producer of the text” (3) by effecting a continuous transformation of readerly subject positions. As it rather (only) sustains the reader’s desire for the meaning-making instance of the author, the author figure is the final signification imposed upon it, the ultimate fantasy through which readers’ loss of selfhood is prevented. In other words, because readers are only confronted with the real, that is, a subversion of systems of knowledge due to the text’s obscurity, which is potentially ethical in refusing the inscription of the ‘other’ into dominant epistemes, the author figure constitutes the only ‘certainty’ that can halt the shifting of meaning. This fact is highly salient with regard to the heightened emphasis on the author figure in the framing and reception of Caribbean or postcolonial literature. Harris’s text thus does not trigger an ‘erotic’ reading, geared towards where ‘the garment gapes’, as through its private mythology and innumerable intertextual and -mythical references it not only remythologises the author between poëta vates and poëta doctus, but also somewhat reaffirms a ‘mythical subject’ in form of a bourgeois reader, in possession of a certain cultural capital to disentangle these.

This chapter considers Samuel Dickson Selvon’s ‘Moses trilogy’, comprising *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *Moses Migrating* (1983), as a (mock) portrait-of-the-artist story and traces the negotiation of artistic consciousness and functionalisation through different stages and contexts. Selvon, despite being certainly one of the most popular Caribbean writers, is presumably the most underestimated in comparison to his contemporaries, some of which are also discussed herein. Brown rightly states that the disregard of Selvon as a serious writer in the 1950s and 1960s has survived into more contemporary literary criticism, which likewise has often adopted a condescending stance *(Migrant* 103–104). Selvon here often finds himself polemically titled as “a second-tier figure in the West Indian literary pantheon, a lesser-light in the shadow of (among others) Walcott, Naipaul, and Lamming” (MacLeod 157) and, e.g. *vis-à-vis* George Lamming, still remains critically rather unattractive due to his refusal to ally himself with any political cause (Ingrams 35; Joseph 83). The here visible critical interpellation of the author into a paradigm of commitment might also explain the fact that it is mostly the London stories and his “trickster black characters” (Nasta, “Voyaging” 579) which awarded him critical acclaim, as they are seen as a reworking of colonial stereotypes and thus as fulfilling ‘corrective’ authorial work.

While these three novels have generally attracted much scholarly attention, especially *Londoners*, this is mostly reduced to Selvon’s ground-breaking portrayals of, as Mark Looker has it, a “black London whose existence had been ignored, distorted, or even erased by the cultural establishment as well as by society at large” (60), and his pioneering use of a creolised dialect as a narrative voice, awarding him the title of the “father of black British literature” (James, *Storyworld* 77). This last point is intriguing, as it is precisely this notion that the artist figure(s) in these novels work against.236 Recently, Selvon criticism has attempted to go beyond these narrow confines and urged for a rereading of his work beyond calypso as an “analytical

235 References to *The Lonely Londoners* pertain to the 2006 Penguin edition and are henceforth abbreviated as ‘LL’; references to *Moses Ascending* to the 1984 Heinemann edition and are abbreviated as ‘MA’; references to *Moses Migrating* to the 2009 Lynne Rienner edition and are abbreviated as ‘MM’. All emphases and capitalisation trace back to the author Selvon unless stated otherwise.

236 Earlier scholarship was mostly focused on linguistic and formal experimentation (see Baugh, “Friday”; Fabre, “Moses”; Warner-Lewis). Other fields of interest have included Selvon’s creolising strategies (Dickinson, “Harlequin”; Buzelin; Sindoni; Neumann), the employment of the Carnivalesque (Rampaul, “Voice”; “Black Crusoe”), the use of calypso (Fabre, “Queens”, “Moses”, “Samuel”; Birath), and the novels’ revision of the canon (Tiffin; Joseph; Chakraborty; Rampaul, “Black Crusoe”; Fallon). Fallon even states that Selvon, next to Walcott, “help[s] to define a Caribbean literary tradition of revision” (60). More recent foci are nationality and citizenship (Ho), the semantics of the house in *Moses Ascending* (Holden; Gerlsbeck, “Confinement”), the London space in *The Lonely Londoners* (Frank, “The Place”; Kelly), and, only most recently, issues of class (Ron).
shortcut” (McIntosh, “Introduction” xii). To these one could add the ever-present aspect of a ‘folk’ or ‘peasant’ aesthetic, a label that, as Kalliney states, “stuck for many years” while newer readings now see Selvon as most avantgarde and urbane writer (“West Indian” 747), as well as an incessant focus on a genuine ‘Caribbean’, ‘diasporic’, or otherwise ‘cultural identity’ in the London novels. Lewis MacLeod pinpoints the ambivalence of Selvon criticism and, crucially, takes issue with the critics and not the author: “Lacking the critical apparatus to deal with him effectively, critics have opted either to ignore him or to kidnap certain sections of his work and force them into ill-fitting analytical frameworks aligned with particular political projects” (157).

While I am here entirely in agreement, I would go even further than MacLeod, who locates the critical misreading of Selvon in his novels’ “idiosyncratic fictional worlds” (157) and argue that it is not just Selvon’s idiosyncrasy that renders him critically somewhat unpopular, or at least controversial, but the fact that his work troubles our own ontological and epistemological foundations by denying any textual norm, either in its affirmation or rejection, which would guide the reader’s perspective. As no coherent, graspable ‘postcolonial’ subjects emerge in his texts, clear points of reference as to who is ‘other’ and, by implication, who is ‘self’ and, concomitantly, the premise of a clear hierarchy of ‘victim/perpetrator’ are frustrated. Put simply, his novels refuse to portray convenient subjects, and specifically the later novels here stand counter to the tendency for positive portrayals of black experience as in Hall’s terms, “monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilized and always ‘right-on’” (“Ethnicities” 449), in and since the more politicised 1970s and deny catering to an audience that demands engagement from authors. My reading that focuses on the texts’ artistic self-inspection and the pre-empting of notions of autonomy and authenticity here attempts to offer a suitable critical framework that attests to the complexities of his work.

Even though I acknowledge that, of all the novels herein discussed, Selvon’s novels are among the least likely to be subsumed under the category of the Künstlerroman, I propose that they do indeed engage with generic mythemes and patterns and stage various discourses of authorship and their ideological co-option to demonstrate that there is no non-ideological point to occupy for the author, which results in continuous flights into and foreclosures of authorial mode(1)s. As such, Selvon’s novels can be said to correspond closest to Zima’s postmodern,

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237 Malachi McIntosh provides the most recent volume that is dedicated to the work of Selvon, Beyond Calypso (2016), whose title is programmatic for its attempts to reread Selvon’s oeuvre and to focus on the author’s hitherto rather neglected texts.

238 This notion goes back to George Lamming, who has lastingly influenced Selvon’s reception by labelling him ‘essentially peasant’ and thus directed criticism towards reading Selvon within a folk paradigm only. See in this respect also Kenneth Ramchand’s The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), which focuses exclusively on work from Caribbean authors with a (supposed) folk or peasant emphasis.
somewhat nihilist assessment that all ideological values have become “arbitrary, exchangeable, and indifferent” (12; my translation), yet they do not deplore this, but indulge in staging the emerging contradictions. Over the course of the three novels, readers witness the settling of Moses, a Trinidadian immigrant and Anglophile, in England (The Lonely Londoners), his establishment in Shepherd’s Bush in London (Moses Ascending), where he buys a dilapidated house and rents out rooms to Commonwealth immigrants and also attempts to inscribe himself into an English tradition by writing his memoirs. The final novel (Moses Migrating) sees a ‘double return’, with Moses’s return to Trinidad and ultimate coming back to Britain, emblematic of the migrant’s twofold displacement through both experiences of rejection in Britain and now also of alienation in Trinidad. In line with the observation that Selvon’s novel cycle only loosely corresponds to the archetypical Künstlerroman and connected to the critical underestimation of his aesthetic programme, the artist theme then has not attracted much scholarly attention. Moses’s aspirations to authorship, which are most pronounced in Moses Ascending, are often read as an ironic rendering of his misrecognition within the English literary tradition and the adopting of a “pseudo-literary style” as a means to “convince himself that he is no longer an outsider” (Joseph 100). Roydon Salick finds Moses’s artistic failure grounded in a lack of “clarity of vision and sexual discipline” (142), which he sees in stark contrast to one of the novel’s intertexts, Robinson Crusoe: “Whereas Crusoe turns instinctively to art as therapy, Moses adopts the artistic pose in imitation of others, whereas Crusoe turns to writing, to the Bible, and to prayer for meaning and purpose, Moses associates writing his memoirs with leisure and economic ascendancy” (142). Here, Salick’s passing commentary to economy and leisure is more insightful than he fleshes out in his analysis, as artistic mobility and the artist’s embeddedness in economic structures are indeed at the heart of the trilogy as a whole. A more in-depth analysis of issues of authorship is provided in Janice Ho’s Nation and Citizenship (2015), which devotes a chapter to the intersection of authorship and citizenship in Londoners. My reading of the London trilogy as structural negotiation of the artist novel takes its cue from yet qualifies Janice Ho’s reading of Londoners as a generic blend between Bildungsroman and picaresque novel (129–135).

Selvon’s negotiations of the role of the artist stand out in many regards. Contrary to the other novels discussed in this study, in Selvon’s trilogy, I argue, the ‘portrait’ of the artist that emerges is that of the artist as a mirror of ideological incongruencies and as always already

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239 Treating Selvon’s London novels as a trilogy is legitimated by the continuity in characters, particularly Moses, and plot. In Moses Ascending, Moses, moreover, refers implicitly to The Lonely Londoners when he mentions his and Galahad’s adventures: “I have chronicled those colourful days in another tome” (MA 44). The notion of Selvon’s London novels comprising a ‘real trilogy’ is, however, debated, see e.g. Salick (132–161) and Nasta (“Introduction” 7–8).
In citing incommensurate mythemes of creation, the text revels in staging the tragic failure of the artist hero as a means to expose not just the notion of a coherent, middle-class, white masculine subject as ‘mythical subject’, but also demands for literature to assume a prophetic and community-building function as ideological overload. The trilogy exposes these demands as grounded in a myth of art as a realm separate from ideology, and thereby also undermines the foundation of the literary field and the models on which the minority writer is to base his art. It thus represents a rather radical stance in the literary field: Selvon’s employment of the artist novel mode, here, serves to eschew becoming ‘Moses’, a prophet or a ‘father’ of Caribbean or black literature in Britain. Thereby, he does not empty out the point of artistic production in general but questions its instrumentalisation. The engagement of the artist theme in his texts render these demands to become, to use Adorno’s term, a proxy for a collective subject (“Artist” 1045), so prevalent in the more politicised decades since the 1960s, as stereotyped, anachronistic, and always ideologically co-opted. The author in Selvon is demystified – exposed as opportunistic and firmly inscribed into dominant – but changing – ideologies. Selvon’s artist narrative is most explicitly concerned with foregrounding the artist’s heteronomous determination, his embeddedness in raced, gendered, and economic forms of exploitation, and exposes, in Bourdieu’s terms, that he is “himself made, at the core of the field of production, by the whole ensemble of those who help to ‘discover’ him and to consecrate him” (Rules 167) – and who can also take him down. As I contend that this manifests both the level of structure that spans the trilogy as a whole and as a central thematical and narrative aspect in the second novel, Moses Ascending, the first part will focus on the progression from The Lonely Londoners to Moses Migrating and trace the shifts in views of authorship and the overall trajectory of the artist story that all three novels suggest, with a predominant focus on structural features. As the artist theme is most self-consciously negotiated in Moses Ascending, the subsequent parts then focus on this novel.

7.3.1 Journeys between Notting Hill and Trinidad: The Artist’s Bildung

The macro-structural negotiation of artistry that spans the three novels cites an artistic journey in form of an extended Bildungs narrative and provides an insight into the author’s changed position in the literary field over the course of almost thirty years and the changing desires that form the artistic subject. This encompasses a staging and discarding of fantasies of a Sartrean notion of engaged authorship, of artistic autonomy and, ultimately, a poststructuralist renunciation of the author as instance of textual authority and imaginations of individuation.

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240 In line with this, I also refrain from terming the novel a ‘satire’, as this would suggest that there is a norm the text endorses.

241 In the original, Adorno speaks of a “Platzhalter des gesellschaftlichen Gesamtsubjekts” (“Artist” 1045).
altogether, which provides an astute commentary on shifts in discourses of authorship and literary theory alike.

The first novel *Londoners*, here, is particularly concerned with the split between autonomy and heteronomy, art and life, a topic that is here awarded more gravitas than in the sequels. Moses’s literary ambitions only come to the fore at the end of this novel, and echo *The Emigrants* with Collis’s final suspended position at the window, where writerly desire is at once deferred and sustained, as the novel’s circular structure suggests an interminable enquiry whether the writer will ever come into his own, emancipate himself from ‘his’ community, and resolve the differing desires in the literary field.²⁴² Kalliney terms this a typical modernist trope of the “struggling, uncompromising artist” (“Metropolitan” 95), which suggests that the struggle of the artist is first and foremost for aesthetic autonomy, a notion *Londoners* does indeed cite, but which, especially over the course of the novels, is a striving that is rather revealed as ideologically fraught than sustained. Indeed, already in *Londoners*, the ideal of autonomy is dismantled. While only extending over the last two pages of the novel, the rendering of Moses’s incipient artistic formation by a heterodiegetic narrator contains many indicators as to how Selvon’s work envisions (the attainment of) authorial agency and the author subject’s self-fashioning in the literary field. Moses wonders whether “he could ever write a book […] what everybody would buy” (*LL* 139), and the development of this theme illustrates the driving force of desire, the subject’s determination by the Other, and how fantasy sustains the subject. Shortly before Moses’s outspoken wish, readers are presented with a short stream of consciousness, focalised through Moses, which shows the different voices and desires influencing Moses:

> Why you don’t go back to Trinidad.  
> What happening man, what happening.  
> If I give you this ballad! Last night –  
> You went to see the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square?  
> Harris giving a dance in Brixton next Saturday – you going?  
> […]  
> ‘You know who I see in Piccadilly last night? Gomes! He must be come up for talks of federation.’ (*LL* 138)

The scene encapsulates the different desires that structure the artistic field in the 1950s and the subject’s possible positions. As was so prominent in Lamming’s novel, writerly desire here, too, is portrayed as initiated within the symbolic, i.e. socio-cultural field, where the subject is split between different forms of ‘response-ability’ (Oliver 15) – after all, Moses’s introspection is mostly rendered in form of questions. These concern both West Indian communal demands,

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²⁴² As Lamming’s and Selvon’s London novel(s) exhibit many similarities in their portrayal of the first generation of Caribbean immigrants in London, they have unsurprisingly attracted many comparative analyses, most of which are focused on notions of exile or experiences of racism, cf. exemplary Page’s and Houlden’s analyses. Nobody has, however, pointed at their similarity in terms of their engagement of ‘becoming author’.
visible in the evocation of bits of dialogues from ‘the boys’ and the citing of political discourses surrounding the incipient West Indian federation, which interpellates the West Indian artist into a paradigm of representativeness and into taking on the task of its literary imagination, a fact that has also preoccupied Lamming’s characters. It also encompasses the subject’s becoming public, visible, and comprising agency in an incipient ‘imagined community’ of Britishness that includes the ‘dusky’ “imperial brethren” (Ball, “Immigration” 224), which the reference to the public Christmas tree as symbol of a shared cultural tradition implies.

Moses’s sudden turn to authorship at the novel’s end constitutes a response and solution to these differing desires, a means to forge a ‘self’ and substantiate the subject’s lack. This ‘lack’ is linguistically manifest in similes, a chain of ‘as if’s’ that express the unfixability of meaning and the signifier’s constant slipping, and aim to express Moses’s “aimlessness”: “As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down […]. As if, on the surface, things don’t look so bad, but when you go down a little, you bounce up a kind of misery and pathos and a frightening – what?” (LL 138–139). Lacking the language to express the situation of the ‘boys’ in London (the “what?”), the text briefly resorts to a Romantic discourse by entangling Moses’s incipient artistic desire with the sublime, which precedes Moses’s wish for writing and envelops his search for expression: Standing on “the bank of the river, watching the lights of the buildings reflected in the water”, Moses “think he see some sort of profound realisation in life”:

Under the kiff-kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-is-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot. […] As if the boys […] only laughing because they fraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity – like how he here now, the thoughts so heavy like he unable to move his body. Still, it had a greatness and a vastness in the way he was feeling tonight, like it was something solid after feeling everything else give way, and though he ain’t getting no happiness out of the cogitations he still pondering, for is the first time that he ever find himself thinking like that. (LL 138-139)

Moses’s perspective echoes a Wordsworthian “sense sublime” as a moment of artistic reaching for transcendence that, while inspired by vastness, lacks the ‘terror’ of the Burkean sublime and rather emphasises the artist’s superior faculty of imagination (Brady 104–105). As a limit experience that temporarily threatens the subject, it ultimately serves to sustain it in a more secure self-conception, and Moses’s feeling of solidity afterwards precipitates his resolution to write. Reminiscent of Wordsworth’s poem “Composed upon Westminster Bridge” (1802), mirrored in the narrative jump from watching the city from the banks of the Thames to pondering how to write literature, performing the genius mytheme of a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth, “Preface” 598), the text cites a fantasy of poetic calling,
redemption, and prophetism, staple tropes that will be subject to biting ridicule in the sequel.\textsuperscript{243} The form in which it is employed in this passage, strikingly, still evidences a belief in the importance of the author’s role, it is, contrary to its function as a satirised set piece in the sequel, not subject to irony. Considering the novel’s particular context, this speaks to a possible obtainment of objet petit a – of carving out a position of autonomy and literary authority in a changing literary field after Windrush, where a climate of post-war consensus and hopes of artistic rejuvenation vested in the emigrants suggest some degree of artistic freedom.

Yet the novel does not idolise the artist as solitary hero who turns inward for creation, as the heteronomous dimension of art is emphasised in Londoners through, in Bourdieu’s terms, exposing “who has created this ‘creator’” (Rules 167), a fact that Moses Ascending will explore even more assiduously. Thus, the desire to write, instigated by another character, is first and foremost a desire for economic ascendancy:

Daniel was telling him how over in France all kinds of fellars writing books what turning out to be best-sellers. Taxi-driver, porter, road-sweeper – it didn’t matter. One day you sweating in the factory and the next day all the newspapers have your name and photo, saying how you are a new literary giant. (LL 139)

Desires for authorship, here, are also cited as a means to transcend class boundaries. The insinuated emergence of the artist from the collective in a fantasy of autonomy staged through Romantic imagery and his moving into individualisation – that is, crossing the sphere of littérature engagée – at the end of Londoners is, however, already traversed, as this passage also astutely comments on the illusion of artistic and social mobility: these possibilities are here deferred to France, where ‘all kinds of fellars’, even those with a working-class background, are imagined to be able to write ‘best-sellers’, whereas in England, Windrush emigrants found themselves working menial and low-paid jobs (Rush 172), a fact that the writer-protagonist Collis in The Emigrants has also illustrated.\textsuperscript{244}

Quite genre-typically and characteristic of the desiring text, fantasies of artistic initiation here are also entwined with sexual initiation and sexual and cultural reproduction are equated, drawing on a staple trope of masculine and artistic subject formation. Moses’s desire for literary success in Londoners is immediately tied in with sexual conquest and as such foreshadows this theme in Moses Ascending: “I was a summer night: laughter fell softly: it was the sort of night that if you wasn’t making love to a woman you feel you was the only person in the world like that” (LL 139).\textsuperscript{245} Intriguingly, Ian Smith here points to the ending’s “homoerotic double-entendre”: the space opened through the negative comparison ‘if you wasn’t making love to a

\textsuperscript{243} Cf. e.g. G. Kim Blank’s elaborations on Wordsworth’s notion of poetic language (17–19).

\textsuperscript{244} The reference to the ‘fellars’ in France here might be an allusion to James Baldwin, the African-American émigré writer with a working-class background, whose literary career started in Paris with Go Tell it on the Mountain (1953) and who ‘resurfaces’ in Moses’s basement in Moses Ascending.

\textsuperscript{245} In the second novel, this theme returns particularly in form of Moses’s and Brenda’s (literary) ‘sparring’.
woman’ includes the possibility that the potential partner could also then be a man (3), which already introduces homosexuality as a narrative subtext to artistic subject formation, a point I will return to in the context of *Moses Ascending* in chapter 7.2.3.

The rendering of Moses’s turn to authorship in *Londoners* also encapsulates how Selvon’s novels incite and frustrate readerly desire for a clearly identifiable ‘other’; and here my reading contrasts the assessment of this scene in criticism. Joshua Esty sees it as an “existentially triumphant (though politically anxious) moment of interiority” and exemplary of the emergence of a “collective West Indian identity formed against white Englishness” (203). Janice Ho’s reconciliatory analysis reads this as a “last-minute” resort to a *Bildungs* narrative (126) and a retrospective transformation of the novel (131): as drawing on the picaresque before allowed to express the continuous struggle of black Britons (134), this shift in generic mode enables both individual growth and a “return to the community” (135) and ultimately envisions a responsible version of authorship (134). Yet to understand the incipient formation of an artistic subjectivity at the end necessitates to go beyond reading Moses’s positionality as ‘only’ determined by race and this tentative individualisation as a mere affirmation of the writer’s role as representative of a larger collective, which superimposes an understanding of Moses as assuming his eponymous status as ‘prophet’. Quite to the contrary, read through the mode of the artist novel, the novel’s polyphonic nature, the stream-of-consciousness mode, and the resulting lack of a definite authorial subject render the theme of authorship much more narcissistically contemplated: these aspects, in a stance similar to Lamming, suggest an artistic subjectivity marked by a profound anxiety vis-à-vis a ‘collective consciousness’ and the confines of the literary market that restrain the aesthetic and economic possibilities of West Indian authors. Moses’s goal is, after all, to draw apart from his community and from ‘hustling’, and the focus is on literary success and fame and thus heteronomous in nature, with Moses aiming to be a ‘literary giant’, rather than on an authentic and original expression.

Selvon here cleverly foregrounds what Sarah Brouillette has identified as a tendency that still structures readers’ expectation of postcolonial literature, i.e. the disavowal of economic aspects, itself a remnant of a romantic literary epistemology that, precisely because ownership and copyright law as external factors became increasingly important, needed to veil these factors in order to uphold the primacy of the artwork (*Postcolonial* 47). Moses’s fantasy and traversal of Romantic authorship also speaks to the author’s futile search for a “non-alienated form of labour” (48) and anticipates a discursive shift: as Brouillette further states, it is now increasingly impossible to discuss authorial autonomy outside the boundaries of the economic or political implications (73–74), which is why so much contemporary fiction is self-reflexive (1). The narcissistic reflections on these factors here point towards this later trend that, while
implicitly present since the nineteenth century, will only centrally define artistry in the late twentieth century, and emphasise the all-enveloping forces of capitalist production, manifest in Moses’s musings on writing a book that everybody ‘would buy’, which alerts readers to the postcolonial text as a commodity.

The resulting undermining of an ideal of ‘authenticity’ is then central to Selvon’s texts. In line with this, readers are continuously made aware that Moses is a disingenuous point of reference. This is not to be understood as derogatory here, but as a strategic pre-empting of categories like authenticity or originality via which the text could be made ‘functional’, i.e. educational, and to display that which is disavowed in functionalising the migrant author, which amounts to a radical rejection of a position as ‘native informant’ as, speaking with Gayatri Spivak, itself a blank, but “generative of a text of cultural identity” that Western reception then inscribes (6). With the figure of Moses, the text performs a continuous foreclosure of the symbolic meaning of immigrant authorship as ‘informative’ and simultaneously stages the subject of this foreclosure as it appears in the real, carrying the “mark of […] expulsion” (Spivak 5). That is, the text presents Moses as ‘distorted’ native informant, in a form that makes legible that which has been disavowed to create him as such. While it is only in Moses Ascending where this will fully unfold, it is already visible at the beginning of Londoners, which posits an insightful comment regarding storytelling that functions as a quasi-poetological comment on authorial self-fashioning and on the necessary mode of reading. Asked by a reporter whether he had just arrived from Jamacia, Moses “don’t know why but he tell the fellar yes”, and subsequently, albeit he “don’t know a damn thing about Jamaica” (LL 7), accepts this interpellation and invents a story about a hurricane and the situation of Jamaicans in England. Crucially, Moses perceives this as “the first time he ever really get a good chance to say his mind, and he had lot of things to say” (LL 8). The novel here pre-empted authenticity as literary value and the author as ‘sincere’ and ‘useful’ informant by exposing him as always already structured by the Other’s desire and conforming to its demands. In other words, it is the text’s laying bare how ‘identity’ is rather the subject’s probing of different fantasies as answers to the Che Vuoi which creates what critics like Forbes (91) and Thieme (87) call the idiosyncrasy of Moses. Within the constraints of the literary field, the only authorial subject position Selvon’s novel hence endorses is that of a conscious self-positioning as opportunistic and the ensuing questioning and dismantling of the premises on which storytelling rests – or, in Moses’s highly metafictional words in Londoners: “Sometimes the words freeze and you have to melt it to hear the talk” (LL 15).

The theme of authorship, initiated in Londoners, is then continued and explored in more detail in its sequel. As Moses Ascending will be analysed in more depth in the next subchapters,
Here I will only focus on the fantasmatic narrative as it pertains to a macrostructural level, where the three novels of the trilogy are united under a journey motif that implies authorial emancipation in form of an Oedipal trajectory. Moses for once undergoes multiple literal journeys from Notting Hill in *Londoners* to Shepherd’s Bush in *Moses Ascending* and then to Trinidad and back in *Moses Migrating*. Moreover, as mirrored in the sequence’s titles, the individual as part of a community in *Londoners* is followed by a separation from the ‘immigrant family’ and subsequent individuation, together with the archetypical promise of social climbing, quite emblematic in the title of *Moses Ascending* that hints at a potential fulfilment of these aspirations and a culmination in a secure position as writer. Changes in narration, from hetero- to autodiegetic, and perspective, with Moses at the end of *Londoners* situated on the banks of the Thames and on eye level with ‘his’ community versus a more distanced view from the penthouse of his own house in *Moses Ascending*, exchanging the “worm’s eye view” for a “bird’s eye view” *(MA 4)*, spatially perform the increase of distance of the writer to his literary material. The text here enacts a writerly fantasy of, in Beebe’s sense, the ‘Ivory Tower’, bringing to mind the mytheme of ‘flight’ inherent to the Daedalus myth through the reference to the ‘bird’.

Where Moses’s ‘worm’s eye view’ is resonant with the internal focalisation prevalent in *The Lonely Londoners* of Moses the character, the ‘bird’s eye view’ of Moses the narrator and author is at once suggestive of gaining narrative centrality and, in Moses’s self-fashioning as an author by writing his memoirs in this novel, writerly omniscience. These shifts and structurally enacted fantasies of *Bildung* also mirror the discursive shift in the public sphere in Britain that has taken place in the first decades after the war: staging the artist’s formation akin to a classical narrative of formation and a rite of passage suggests a now somewhat more emancipated status of the West Indian author in Britain, as the settlement within and exertion of a more confident gaze from one’s own house, so central to Selvon’s middle novel, reflects the increasing institutionalisation and canonisation of Caribbean literature and criticism as well as of the field of Postcolonial Studies. The individualisation of the narrative voice also suggests a new immigrant subjectivity, of having, concomitant with the shifts in discourses on immigration, left the community of ‘Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies’ behind and ‘become British’, and this is mirrored in Moses’s act of writing his memoirs as claim to a form of life writing, to cite Spivak again, “as it is understood in the Northwestern European tradition”, which the ‘native informant’ is usually denied (6).

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246 This is best illustrated when reading Moses’s proprietorship in *Moses Ascending* next to Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, where the writer Collis was only allowed to visit the ‘house of literature’, i.e. the Pearsons’ house, just to be rejected, abjected, even, which speaks to a now more established presence of Caribbean literature in the British literary field, albeit in a compartmentalised version.
The *Bildungs* narrative, however, is never fully realised: at the end of *Moses Ascending*, Moses has not ascended but descended and ended up in the basement once more (*MA* 139–140). Following a circular movement instead of a linear trajectory, both in the novel itself and the trilogy as a whole, the quest mytheme is cited, but depleted – Moses-as-Daedalus has briefly soared above others, but is ultimately trapped again and the novel, like *Londoners*, ends with an awareness that the sole proprietorship of an author over his literary labour is always tenuous, with the work being potentially subjected to either ideological appropriation or the forces of the market. Thus, Moses warns of potential political misuses of the text: “some black power militants might chose [sic.] to misconstrue my Memoirs for their own purposes, and put the following moral to defame me, to wit: […] it is the white man who ends up Upstairs and the black man who ends up Downstairs” (*MA* 139). The capitalisation of ‘Upstairs’ and ‘Downstairs’, a recurring image in the novel (Joseph 99), here constitutes an enactment of the master-servant relationship in probing flights into and from (authorial) mastery, a telling image regarding the assumption and renunciation of authorial responsibility. Yet it also self-reflexively cites commercialisation processes and foregrounds authorial anxiety as to the misappropriation of the author’s work: as a pun on the popular TV series *Upstairs, Downstairs* (*ITV*, 1971–1975), it speaks to an awareness that Caribbean literature is first and foremost a commodity and that even a revolutionary political movement, in this novel particularly the Black Power movement, is not exempt from ideological complicity with capitalist structures. The wish for the recognition of the author’s symbolic capital, initiated in *Londoners*, results in (forced) complicity, which illustrates the subject’s determination by the Other’s desire, i.e. it foregrounds an awareness that there is no outside-ideology for the author and no unencumbered writing.

Consequently, the desire to write is then seemingly abandoned in the third and final novel in the trilogy, *Moses Migrating*. This text illustrates yet another discursive shift in conceptions of the ‘postcolonial author’. Where the move from *Londoners* to *Moses Ascending* stages the ‘birth’ of the Author (with a capital A) as proprietor of his literary labour, resonant with the author as still under the aegis of an exclusively British literary establishment in the 1950s versus individuation under a, albeit homogenised, notion of political blackness and within more firmly established Caribbean or black British literary institutions in the 1970s, the Oedipal relations in

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247 At the end of *Moses Migrating*, Moses is again suspended in a liminal state, here at the airport.

248 Tellingly, critics seem frustrated with Selvon’s unfulfilled *Bildungs* narrative: with regard to *Londoners*, I have mentioned Ho’s reconciliatory superimposition of this trope already, and likewise, now referring to *Moses Migrating*, Roydon Salick also wishes to adhere to its classical form: because he deems the unfolding of this theme unsatisfactory over the span of the trilogy, he proposes a different ordering: with “the suggested order [Moses Ascending – Moses Migrating – The Lonely Londoners], then, the three novels do appear to form a trilogy, a logically, chronologically, and thematically linked narrative, with the recognizable prescriptive architeconics of beginning, middle, and end, focusing on the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth of Moses Aloetta” (159).
Moses Migrating demonstrate a culmination of these developments. Where Moses’s white friend Bob here searches for his Caribbean ancestry – “Some time in the last century someone to whom I may be related sailed to these [Caribbean] waters and set up roots” (MM 148) – Moses embraces his ‘bastard’ status: “Look at me, I don’t even know who my father and mother was, and I do not lose any sleep over it. […]’ ‘What you are saying is that you are just a fluke,’ he sneer, ‘a random bastard who adopted England as his home. […]’ ‘Don’t call me no fucking fluke, Bob!’” (MM 148). Moses’s acceptance of being called a ‘bastard’ but rejecting the ‘fluke’ speaks to the dismissal of his search for a literary father, a predecessor, which was still so central a theme in Moses Ascending, and indicates that the Caribbean writer has now, as Härtl states with regard to Walcott, carved out a space between the “‘Great Tradition’ of English literature” and a “distinctly Caribbean poetics” (225), i.e. created a literary tradition ‘without roots’. Bob’s ‘hybridisation’ in this novel, moreover, signals that the racial ‘other’ was always already part of the ‘self’, rendering racial belongings somewhat more differentiated than in Selvon’s previous novels. The renunciation of paternal relations is intertwined with the novel’s suspending of the fantasy of a successful artistic journey, as the artist theme vanishes intratextually. Moses has here abandoned all aspirations to authorship and the only writing he attempts is a letter to Enoch Powell as ‘concerned citizen’, in a hyperbolic exaggeration of the author’s being subject to a ‘false consciousness’: “Dear Mr Powell, though Black I am writing you to express my support for your campaigns to keep Brit’n White” (MM 29).

The relinquishing of the overt desire to write here is already telling, and most insightful regarding shifts in discourses of art and authorship is its combination with Selvon’s ‘semi-paratextual’ treatment of the issue in a 1991 preface to the Lynne Rienner edition of Moses Migrating, which dissolves textual boundaries and, in a postmodern-poststructuralist stance, blends author/character/narrator, intratext/paratext, and fiction/criticism by having Moses traverse text and paratext. The preface added by “M.S./S.S”, “A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esq.” (MM 25), here also constitutes an astute commentary on notions of authenticity so often tied to autobiography as a genre:

> It have a lot of myths and legends and nancy stories that circulate since I, Moses Aloetta Esq., presented my credentials to the literary world. Some people think I am an arsehole, some people say I am an enigma that never arrived, the chosen few consider me a genius, and one evening at a big literary conference at the Commonwealth Institute in London whilst I was reading a bawdy passage from one of my tomes in front of a big audience that included Whites, a black Guyanese bitch walked up to the microphone and slap me bam bam in my face. I wouldn’t of minded if Blacks alone was present, but to slap me in front of White people really hurt. (MM 25)

249 ‘False consciousness’ refers to a Marxist understanding of ideology as the naturalisation of the dominion of the ruling classes and the mystification of social relations by the market (Barker 76–77).
Selvon here blurs subject positions between Moses and Selvon’s inferred author image, and the performance of this slippage might serve to ‘fortify’ Selvon against reproaches from critics: the event this passage refers to took place at the Caribbean Writer’s Conference in 1986, where Selvon read from his second and third Moses novel and was interrupted by a Guyanese woman entering the stage and slapping him for his crude portrayal of women in his works.250 The fictionalisation of this episode in the preface is a conscious move of authorial self-fashioning through an enactment of the archetypical artistic ‘split’, which here blurs the distinction between ‘life’ and ‘art’ through the traversal of intra- and paratextual levels, author and character/narrator.

This also serves to illustrate the diverging desires that structure the literary field and discursive changes and points towards a new subject position. For once, Selvon here inscribes both the observing and observed author into his work, which functions as a nod to the shift in the literary sphere, where literary authorship is increasingly merged with celebrity from the 1970s onwards and influenced by self-spectacularisation, where “a growing interest in the personal, the individual and the private” as well as a perception of the self/the author as product increasingly dominate the literary field (Franssen & Honings 6–7). This constitutes a logical continuation of the cultural politics installed under Thatcher, particularly notions of self-marketing and a focus on the ‘prizeability’ of authors and literature. Position-taking within the literary field as a field of power and vis-à-vis its actants and the appropriation of the author’s image by these different parties necessitate new strategies to retain authority, either by rejecting success or embracing popularity (Franssen & Honings 2–3). Selvon’s blurring of textual boundaries here speaks to an awareness that in determining the “value and meaning of the work and the public image of its author” (2) and the discursive parameters in which they are discussed, the author has limited control over his image and work. More so, in Foucault’s sense, there is a sense that the author only emerges as a result of these processes. Selvon’s response, i.e. the commodification of criticism, which is further emphasised in the preface’s acknowledgement that “[i]n my own years in London, any hardcore material I wrote about Blacks had to have ha-ha before any English publisher would touch it” (MM 28), can here be read as a strategic position-taking vis-à-vis these other actors.251 By including this humiliating

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250 Austin Clarke’s personal reminiscence of Selvon, A Passage Back Home (1994), gives a detailed description of this event (120–129). Clarke ties in this incident with a decrease in Selvon’s literary ‘power’: “Sam never recovered from this assault. […] His letters to me, on our return to Canada, were decreasing in length, in humor, and in regularity” (124).

251 The predominantly commercial value of literature labelled ‘postcolonial’ or ‘Commonwealth’ is already foreshadowed in Moses’s aforementioned musings in Londoners, where his desire is in fact geared towards writing a book that people would buy, not necessarily read, towards being marketed as a “literary giant” via his “name and photo”. This positioning of literature and art as a commodity without intrinsic value reminds of the display of
episode as part of Moses’s/Selvon’s self-fashioning, Selvon nods to what Sarah Brouillette terms “late-capitalist postcoloniality”, where “postcolonial self-consciousness”, that is, the marketing of “radical insecurities of the subject, of identity, of rational thought, and of the clearly bounded community”, is increasingly saleable and attractive (Postcolonial 5) and thus also yield a new authorial subjectivity. In Selvon’s novel, ‘literary criticism’, in its extreme form, is integrated and reframed as a “protective gesture” and a pre-empting of one’s “ethical flaws” (Brouillette, Postcolonial 5), but, in a blurring of textual boundaries, the in-built literary criticism also constitutes a quality that distinguishes the author in terms of cultural capital. In so doing, Moses Migrating here exposes that ‘author’ is a radically unstable sign. More so, as blurring author and protagonist, it also constitutes a lucid comment on what could be called the ‘postcolonial author function’, i.e. the framing of Caribbean literature within paradigms of naturalised and essentialised cultural differences “along the axes of ‘authenticity’ or ‘self-enunciation’” (Sedlmeier 1–2) that often merge paratexts (i.e. biographical details) with fiction.252

The preface, then, brings the artist theme and fantasies of artistic mobility within the literary field – at least formally – full circle and culminates what has been begun in The Lonely Londoners: for once, the writer subject’s ironic self-chastisement reads like a retrospective (the preface was only written in 1992) reframing of the surrender of writerly ambition as an acceptance of the desire of the Other: here, this amounts to the dismissal of the ‘problematic’, ‘incorrect’ postcolonial author, resonant with the assessment of Selvon as author. Moreover, the subject’s self-commodification can, ultimately, be read as a critical stance on discourses of artistic responsibility and the artist as prophet, as the texts expose these as always implied in the logics of the market, and this demonstrates Selvon’s exposure of the author as inevitably siding with or supporting hegemonic idea(l)s that Moses Ascending spells out in more depth. As a meta-commentary on the altered positionality and ascribed function of art and the artist after Windrush, Selvon’s employment of the Künstlerroman mode then maps not only the changed socio-cultural environment in which the author finds himself ambivalently interpellated and possible subjectivities hereunder, but gives an insight into artists’ view on the increasing commodification of Caribbean literature in Britain and the ‘whims’ of the literary market.

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252 Matthias Schaffrick and Marcus Willand also point to the function of such ‘pseudo-paratexts’ (73): the editor fiction “entzieht der literaturkritischen Spekulation in Form biographistischer Lesarten jeglichen Nährboden” (73).
7.3.2 Anxious ‘Fatherhood’ and Authorial Complicity in *Moses Ascending* (1975)

In *Moses Ascending*, the theme of writing takes centre stage with Moses’s attempts to compose his “magnus opus” (*MA* 103) in the privacy of his penthouse and the interruption of the same by various characters, demonstrating the ‘corruption’ of authorship by different actors and institutions in the field, whereby the text again draws on the archetypical artistic split between ‘life’ and ‘art’. Now an established landlord, Moses houses tenants from the whole Commonwealth (*MA* 32) and becomes involved in the trafficking of immigrants by Faizull and Farouk, two South Asian tenants who turn out to be one person; events that Moses attempts to exploit for his memoirs. While the fact that it is precisely this genre Moses aims for has not attracted much attention, a look at its definition already points towards the metafictional employment of this denominator in Selvon’s text: as a highly individualised and psychological genre, it is typically not (only) focused on the individual’s development, but on his/her social role and the “effect […] on a historically important political or public event” (Lahusen 626) and shows a desire to problematise precisely this role and its context (629). The novel both cites this generic marker and infers that *Moses Ascending* is in fact the memoirs Moses aims to write, presenting us with a self-begetting text that blends “process and product, quest and goal” (Kellman 119), and thereby signals not only the artist’s relation to society but, a factor overlooked so far, the very desires and conditions underlying the production of art.

In Selvon’s text, the desire to write the memoirs, the anchor point for my analyses, is tied to the visualisation of the agonistic position of the ‘postcolonial author’ as one of inevitable complicity. That is, the moniker is employed to present the problematic social role of the author. This is achieved by foregrounding different narrative identity scripts which do, however, not result in the representation of a coherent identity. These comprise particularly ideals from the genius tradition to emphasise the author’s a priori futile search for authenticity and originality. Different artistic mythemes that roughly correspond to what Beebe circumscribes as ‘Sacred Fount’ and ‘Ivory Tower’ are here cited precisely to stress the fact that the author is always co-opted by the hegemonic order: where artists, as Brendan Moran states in referring to Adorno, “have a tendency to acquit themselves and convict the world” and “even acquit the world insofar as it is them who enact it” (139), Selvon’s novel employs these to accentuate the artist’s disavowed complicity and to stage the writer’s conformity with various ideological projects.

With the figure of Moses, Selvon combines various artistic tropes at once. He can be read as a pun on the mythical artist figures of Prometheus and Daedalus, who continue to influence

253 According to Christiane Lahusen, the memoir typically aims to “provid[e] readers with knowledge about the world, setting an example, [or] relating marginal events in history” (627). She defines the genre as presenting an act of ordering pre-existing narratives and identities to “present […] [a] proposed identity (633).
European notions of art well into the twentieth century, the latter particularly in its Joycean application. The novel combines both the Promethean notion of prophetism and the founding of culture: Moses, as his licence plate shows, imagines himself as BLACK1 (MA 117), and the reference to the biblical Moses is also present in the hope that Moses will lead, to use Galahad’s words, “Our People”, that is, the black community in Britain, as well as in Moses’s reception and mediation of the word of god as paralleled in Selvon’s protagonist’s utopian desire to create a “new dimension” (MA 43) with his memoirs. The Daedalian idea of escaping imprisonment (in society) through art (Flinspach 179–180) manifests in his retreat to the penthouse and English literature in attempting to disentangle from the Caribbean community.

What has so far been described as Moses’s ‘idiosyncrasy’ then can rather be described as the enactment of the subject’s refusal of a “forced choice” (Žižek, Enjoy 88), such as between autonomy or engagement, precisely by exposing that the subject “has always already chosen” (88), which in Lacan and Žižek is a psychotic structure and marked by a refusal to “exchange enjoyment for the Name of the Father” (88). This strategy in Moses Ascending serves to expose authorship as inherently tied to sustaining “our own ideological system” (Žižek, Sublime 49), not least through naturalised fantasies of the racial ‘other’, which Moses performs through a heightened phallic black masculinity. With regard to the ideologies that structure the literary field in the 1970s, this posits a poignant commentary on notions of the ethnically marked author as a prophet, on literature and art as bringing about a ‘new’, unencumbered black subject, and on incipient discourses of multiculturalism, all of which are revealed as ideologically complicit. In disavowing notions of ‘originality’ and ‘identity’, on which these assumptions rest, the text’s use of the artist novel genre amounts to exposing the ideological function the raced ‘other’ fulfils and to demystifying the ‘postcolonial author’ – in other words, it foregrounds an authorial subject position that is grounded on the author assuming, but problematising the grounds of his own authority.

In this vein, from the novel’s beginning, the text emphasises that writerly desire is the desire of the Other and the subject formed as a response to it. Quite similar to Lamming’s text, the demarcation of the authorial self is rendered in spatial terms and is premised on Moses’s acquisition of his own house, a common topos in Caribbean writing, as Edward Kamau Brathwaite has outlined (“Caribbean” 199), and an idea crucially initiated by Moses’s friend, nicknamed Sir Galahad (MA 1). Citing a fantasy of authorship-as-proprietorship, becoming-writer in the novel is indeed itself premised on owning property, which enables a retreat from

254 For a detailed outline of the reception of the Prometheus myth in terms of artistry cf. e.g. Flinspach (162–167). The ironic citing of notions of artistic prophetism is of course also manifest in Moses’s name, which invests the figure with metaphysical and logocentric importance.
‘hustling’ (*MA* 5), as master signifier that suggests authorial and masculine self-fortification. As such, it stages a discourse of authorship as a “privileged moment of individualization” (Foucault, “Author” 300) that is dependent on the author’s acceptance “into the social order of property which governs our culture” (306). The discourse of the ‘split’ subject – and fantasies of uniting it, thus supposing that there is a coherent subject to unite – is here inscribed within the house itself and tied to particular authorial and masculine mythemes which are evoked in relation to contemporaneous authorial demands and are based on symbolic father-son conflicts, thereby raising questions of filiation within a by now more established niche of Caribbean writing. These comprise the author as self-generating in form of Robinson Crusoe and the notion of Galahad as ‘pure’ son. Moses’s withdrawal to and fortification in his penthouse, concomitant with the ivory-tower myth and figured as premise for entering into an Oedipal struggle with the English canon, cites one of the “most widely familiar of our [...] myths”, embodied in the “man stuck alone on a desert island” (Watt, *Myths* 141), i.e. Daniel Defoe’s protagonist Robinson Crusoe.

Moses, the Crusoean ‘cast away’ in the city’s less prosperous area, has now taken on the white, illiterate Bob, his “man Friday” (*MA* 4), as his ‘footman’ in an attempt to “inhabit a form of white manhood” (Forbes 96) vis-à-vis the feminised Bob. The novel’s reworking of Defoe’s text has been widely recognised, mostly with regard to the destabilisation of colonial texts as signs of authority, but not in terms of its providing the mythemes for the Caribbean author to fashion his ‘self’ and, more specifically, how Selvon adapts these to his artist novel strategy.255 Therefore, I am more interested in the structural patterns this myth provides.256 Crusoe provides an apt author function for Caribbean writing on various levels which comprise, but extend its function for negotiations of the colonial legacy and of questions what myths of Britishness are compatible with subject formation under the auspices of race and ethnicity. Rather, it is also indicative of a new literary subjectivity: after all, Crusoe is a writer, too, and writes himself ‘into existence’ on the island. Selvon’s text refers to various mythemes of Defoe’s text, most prominently that of economic individualism, which serve to negotiate a more commodified,
Highly important for my reading is Crusoe-as-author’s continuous self-fashioning along the images of filial disobedience, as a sign of “male privilege that ultimately affirms a man’s masculinity” (Pollak 144), which Moses turns around and makes himself the victim of, and self-composition through “protean metamorphoses” (Leborgne 928–929), which Selvon stages to emphasise the author’s inevitable ideological complicity. Moreover, my reading is interested in Crusoe’s function as a “literary emblem of Western male identity” (Volkmann 129) that has “shaped constructions of masculinities for centuries by providing a literary example of what ‘humans’ – a phrase taken as synonymous for ‘males’ – can achieve through self-reliance, perseverance, clear-cut belief systems, and adherence to a religious creed” (130). It is along these mythemes, which form a subtext to the novel rather than outright themes, that Moses’s self-fashioning acts, engaged in fantasmatic narratives of a (denial of) patrilineal transmission of literary authority, provide most insightful regarding the conception of the Caribbean author’s positionality within the literary field and connected aspects of race and masculinity.

The Crusoean fantasy of autonomy, self-generation, and mercantile spirit is already visible on the level of language. The fantasy of a “liberal-bourgeois […] possessive individualism” (Ho 129) as hinging on the exploitation of ‘others’ is emphasised in Moses’s using his new position to turn his tenants into literary material, i.e. exploit the stories of the subaltern, as is evident in his attempts to commodify the stories of the ‘Pakis’ and Black Power dwelling in his basement. Linguistically, this fantasy is performed through what Maria Sindoni calls an “assertive and magniloquent *incipit*” in the style of the “modern bourgeois novel” (221), which hinges on phrases such as ‘roaming’, ‘musing’, or ‘speculating, and ‘as was his wont’ (MA 1; Sindoni 222). Moses’s new status of landlord here cites a premise of the artist novel genre: the *Künstlerroman* is inextricably linked – through the artist’s affirmation or distinction – to the formation of an individual subjectivity as bourgeois and property-owning and is thus inherently class-marked. As tied to and sustaining fantasies of artistic autonomy, ownership, while already subject to traversal – after all, Moses’s house is “due for LCC demolition” in three years (MA 1), serves as a fortification of body and intellect and a prerequisite to “stay in bed” and “work on my Memoirs” (MA 5), blending a bourgeois subjectivity with the idle leisure of the dandy. The text here cites the teleology of the hypotext, where Crusoe’s self-establishment predates the writing of his journal and has Moses identify as Crusoe, who

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258 As Gillian Hewitson states, Crusoe draws on a morphology of masculinity that centres on the ability “to give birth to self, to culture, to contract and, through its self-presence, to meaning” (128). Bruce Mazlish likewise ties this to the metaphor of self-begetting, as the novel ultimately stages the fantasy of a child “escaped from parental figures and all their prohibitions” to become “his own father” (3).
considers himself as “King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, […] and if I could convey it, I might have it in Inheritance, as compleately as any Lord of a Mannor in England” (Defoe 85; original emphasis): “Having lived below the surface of the world all my life I ensconced myself in the highest flat in the house […]. I cannot tell you what joy and satisfaction I had the day I move into these new Quarters. […] I was Master of the house” (MA 3–4). Moses’s rhetorical self-embourgeoisement echoes Crusoe’s rhetorical fortification on the island and makes aware of the manipulative function of language, which here veils the actual dilapidation of the house. In this fantasy of patrilineal transmission of property and language – imagined as a prerequisite for writing – Moses imagines himself as Crusoe’s heir. Yet while Selvon employs this myth to probe the artist subject’s establishment as individual, agential, and economically successful, its function is yet more contemporaneous and serves Selvon to negotiate the possible subject positions within the literary field.

As such, it is particularly used to foreground the postcolonial author’s complicity. This takes place for once literally, as Moses changes from bourgeois to capitalist-by-force, as the house later becomes the basis for the trafficking of immigrants in which he becomes complicit. Selvon here refers to shifts in the literary landscape and the struggle between artistic autonomy and the adherence to external demands that have exacerbated in the 1960s and 70s in comparison to the immediate post-Windrush decades, and illustrates the complicity of the ‘native informant’ as catering to a readership that seeks knowledge of the ‘other’. The tragicomic allusion to the hypotext’s ‘monarch-of-all-he-surveys’-scene, the mastering eye as the classical point of origin of the colonising mission, a moment where Crusoe takes visual possession of his island and subsequently fashions himself as master (Defoe 85), illustrates this. Here, the formation of subjectivity functions akin to Lacan’s mirror stage: in the subject’s visual mastery of landscape, it recognises the landscape only insofar as it constitutes an image of its own culture and knowledge; like a mirror the gaze on the land reflects back an imaginary ‘self’ marked by an “‘orthopedic’ form of […] totality” (Lacan, Écrits 78) and fortifies against uncertainty. The masculine fantasy of mastering a sublime experience by visually appropriating one’s surroundings is exerted – and ridiculed – in Moses’s probing the black working classes’ gaze for enriching his memoirs. Describing the conditions of the black working class, Moses compares the “black man”, “the first passenger of the day” (MA 6) in London’s twilight to Crusoe as the first person to domesticate his island:

259 Its ephemeral status also symbolises the fragility of post-war Britain, held together by a post-war consensus as a “fragile compromise”, whose cracks had already become evident by the 1970s (Coxall & Robins 50).
260 For a discussion of the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ trope and its meaning for travel writing throughout the centuries see Pratt’s Imperial Eyes. She finds that rather than being discouraged by their unfamiliarity with the unknown land, travel writers “claim authoritativeness for their vision. What they see is what there is” (213).
He is the first passenger of the day. He is the harbinger who will put the kettle on to boil. [...] As he stands, mayhap, in some wall-to-wall carpeted mansion (resting, dreaming on his broom or hoover) and looks about him at mahogany furniture, at deeply-padded sofas and armchairs, at myriading chandeliers, at hi-fi set and colour television, as his eyes roam on leather-bound tomes and velvet curtains and cushions, at silver cutlery and crystal glass, at Renoirs and Van Goghs and them other fellars, what thoughts of humble gratitude should go through his mind! Here he is, monarch of all he surveys [...]. And the black man is the chosen race to dream such dreams, and to enjoy the splendour and the power whilst the whole rest of the world still in slumberland! (MA 6–7)

In an ironic repetition of the image of the conquerors who made for the ‘New World’ and an attempt at ‘rewriting’, the ‘black man’ is now inscribed as “pioneer”: he is awake before everyone else, enlightened, aware, while the rest still ‘slumbers’, drawing upon the colonial opposition between civilised/enlightened – uncivilised/ignorant, and is, like the colonisers’ ‘scramble for Africa,’ also involved in a “scramble” (MA 6). Yet the codes of masculine mastery of a femininely-coded landscape inherent to this trope are here pre-empted, even turned around. For once, the appropriation of his surroundings through the gaze – the furniture, Renoirs, and Van Goghs – remains foreclosed, nor can the ‘black man’ project his own self-image onto ‘terra incognita’. Further, he is feminised through performing domestic labour. The description of the scene by reinscribing the tropes of imperial travel writing exaggeratedly illustrates the incompatibility of the Crusoe-mytheme of self-formation through “internalised discipline” and a Puritan work ethic (Holden 118) for those marked as different, but also the Caribbean writer’s inescapability from this masculine fantasy of self-reliance and autonomy.

This is most obvious in the fact that Moses himself is immediately expelled from the fantasmatic narrative and from the imaginary of a detached observer status. After the ‘monarch’ scene, Moses is figured as briefly assuming the role of his described – feminised – object in a traversal of his authorial fantasy, rendering a self-begetting in writing through the disentanglement from the raced and classed other impossible: “As I became objective, I was mad to jump up and put on my clothes and go straight to work” (MA 7). The island of ‘Brit’n’, as Moses frequently calls it, in this sense, is not a mirror that enables the progression from specular desire to mastery through an imaginary wholeness. The reference to the paintings is telling here, as it suggests a foreclosing of the realm of ‘high-brow’ culture for the black immigrant, which resonates with the fixing of West Indian writers in cultural paradigms that emphasise their folk or peasant aesthetic. In citing the Crusoean mytheme of the *homo economicus* (Watt, *Rise* 63), the text exposes an archetypical myth of Britishness and meritocratic ideologies that see achievement and progress as premised on one’s personal capacities, neglecting socio-economic conditions, a myth Lamming’s novel has also exposed to some extent. The Crusoe myth is here not to be seen as a mere satirised set piece only: for once, it also serves as a *productive* fantasy in that it makes the actual working conditions of the
Windrush generation visible. Moreover, the exposure of Moses’s méconnaissance in it and its mode of verisimilitude and formal realism\textsuperscript{261} demonstrates that the attempt to achieve a ‘realistic’ portrayal, aesthetic demands in a now more politicised cultural discourse, results in a re-inscription of stereotypes and self-reflexively foregrounds that the author’s individuation hinges on the commodification of the immigrants’ stories and making them legible.\textsuperscript{262}

Selvon here shows a different take on Bloom’s notion of a “poetic misprision” (7), i.e. the creative mis-reading of the literary father in Oedipal terms in order to create new knowledge: less a rewriting and thus a symbolic killing, it rather empties out the premises on which his power is grounded. Resorting to the function of fantasy as protecting from but staging the gap in ideology, as “a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance”, which entails that “every process of identification conferring on us a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail” (Žižek, Sublime 142; original emphasis), we can analyse the text’s preferred authorial subject position as precisely grounded in exposing this function. What the Crusoean fantasy and Moses’s failing in it also amounts to is the exposure of an ideological lapse, a gap in the symbolic – not so much in the colonial hypotext per se but in the mythemes as which it continues to persist, i.e. the associated meanings that continue to define Britishness and the patrilineal literary field. Moses’s mock-heroic stance, in the novel’s typical picaresque fashion, and the adaptation of the monarch-scene to the condition of the black working class also ridicules the centrality of this moment and the associated ideal of masculine mastery to the grand narratives of Britishness and unsettles the ontological certainty they provide. Selvon’s text exposes their formative processes and context dependency as well as their inability to accommodate all British subjects.\textsuperscript{263} It here also dismantles authorial myths of filiation, as both the transition of authorial ‘power’ from predecessor to successor and of the author’s originary power is rendered as resting on a priori fragile grounds, but, in line with the author as opportunist, likewise shows how they can be made to serve various purposes.

Issues of filiation within the Caribbean-British literary field are also negotiated by alluding to the Grail quest, particularly with the figure of Galahad, the Arthurian-knight-turned-Black Panther-activist in the novel. It is in fact Galahad who initiates Moses’s desire to become a landlord – and thus writer. As the text informs us, “[i]t was Sir Galahad who drew my attention to the property. He was reading Dalton’s Weekly, as was his wont [...]. ‘Hello Moses!’ he say,

\textsuperscript{261} Cf. on Defoe’s ‘formal realism’ Watt (Rise 104).

\textsuperscript{262} Later, Moses also wonders whether he could substitute the “further adventures” of the ‘Pakis’ – note the reference to the successor of Robinson Crusoe here – with stories about Black Power (MA 90).

\textsuperscript{263} Moses’s ‘mock-heroic’ stance is particular prevalent in his aspiration to the habitus of writers of the eighteenth century, e.g. Henry Fielding and his ‘comic epic poem in prose’. For a detailed analysis of Moses Ascending through the lens of mock-heroism cf. Victor Chang, “Elements of the Mock-Heroic” (1992), and for Moses as picaro in Londoners Janice Ho, Nation and Citizenship (2015).
[...] ‘Tolroy’s property is up for sale. Listen to this: ‘Highly desirable mansion in exclusive part of Shepherd’s Bush [...]’” (MA 1). Galahad, who was also one of the boys in Londoners, here assumes the role of objet petit a as object-cause of desire and a different function than in Londoners. Here, the signifier ‘Galahad’, as a citation of the Arthurian legend and the quest for the Grail by alluding to the medieval romance,\(^{264}\) for once marks Moses Ascending as a quest narrative, as does the title, and inscribes authorial subject formation as taking place within the boundaries of Oedipal law. As Galahad is Moses’s severest literary critic and the embodiment of a more contemporaneous discourse, the novel can be read as importing a classical father-son conflict, following Northrop Frye’s theory of myths in Anatomy of Criticism a recurring key pattern of the romance: “in the Grail cycle the pure son Galahad accomplishes what his imperfect father Lancelot failed in” (196). Donald Hoffman claims that akin to the original Galahad’s “exposure of the sins of his father, Lancelot”, Selvon’s Galahad will continuously confront Moses with the flaws of his vision: on the novel’s surface, this is Moses’s excessive adherence to English culture, as Hoffman states (178), which forms a central theme of the novel and demonstrates that aspirations to Britishness are based on assimilation in the 1970s.

Yet Galahad’s position for once is not as oppositional as Hoffman claims: by habitually reading an English newspaper, Galahad, as Sindoni rightly remarks, “is ironically enmeshed in that very culture he believes he denies” (222), and Galahad as initiating Moses’s economic and literary aspirations, through evoking the signifier of ‘property’, which itself introduces the novel’s metaphorisation of the house as ‘the house of literature’ and the intertwining of economic and literary success, also renders him part of the hegemonic order. Rather, the fundamental flaw of Moses’s position is to be read in regard to the landscape of black British writing itself, as implied in a dialogue between Galahad and Moses: “‘The revolution has come. At last the Black man is coming into his own.’ ‘Exactly,’ I say. ‘I am coming into my own, and I just want to be left in peace.’” (MA 12). Moses’s méconnaissance consists of a by now anachronistic belief in an authorial position of detachment and non-complicity, i.e. the authorial subject’s relative autonomy within the literary field as regards racial representativeness, which had still somewhat characterised the 1950s, and his mistaking of temporal for ideational progress in the assumption that the possible subject positions the Caribbean author can occupy have by now widened instead of narrowed. This illustrates Moses’s disavowal of the signifier of race, more precisely, of racial difference that now more urgently circumscribes authorial positions.

\(^{264}\) For details on Galahad as an employment of the Arthurian legend in Selvon’s trilogy, see Donald Hoffman.
Concomitant with Moses’s occupation of the ‘seat’ of English literature, the penthouse as emblematic of becoming-au-thor in the patrilineal tradition of the English canon but also as signifying, at least from the point of view of Moses, more varied authorial subject positions, Galahad, the Marxist Black Power figure and cultural materialist (Weber 139), can then only resurface as body-in-pieces and as incompatible with the ‘older’ discourse Moses embodies:

He arrived in his Black Power glad rags. Starting from foot to head, he have on a pair of platforms, yellow socks, purple corduroy trousers, a leather belt about six inches broad with a big heavy brass buckle and some fancy, spiky chunks of metal studded in it [...]. Round his neck he had a heavy chain like what peasants in Trinidad tether their cattle with. And on top of his head, he had on a navy-blue wool cap, pulled down over his ears. When I opened the door Galahad raise his right hand up in the air making a fist of his fingers as if he going to bust a cuff in my arse, and say, paradoxically, ‘Peace, brother. Black is beautiful.’ (MA 10–11)

Moses’s description speaks to the foreclosure of the subject model Galahad embodies to the real, indicated in the inability to form a coherent image and a subsequent misinterpretation of his message. In terms of masculinity, the seeming authenticity of Black Power is, by means of the clothes, revealed to be a Westernised, capitalist-influenced farce, while the association with Trinidadian peasants serves as an uncanny resurfacing of an idealised folk masculinity that dominated discourses of West Indian nation building in the 1950s. The newer discourse of a politicised blackness is here figured as a return of older ideas of nationalism that will ultimately result in similar stereotypical circumscriptions of the black subject. As evident of enacting a – productive – psychosis, the focus on fragmentation is telling, as this condition is marked by a primacy of the body (Widmer 128). Moses’s failing interpretation of Galahad shows the non-identity that marks a schizophrenic condition, as the delirious way of speaking hinges on, according to Widmer (130), an acknowledgement of the signifier (the body parts, clothes, adornments) without attaching a signified (the message of ‘Black Power’). In misrecognising Galahad, Moses empties out engaged literary discourses, yet at the same time encounters them in the real – in the text spatially identified with the basement and narratively with a queer undertone, as I will elaborate on later. Yet as Moses’s desire is likewise initiated by Galahad and he later also probes the fantasy of speaking ‘for’ the people, the author is marked as always on the side of the dominant ideology.

The instigation of Moses’s desire by Galahad also speaks to a clash between two generations of immigrant writers in the 1970s and performs the artist as ‘split’ between these:²⁶⁵ as McLeod states, in terms of black British fiction, the 1970s saw the literary landscape dominated by an aging, wearier generation of migrants that was often either alarmed by or satirical of the younger generation’s politicisation and lacking “the ardent experimentalism of

²⁶⁵ Although Galahad is, as McLeod has it, “a long-standing immigrant himself”, I concur with his assessment that he is nevertheless associated with “the new Black Power militancy of the seventies, along with his young companion Brenda” (106), and representative of a younger artistic and political subjectivity.
youth” (97). With Galahad thus ‘guiding’ Moses’s aspirations, the text demonstrates an awareness of the inevitability of becoming an ‘impure’, that is, a lacking father and shows a poignant self-awareness of the inevitable symbolic Oedipal struggle, in Bloom’s sense, in which the successor trumps his predecessor, and this self-aware negotiation goes far beyond estimations that see the novel merely satirising the political engagement of the younger generation, but shows a more profound awareness of the loss of authorial possibilities in the changing diasporic landscape. It is precisely in this context that the novel’s citing of a West Indian literary tradition in Britain, embodied in Moses’s ‘antagonists’, particularly Lamming and Salkey, must be understood as well. While Moses’s penthouse, i.e. the attic, is the space of the English canon and of autonomy to which he aspires, in an architectural metaphor constituting the super-ego or Lacanian symbolic (Lacan, Freud’s Papers 102), ‘black literature’ is associated with the basement, as is the Black Power movement, and figured as the ‘other’, the real to Moses’s literary ‘self’. The text’s staging of the ‘dual nature’ of the artist via a spatial demarcation of authorship ideals here echoes what Gaston Bachelard has described as “psychology of the house” (17) and the “vertical polarity” between the “rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar” (39).

In a disavowal of an existing Caribbean literary tradition, concomitant with desires for self-creation and giving “birth to self” and to “culture” (Hewitson 128), Moses feigns ignorance of Lamming and Salkey, who, as “a pair of terrible twins” (Baugh, “Recent” 137) or together with James Baldwin, are mentioned three times in the novel and to whom he is introduced by Galahad (MA 42). It is however implied that he has recognised them as “Black literature” before in Brenda’s bookshelf in the basement (MA 27), which speaks to the staging of a foreclosure of this knowledge to sustain fantasies of self-begetting. At the novel’s point of culmination, Moses then ends up in the basement himself, occupying the same plane as Lamming and Salkey, and, tellingly, that of Lamming’s characters in The Emigrants, thus implying the author’s ‘reverse-journey’ from autonomy to heteronomy: both Lamming and Salkey resurface as uncanny Caribbean literary ‘fathers’ who embody an earlier discourse that had already emphasised the “social function of the West Indian novelist” (Campbell, “Folking” 386) and task the Caribbean writer with returning to his ‘roots’, i.e. an aesthetics of the folk and notions of a ‘peasant’ masculinity, aspects Moses had discarded to the real but which return in altered form, such as a pronounced phallo(go)centric blackness in the context of Black Power (Waters 34) and of a more politicised Caribbean literary sphere. The return of these idea(l)s, now bearing the ‘mark of foreclosure’, is visible in Moses’s mentioning of Lamming’s novel Water with Berries,

266 Cf. Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space and his concept of the ‘oneiric house’, where he quotes Jung on the dual imagery of the cellar and the attic as seats of the fears that inhabit a house (19).
which resurfaces in alienated, disavowed form as “Water For Berries”. While this has been interpreted as a sideswipe by the author, grounded in Selvon’s own vanity because of his own comparative neglect in literary criticism and the West Indian literary circles (Baugh, “Recent” 137), it rather signals an anxiety of a constriction of authorial subjectivities and of the space of possibilities, particularly in light of a now increasing compartmentalisation of black British writing.267

Fantasies of literary filiation, begetting, and exerting influence, in form of a Crusoean self-fashioning, are further staged and emptied out on the level of speech. Moses’s resorting to archaisms, his fantasy of “the Queen’s language” (MA 105), and the text’s creolising strategies have often been noted, but insightful for the text’s view of the artist’s role, and so far neglected, is the blurring of subject positions by having the narrative voice Moses oscillate between appropriating or influencing the linguistic register of other characters. In other words, the novel enacts both Moses’s adherence to and becoming the phallus. Thus, Moses as narrator incorporates Galahad’s ‘Black Power’ rhetoric into his vocabulary, and concomitant with the schizophrenic’s disordering and destabilising of meaning (Currie 103) dissolves it as a sign, for instance in making use of “the struggle” to express the split of art from life – from “Our People” (MA 11) – or the renunciation of Black Power with the Black Power phrase “Action will speak louder than words” (MA 38). Galahad’s repeated reference to Moses’s stories as “ballad” (MA 77; 78), uttered in direct speech, is successively and, so the text suggests, unconsciously integrated into Moses’s vocabulary – from repetition in direct speech (MA 114) into the narrative voice of Moses at the end of the novel (MA 139). While these fantasmatic identifications with a period-specific discourse of committed, politicised authorship, condensed in the Black Power discourse, sustain Moses’s writing, in concurrence with fantasy as enabling the subject to assume a particular subject position and to veil the lack in being, they also point to the author as inevitably emerging with the dominant discourse.

On the other hand, the author as becoming father, as embodiment of the ‘paternal function’ by providing the signifier that determines the others as subject is negotiated more anxiously, albeit rendered as inevitable. This is most pronounced in instances where Moses’s turns of phrases find entrance into other characters’ speech and where the text enacts an awareness of the author as perpetrator of ideology. Galahad’s unconscious appropriation of Moses’s “If I lie, I die” (MA 80; 87; 114), ‘Paki’s’ repetition of Moses’s “There is no god but

267 The fear of becoming – literally – stuck in a niche is also emphasised in Lamming’s work being in Moses’s way to the window (MA 138). Here, Selvon also cleverly has Moses echo Collis’s positionality at the end of The Emigrants, which employs a similar melancholic tone and leaves it open whether the author subject will ultimately ‘move forward’ and representational possibilities increase.
Allah” respectively “the god” (MA 66; 69; 85; 112), a pun on the Providence theme and Puritanism inherent to the Crusoe myth, and Brenda’s falling in line with Moses’s alliterations (MA 103) speak to the author’s power to exert influence on language and discourse and to structure the reality of others; that is, of his own working as the law. Moses’s assumption of a pioneering role, visible in his statement that his work “will create a new dimension” (MA 43), is, in so far, reinforced linguistically, but in turn always immediately rejected, as in these instances, moments of blockage occur. Thus, Paki’s mimicry of Moses is immediately halted: “‘There is no god but the god,’ he began. ‘Get lost,’ I interrupt” (MA 112). Likewise, after Galahad repeats his phrase “If I lie, I die”, Moses states that “a simple thing like Galahad’s disclosure make me feel incapacitated. I tried to put everything in perspective and pull myself together” (MA 114).

The subconscious repetitions then both perform the workings of the Name-of-the-Father within the symbolic order and point towards the fact that ‘the author’, as a priori originator of meaning, does not exist but only emerges a junction of different discourses within the literary field. The ‘other’, in the sense of an alterity, is here always already present within speech, which illustrates the text’s enactment of a dissolution (Entgrenzung) of the subject and thereby counters fantasies of literary filiation and originality. The same pertains to the memoirs: Moses’s attempts at seclusion and producing his text are continuously interrupted and the text is co-opted by various parties, rendering the memoirs always already ‘other’, this even more so if the memoirs are, in self-begetting fashion, acknowledged as the very novel Moses Ascending.

The mimicry of Moses’s discourse and Moses’s interruption of the other character’s pleasure in it enacts a reversal of Bloom’s notion of an ‘anxiety of influencing’, fearing rather the influence the author has on his successors than the influence of predecessors he must himself surpass. The hindered writer is a manifestation of a withdrawal from, in Bloom’s sense, an Oedipal struggle to become a literary precursor to one’s ephebes, a ‘new’ discursive and literary father. This has ramifications for notions of authorship in a black British context in general. The citing and depletion of mythemes of becoming-father, speaking to a self-reflexive engagement of becoming an authorial myth oneself, function as a comment on – and fortification against – the artist’s co-option in an era of cultural self-determination and resulting demands to portray positive, but essential, black subjects and attests to the complicity in essentialising and commodifying the ‘postcolonial subject’.

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268 This episode has, to my mind, frequently been misinterpreted, as it is usually seen as Moses mimicking his South Asian tenants (cf. e.g. Harney 112). Yet we only hear ‘Paki’ uttering these words after Moses has done so.

269 The performative power of the author’s speech is also visible in Galahad’s later assumption of the role of ‘leader’, i.e. the position of the ideological and economic head of the trafficking enterprise (MA 77).
7.3.3 Literary Un/Productivity: Queer Desires and Phallic Struggles

As these elaborations have implied, the novel heavily draws on male myths of creation and sexual prowess to verbalise writerly desire. The literary struggle of the author with his ephebes more so than his precursors, which contrasts the novel from the other artist narratives herein discussed, intertwines the writer subject Moses’s artistic self-fashioning intricately with both Galahad and the novel’s main female protagonist, the young Black Power activist Brenda, both, as I have stated, exemplary of a younger generation of writers and a new, more politicised and more globally oriented artistic subjectivity, as Black Power in the novel is figured as a US-American ‘import’ (MA 91). Through gendered and sexualised literary struggles, pertaining precisely to these characters, the text further undermines Moses-as-established-father’s literary ‘power’ and performs an artistic self-deconstruction. It is here where I depart from the dominant tendency in literary criticism that condemns Selvon for his portrayal of female characters,

the men’s hypersexualisation, and an aggressive heterosexuality, e.g. through Moses’s depiction as “village ram” (Forbes 85). The ambivalent function sexual imagery carries for processes of artistic self-fashioning and the expressed view on the position of the Caribbean writer complicates the novel’s supposed hypermasculine posture, reproaches of misogyny, and assessments like Donnell’s that “the sexist jokes and affectionately comical stereotypes of Caribbean masculinity […] do not raise particularly interesting or serious questions about sexuality” (Twentieth 183–184).

Moses’s writerly ambitions are closely intertwined with sexual conquests and, typical for the Künstlerroman, sex demarcates the boundaries between life and art in the novel. Concomitant with Moses’s ‘split’ and shifting between the ‘Ivory Tower’ and the ‘Sacred Fount’, in form of retreating to the penthouse to recollect one’s thoughts in tranquillity and the writer’s immersion into society, the text neither fully subscribes to the artist as renouncing the pleasures of life and sex to preserve his creative ‘seed’ nor to a full immersion into the same. Rather, sexual conquests here, while excessively foregrounded, are continuously hindered and remain ‘fruitless’, which is in line with the overall problematisation of the artist as ‘begetter’.

While Moses desires to submit the female muse to achieve “procreation, and hence

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270 The descriptions of women in both The Lonely Londoners and Moses Ascending are seen to, as Houlden summarises the dominant perception, “weaken much of the [post-war] period’s writing, the deep sympathies of which lie with male experience” (49).

271 Most work on Selvon’s treatment of gender and sexuality focuses on The Lonely Londoners, see e.g. Lewis MacLeod, “You have to start thinking all over again” (2005), Ashley Dawson, Mongrel Nation (2007), and Kate Houlden, Sexuality, Gender and Nationalism in Caribbean Literature (2017), and regarding queer desires Ian Smith, “Critics in the Dark” (1992) and Biman Basu, “Linguistic and Libidinal Progressions in Sam Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners” (2018). Curdella Forbes’s From Nation to Diaspora (2005) provides the most detailed analysis of Moses Ascending by looking at the intertwining of national and gendered aspects. She focuses, however, only on (clearly demarcated) gender roles and gender identities.
productivity” (Rivera Godoy-Benesch 94), the muse here ‘strikes back’. In this way, the text curiously resounds with the ‘impotence’ of the artist-hero Crusoe, whose self-fashioning hinges on an “erotics of the self” and a displacement of male sexuality (Downes 173), but denies the dissipation of creative energy into art.

While the text alludes to Moses’s potential sexual relationships with the female characters Brenda and Jeannie, more insightful is that which is disavowed: the novel negotiates homoerotic desires between the male characters by evoking and, rather typical for its time, immediately displacing these ‘threats’. Selvon’s text is interspersed with covert homoerotic passages. Moses’s and Bob’s homosocial relationship is one example here, where hints as to a mutual desire are interspersed extremely subtly, in an allusion to the disavowed homosexual desire in the hypotext Robinson Crusoe (Turley 128-177), others are Moses’s repeated reference to Galahad’s and Paki’s “taking a turn in my arse” (MA 80; 135), Moses’s thoughts wandering from Galahad to former sexual encounters (MA 78), or, in the above-mentioned scene of Galahad as corps morcelé, Galahad’s fist as potentially “bust[ing] a cuff in my arse” (MA 11). Somewhat counter to the novel’s reproach as sexually conservative, homosexuality here is also probed as a counter-discourse to literary filiation. It is crucial that both Galahad and Bob are also challengers to Moses’s literary vision, as the images of the writer being penetrated by his rivals here bespeaks a simultaneously feared and desired loss of phallic authorial power. This homoerotic undercurrent also destabilises the heterosexual norm on which narrative agency and post-colonial (literary) nation building rests, as the connotations of ‘unproductivity’ inherent to homosexuality imply that the writer might not ‘father’ a legacy and leave no cultural mark. Bob’s destruction of the image of white male literacy also illustrates this: Moses’s fantasmatic identification with Crusoe in educating Bob, introduced at the very beginning (MA 5), as indicative of his sowing cultural seeds is ultimately traversed, as the latter remains illiterate: “‘You’ll have to excuse me,’ I say sarcastically, ‘it is the first time that I have come across a fully-fledged white man in this day and age who does not know that A is for apple and B is for bat’” (MA 129). Bob has denied castration through language and Moses failed in performing the paternal function.

Yet it is not only male-male relationships which are portrayed within a hindered Oedipal framework and as displaying a loss of male authorial power. Vis-à-vis the two women of the novel, Brenda and Jeannie, Moses’s performance of hypermasculinity is most poignant, but constantly led ad absurdum. Passages like Moses’s musing on the “black beaut[ies]” who

272 Cf. e.g. Bob’s question whether Moses has “another fag in” (MA 118) or Moses’s statement that “Bob’s coming back tomorrow, I say gaily” (MA 118).

273 Hans Turley’s Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash (1999) presents a seminal interpretation from the perspective of queer studies and reads Crusoe’s love for Friday as a case of repressed homosexual desire.
“flounce and bounce about the city” (MA 15) or his boasting that he has “fucked more than a hundred white women” (MA 25), while at the heart of much of the critical condemnation of Selvon’s work, speak to a conscious staging of the trope of the hypersexual ‘other’: this image of a phallocentred black masculinity that, following Hall, in the Caribbean as former slave society has its origins in the denial of social power and complex paternities (“Why Fanon” 353), here visualises the black man’s interpellation as endangering social cohesion and threatening miscegenation and uneasily resonates with the emphasis on black masculinity in the context of Black Power. Crucially, it is precisely into one of Moses-the-observer’s musings on the ‘black beauties’, in the process of composing his memoirs in this scene, that ‘the feminine’ in form of Brenda intervenes. The encroachment of Brenda, who Forbes reads as a representative of a “new kind of hybrid, a female Caliban/Anancy who is British, not West Indian, fully engaged with her present reality but equipped with the tools of her heritage” (100), on the narration is of special significance in this instance, as she is the most imminent threat to Moses’s establishing of masculinity through authorship.

The text is by no means unequivocal regarding the relationship between Moses and Brenda, sexual relations are hinted at by Moses, yet left vague and ambiguous, and he admits that Brenda goes about her business “unbeknownst” to him (MA 27). Moses’s initial glance on Brenda is most telling as regards the negotiation of gendered myths of authorship and the female muse’s recalcitrance. Crucially, the drive activated with Brenda is invocatory rather than scopic, suggesting the battle for language both later engage in, with Moses describing her accent and repeatedly emphasises what she “sounds” like (MA 23). Moses’s scopic drive yields no tangible insights: other than “little thing”, and that she had “Afro hair, Afro blouse, and Afro gleam in the eye” (MA 17), readers get no visual description of Brenda, and the focus on Brenda’s eye, resonant with Lacan’s anecdote on realising one’s status as object vis-à-vis the ‘gaze’ of a sardine tin (Four 95), already locates the gaze, and thus power, at her site, which unsettles the writer’s superior vision and his status as autonomous individual.274

Indeed, Moses’s gaze on Brenda is obscured: while he adopts a voyeuristic position when Bob attacks Brenda (MA 23), for which Brenda hits Bob and has to take off her skirt because of ensuing bloodstains, he catches “only a fleeting glimpse, because she fling the maxi [skirt] […] and cover me over” (MA 24), which he strikingly, and repeatedly, compares implicitly to a camera obscura (MA 23; 24). With Jonathan Crary, the meaning of the camera obscura as “philosophical metaphor” changed from it standing “as model, in both rationalist and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world” to it becoming a model

274 The ‘Afro’ hints at the primacy of the signifier ‘black’ as umbrella term for various ethnicities in the 1970s.
“for procedures and forces that conceal, invert, and mystify truth” (29) in the nineteenth century. This image here exemplifies the text’s play with notions of ‘truth’ on various levels and reminds of Moses as disingenuous point of view initiated in Londoners.\textsuperscript{275} For once, it hints at the inherent treacherousness of the novel’s realistic mode, as the mimesis associated with photography, the supposed reproduction of ‘reality’, is constantly undermined in Moses’s misrecognition of people, situations, or linguistic meanings, which questions both the efficacy of this mode and the existence of a definite external reality or truth to portray in the first place. Further, it suggests how to engage with discourses of gender and creation in the novel. As akin to Lacan’s mirror stage, the ‘upside down’ image reminds of the alienation of the subject in the imaginary – and ideological – domain (Valente 160), which recalls the incompatibility of the fantasies of literary and masculine mastery with Moses’s imago.

Moses’s literary banter with Brenda in this context reads as situated at the site of the real, that is, as a resurfacing of a threat to representation. The repeated hint at having a “stroke” with Brenda (\textit{MA} 26), as a further example of the obscured gaze and the novel’s play with authenticity, illustrates this. While suggesting sexual intercourse, its semantics also comprise the ‘mark of a pen’ – Brenda is as such already introduced less as inspiring muse than as literary rival long before they debate Moses’s writing,\textsuperscript{276} a notion the text continuously suggests and attempts to repress. Thus, like Black Power and the texts of Selvon’s contemporaries Lamming and Salkey, Brenda is spatially confined to the basement, suggesting that both black and feminist writing are displaced to the real from where they threaten the subject’s coherence. Further, it is Brenda who ultimately ‘penetrates’ Moses: Moses has locked away his memoirs in the penthouse, but, in another homoerotic allusion, Bob, tempted by Brenda who promises him sex, picks Moses’s lock, to “reciprocate to his disgusting lust” (\textit{MA} 104). While Moses, Bob, and Brenda correspond to the “erotic triangle” Sedgwick has identified as a classical trope in literature that serves to strengthen male power,\textsuperscript{277} the reinforcement of this power is here hindered, as it is Bob who ensures the metaphorical female act of penetration. By invading Moses privacy and as only character able to catch a glimpse of the memoirs on an intratextual level, Brenda also turns the male gaze around and intervenes in his fantasies of authorship:

‘You sit down upstairs polishing homilies and belabouring clichés, face-lifting warnout [sic.] phrases, and you say you are writing literature?’ […] ‘The only sentence you know, Moses,’ Brenda went on, delighting in my discomfiture and misery, ‘is what criminals get. Your

\textsuperscript{275}Moses compares himself again to a “trigger-happy photographer” when he does ‘research’, “holding down my precious annotations” (\textit{MA} 75), which speaks to literature’s function to capture ‘reality’.

\textsuperscript{276}Brenda outwardly echoes the muse’s function, as she is figured as a prerequisite for Moses’s writing, providing “a woman’s touch” and enabling Moses to “work on these Memoirs” and “work up inspiration” (\textit{MA} 26).

\textsuperscript{277}\textit{See Between Men} (1985). Sedgwick argues that in constellations of two men and a woman, which she bases on the schema of the triangle, the bond between the men is strengthened through the rivalry for a woman. The woman, here, is a vehicle in homosocial bonds to consolidate patriarchal power structures and the bonding between men is ultimately not endangering masculinity, but “definitive of it” (50).
conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax, and your figures of speech only fall between 10 and 20. Where you have punctuation you should have allegory and predicates, so that the pronouns appear in the correct context. In other words, you should stick to oral communication and leave the written word to them what knows their business.’ (MA 103–105)

The scene is framed with allusions to Brenda-the-muse penetrating Moses: not only does she effect the picking of the lock, she delights in his “discomfiture” (MA 104), has fired a “double-barrel barrage” at Moses (MA 105), and left a “nasty taste in my mouth” (MA 108). Moses has to ‘gag’ and almost ‘puke’ (MA 108), and cover his ears after her criticism (MA 105). This point especially renders Brenda’s voice as objet petit a, the lost and disavowed object separated from the subject with its entry into the symbolic. Brenda’s voice is accordingly described in unsettling terms – “she sneer”, “she smirked” (MA 104), and has “one of those scandalous kya-kya barrack-yard laughs” (MA 103).

The belittling of Moses’s literary creative force, the undermining of phallic writerly power, results in Moses’s feminisation, narratively performed in citing a sentimental discourse that feminises Moses and results in “melancholia” (MA 105), a condition that, according to Silverman’s reading of Freud and Luce Irigaray, is connected to female subjectivity (Acoustic 155): “‘How can I think now?’ I say, and I was almost in tears […]. ‘A masterpiece was coming to me, but your vicious assessment of my work has stultified my brains.’” (MA 105). In an upending of myths of hypermasculinity and of the muse affirming the subject as artist and as male, Brenda assumes the role of the – usually male – calypsonian by performing a symbolic ‘stick fight’, here in form of assuming the pen-as-phallus through the stick as metaphorised pen, and by assuming the calypsonian’s sexual prowess.

278 The citing of a discourse of melancholia, serving a narcissistic negotiation and valorisation of failure, akin to Moses Migrating’s preface, can be read as an affirmative framing of Moses’s agon and loss of male authorial power in terms of a “charismatic ideology of creativity” (Feulner 394) that serves to reinstate the male artistic subject as exceptionally sensitive and perceptive. Thus, Moses repeatedly yearns for having his failure acknowledged by Bob, yet self-fashioning via the trope of melancholia as creative marginal (Neumann 282) is similarly suspended, as his “[w]oe” (MA 105) falls on deaf ears.

279 This upending of creative myths and the interruptions of the male, original author’s apotheosis also reverberate with a rising authority of female writing and feminist literary criticism’s attack on grand narratives in the 1970s.

While Moses’s ‘violation’ might be read as staging an ironic, hyperbolised self-fashioning as suffering artiste manqué, misunderstood and rejected by a philistine audience,

278 Cf. Dawson (31–33) for an outline of calypso aesthetics.

279 As Moses claims: “[I was] getting even more irritable that he [Bob] couldn’t notice the mood I was in” (MA 106).
concomitant with Moses’s intermittent stylisation as Prometheus, the point at which this criticism occurs is crucial, as the subject positions of Brenda and Moses have here already become blurred: Brenda’s ‘idiosyncrasies’, visible in her attempt at literary criticism, her “faulty grammar in […] [her] implied self-description” (Dickinson, “Harlequin” 97) parallel Moses’s idiosyncratic use of language, her “sarcasm” slips Moses “for a moment” (MA 99), whereas it is usually Moses’s sarcasm that slips others (MA 73), and, most tellingly, while Brenda criticises Moses’s use of alliteration before, she does so in resorting to alliteration herself: “‘People Panic as Police Pounce?’ She ignore that one. ‘How about Brutal Babylon Batter Blacks?’ ‘Stop making up alliterations. Concentrate on something thoughtful, terse, taut and telling” (MA 103). The novel does not neatly contrast male and female positions and uphold distinctions of gender and sexuality, but enacts the ‘self’ as always already ‘other’. Brenda presents an impasse to Moses’s artistry in two ways: she is hindered muse, but more so that which the subject has disavowed and which now returns, i.e. the acknowledgement that the subject(’s language) is always already determined by the Other: in this context, this indicates that the Caribbean writer’s text is a priori confined by socio-political concerns and neglected for its aesthetic merit, making legible the subject’s circumscription by the dominant ideology.

Here, it is crucial that Brenda also functions as postcolonial critic. Her focus on Moses’s writing needing more “allegory” and his sticking to “oral communication” (MA 105) reminds of Caribbean Voices’ editor Swanzy, who interpellated West Indian artists into paradigms of representativeness and a folk aesthetic that rested on giving stories ‘local colour’. Brenda’s criticism, accordingly, seems to weigh heavier on Moses than Galahad’s: whereas Galahad, in a quasi-Marxist fashion, criticises content, Brenda attacks form (MA 105). The text here revalues aesthetics over politics, respectively illustrates that gaining cultural capital from the former is aggravated for the Caribbean artist due to an interpellation into ideals of an engaged authorship, and remind of Adorno’s view of the artwork as signifying “beyond its aesthetic complexion […] only by virtue of that aesthetic complexion” (Aesthetic 248). Consequently, in the wake of this event, Moses’s ‘house of literature’ then also starts to crumble: the Commonwealth tenants now impinge upon Moses instead of Bob, to whom he had delegated his duties, making Moses aware of the dilapidation of the house (MA 111–113) and thus correct Moses’s gaze, i.e. his misrecognition of the state of his ‘mansion’ and, subsequently, the ‘self’. Moses, more abstractly, is now forced to acknowledge that the ‘house of literature’, resonant with the canon, is ‘falling apart at the seams’, speaking to a partial traversal of the fantasy of coherence and of a Crusoean self-fortification and -begetting.
7.3.4 The Pleasures of Misrecognition: Moses Ascending’s Stifling of Laughter

Selvon’s employment of artist myths to highlight the artist’s inevitable occupation of a position of complicity, which pre-empts fantasies of an ‘ethical’ engaged writing, is also cleverly extended to the reader. Moses’s appellation to the reader is visible in his employment of an archaic address in the tradition of Charles Dickens or Henry Fielding. The “Dear” or “gentle R.” Moses frequently addresses himself to functions as a further strategy of self-embourgeoisement and as an exaggeration of the imagined readership of the novel in form of “cosmopolitan, elite readers […] as consumers of a global commodity” (Brouillette, Postcolonial 56) who comprise a certain amount of cultural capital. While Giselle Rampaul conceives this address as emphasising “the contrast between the oral and scribal modes as prescribed by the English literary tradition” (“Voice” 316), I read it as the text’s foregrounding of readerly response-ability and as a means to inscribe readers into the complicity that Selvon sees as inevitable for the artist subject. Selvon’s obstructing of the novel as “a work of art [that] should say something”, i.e. should have a clear message which, following Adorno, is a unifying hallmark of both conservative and liberal tendencies (“Commitment” 179), prevents readers from assuming a position of complacency and of ‘moral superiority’ – more precisely, readers are confronted with their implication in processes of ‘othering’ and the fallacies of a belief in a progressive ‘liberal’ Britain as increasingly attuned to the cultural ‘other’.

As Selvon’s texts, most notably the middle novel Moses Ascending, are highly ‘comical’, the novel’s creation of laughter – which I view as tragicomic rather than comic – and the thereby ensuing creation of an ‘ethics of otherness’ needs closer examination, and here I wish to build a bridge to the subject positions the text offers for readers and the role of the artist myths herein. Selvon, I contend, employs a textual strategy of creating a ‘painful pleasure’ that corresponds to Barthes’s idea of readerly bliss. To understand the evocation and function laughter has for the novel, a closer look at the narrator Moses’s ‘split’, i.e. the already mentioned ‘schizophrenia’ is warranted. Whereas Lamming’s readers are, as I have shown, fortified against incorporating the ‘other’ into dominant systems of knowledge through frustrating their gaze and Harris’s are firmly oriented towards the author, Selvon’s ‘portrait of the reader’ presents yet a different strategy: his text frustrates readers’ desire for the author as meaning-creating instance by interpellating them into Moses’s errors. Moses as split subject, visible in his assuming different positions, such as the misunderstood, misappropriated, or even violated (‘penetrated’) artist, provokes laughter, but not in an immunising form that fortifies the reading subject against inconvenient truths and results in relief and de-tension. The novel rather effects a more radical form, best described as a stifled form of laughter, which provokes the reading subject’s traversal of its fantasies and hints at moments of “excess [where] pleasure chokes and
reels into bliss” (Barthes, *Pleasure* 8). This strategy is continuously alienating, its disturbing, even painful quality serves to circumvent a closure of the text and hinders readers from emerging with a feeling of recognition and containment.

Reading is a central topic in *Moses Ascending*, a fact that unites it with the other artist novels herein discussed. Jean Jacques Weber has commented on the novel’s incorporation of ‘unreliable readers’, in form of Brenda and Galahad, as a means to effect ideological growth (135). Moses reading the newspaper and the ensuing purchase of the house as a prerequisite for coming into authorship, moreover, echoes Barthes’s transition from reader to writer (*MA* 1). In contrast to Lamming’s Collis, Moses is worried that *nobody* wants to read his memoirs (*MA* 45), whereas Collis was worried about a “million” judgemental readers (*TE* 102), and both reactions illustrate the anxiety inherent to Caribbean authorship due to the restriction of their texts to sociological aspects (Ramchand 88) and their incompatibility with the demands of the literary field, in Selvon’s case more pronounced through the now increased compartmentalisation of Caribbean literature in market niches. Here, this is emphasised by the work’s inscription of literary criticism in form of Galahad and Brenda, as demonstrated above.

To enquire into the novel’s staging and defamiliarisation of readerly expectations, we might first turn to another episode where Moses figures as quasi-reader. In one scene, Moses dons the mask of an ethnographer in aiming to learn and write about his tenants Faizull/Farouk’s slaughtering of a sheep, emblematic of the artist leaving his ‘ivory tower’ to immerse himself in the ‘sacred fount’ in an attempt to “kill two books with one pen” (*MA* 45) – one which is firmly located at the site of artistic autonomy, the memoirs, and another that engages with the stories of the ‘folk’. The conflation of ‘killing’ and the ‘pen’ not only speaks to writing the ‘other’ as violent act, but also exposes both paradigms – of autonomy and of art as *fait social* – as always already implicated in processes of commodification, thereby pre-emptying the supposed economic disinterestedness of the literary field. Here, Moses takes on the cosmopolitan, culturally ‘attuned’ reader’s desire, which lies in seeking authentic representation of the ‘other’ as means to demarcate and fortify the ‘self’. Moses’s disappointment in the scene’s lack of ‘exotic’ appeal – “Is that all? […] What about all them rites and rituals?” (*MA* 57) – foregrounds the stereotypical expectations Selvon locates at the site of the reader but pre-empts these in emphasising the scene’s banality. The attempt to make sense of the events through the (distorted) lens of Greek mythology, the myths of Medusa and Jason and the Argonauts, where he twice interpellates readers through interjections (*MA* 56), further serves to frustrate readers’ “essentialist notions of authenticity” (Sommer 118) by foregrounding the symbolic structuring – here through myths – of the ‘other’ and the misrecognition of the particular instance for the universal.
Most insightful, here, is Moses’s presentation of the sheep’s liver he was given by Faizull to Bob, which functions as a poetological comment of the author’s ‘making digestible’ the cultural ‘other’ for readers’ consumption: Bob’s reaction to the liver, as a sign of absolute cultural ‘otherness’, echoes Kristeva’s notion of the abject (Powers), with Bob looking “as if he want to throw up” (MA 57). In donning the mask of Crusoe-the-civiliser, Moses then instructs him to “[s]eason it with a little salt” and promises that “[i]t will make your cock stand up” (MA 57), resorting to a logic of ‘sex sells’. While Michel Fabre finds that Selvon, in addressing both a European as well as Trinidadian audience, “had to create a literary language suited to cultural particulars while creating a bond of sympathetic immediacy with foreign readers unconversant with West Indian culture who sometimes required nearly anthropological information” (“Samuel” 153), Selvon here does precisely the opposite by confronting readers’ with their demands for the ‘exotic’. Moses’s final assessment that “[y]ou could fool a white man with any shit if he believe it will prolong the sexual act” (MA 57) in this sense reads highly metafictional: sustaining the ‘sexual act’ – in Scholes’s terms, the “reciprocal relationship” (27) – between author and reader, in other words, the reader’s desire, the text suggests, necessitates a presentation of ‘otherness’ as ‘seasoned’ with the marks of civilisation so as to make it palatable and incorporable into the imagined ‘self’, akin to Moses’s incorporation of the story into his memoirs. In this, the scene also constitutes an astute comment on the literary field and the artist’s awareness of needing to cater to an audience that expects a recognisable cultural ‘other’.

Selvon’s implication of the reader is salient in scenes of sexual boasting and objectification, firmly in line with the overall ‘erotics’ of the text and the reason for the novel’s uneasy assessment in this regard. Here, the novel frequently implicates the reader into the artist’s gaze, which is oftentimes voyeuristic, through either the second-person pronoun or direct address and thereby creates an uncomfortable familiarity with the reader – in Sommer’s words, through “borrowed authenticity” it provides an intimacy with the ‘other’ (156), but with an ‘other’ who is perceived as profoundly inappropriate. Kate Houlden claims that the opening pages of Londoners draw readers into the male migrant’s perspective as sexual observers and involve them in a “phantasmatic stereotyping” (90), yet while it does so without resorting to an overtly present bond between narrator/author-character and reader, Moses Ascending often uses

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280 For Kristeva, food loathing is “the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection” (Powers 2). With her example of milk, Kristeva illustrates how this reaction is tied to the separation from the mother, whereupon a self is formed but always remains fragile. Disgust and resulting abjection is as such indicative of the ambiguity that characterises the self, of an awareness that ‘I’ is always ‘other’: “during that course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (3).
scenes of sexual objectification precisely to alienate readers from both the position of detached observers as well as from engagement by foregrounding these structures of voyeurism.

I illustrate this with one of the novel’s most notorious scenes exemplary. Moses here muses on black women by drawing on scripts of a hyper-sexualised Caribbean masculinity, enacting what Lewis calls a Caribbean trope of ‘man talk’ that has its origins in the calypso (“Man Talk” 2) by drawing upon a supposed shared knowledge between Moses and the reader:

Blessed be the coming of this new generation of Black Britons, and blessed be I that I still alive and well to witness their coming of age from piccaninny to black beauty. It is a sight for sore eyes to see them flounce and bounce about the city. Be it bevy or crocodile, Woman’s Lib or Woman’s Tit, they are on the march, sweeping through the streets. [...] Like how you see an ordinary girl tits jump up and down if she is running [...] The tide is turning, yes sir. (MA 15)

Page has observed that the mediation between the host and immigrant culture is often acted out through sexual meetings (18) and in this context, the text draws upon the stereotypical hypersexualised black male, an ‘other’, fetishised figure who is the object of white desire and derision. In inscribing him as “everything that the wishful-shameful fantasies of culture want him to be, an enigma of inversion and of hate” (Marriott x), he functions as sustaining readers ideological fantasy of a ‘civilised Britishness’. In line with this, author and reader here are initially finding ‘common ground’ through the scopic consumption of the black female, but this passage also posits, next to the depicted female and racial ‘other’, the depicting male racial ‘other’ at the core of the reader’s voyeuristic desire and frustrates a demarcation from the same to sustain a fantasy of British superiority. As such, Moses here functions as a mirror that confronts the – mostly white British – readership with its own stereotypes and constructs of racially or ethnically marked masculinities. The scene above initially focuses on Moses’s own consciousness with the emphasis on ‘I’, but then moves from the singular to a plural black perspective – “Our females are in a class by themselves” (MA 15) – and eventually implicates the white men in its voyeuristic description as well - “[w]hite window cleaners and navies digging up the road want to drop everything and follow the pied pipers” (MA 15) – until the perspective is neither a specifically racially one, but incriminates all men – black and white, the “poor Oriental” and the “lusty-blooded Englishman” (MA 17). Additionally, the narrator makes it clear that he has been addressing himself to the reader all this time in an attempt to convey ‘insider knowledge’ about (black) women and implicates the supposedly white reader in his voyeuristic gaze as well. This unsettles the trope of the hypersexualised black male through a demonstration of an all-prevalent complicity in structures of racialisation and sexualisation of (white and black) women and illustrates what Houlden calls the “disavowed sexual undercurrents of Empire” (91) rather than the perspective of individual men.

The novel intertwines such scenes with structures of humour; here, for example, created through Moses’s misrecognition as detached ethnographer, and most often caused through the
incongruency between _histoire_ and _discours_ – the what and the how of narration – and Moses’s inability to ‘read’ others, such as Galahad’s Black Power message.\(^2\) The text frequently plays with evoking laughter and immediately stifling it, such as for example in the aforementioned scene where the ‘black man’s’ condition in Britain is rendered through the eyes of Crusoe-the-conqueror. In a psychoanalytic conception of humour, jokes and laughter serve as forms of repression that “protect the libidinal subject against traumatic eruptions of the unconscious” (de Kesel 75), and similarly, we are briefly confronted with something that is usually censored or unconscious, such as internalised forms of racism or misogyny. Following Mary Eloise Ragland, laughter indicates points of collision “between the logic, appropriate language of the culture (norms, values, mores) and the subjective, socially inappropriate language of desire and tension” (103), which it then neutralises and thereby restores us as “masters – subjects – in our own houses” (75). This conceptualisation is helpful in approaching Selvon’s tactics of disinterpellating the reader from achieving this wholeness: while Moses’s misrecognition of his own situation and the situation of ‘others’ within the dominant order forms the collision point between what is deemed appropriate and readers’ unconscious desires, the text continuously withholds a cathartic resolution and readers’ ensuing feeling of ‘righteousness’.

What interferes into this catharsis is Moses’s occupying the position of the perpetrator instead of victim, in a further positioning of the author as complicit, which disturbs the boundaries between the “bad old essential white subject” and “the new essentially good black subject”, as Hall phrases it (“Ethnicities” 444). This is expressive of a regime of representation – and reception – that rests on a restricted economy of enunciation. In Moses’s aforementioned gazing on black women, for instance, his musings from a position as detached observer from his ‘ivory tower’ on the ‘new generation of Black Britons’ eerily resembles the white master’s overlooking of a plantation. Readerly resolution through a purifying laughter is further withheld through the resurfacing of the history of the black female’s double objectification in a “pornography of empire” (Jackson & Scott 22) as uncanny elements, as the real that thereby troubles readers’ consumption of these scenes. The abrupt reference to the women’s posture as inherited from “the days of slavery” (MA 15) is one example where the comic surface is disrupted by a reminder of the traumatic past, as is Moses’s culmination of his objectifying comments with a shift to the women shopping for wigs: “the greatest invention will be when you can walk in black as midnight and emerge as pure and white as the driven snow” (MA 16). These interruptions alert readers to Moses’s sexism as intertwined with racist misrecognition, of the internalisation of the ‘white gaze’, particularly with that what is abject in that gaze, i.e.

\(^2\) For Baugh, for example, the novel’s comedy lies in “the language […] [that] arises from its literary pretentiousness, which is in turn humorously undermined by the slips into vernacular and incorrect English” (6).
in white, British discourse, in form of a Fanonian epidermalisation of inferiority. Laughter, in such scenes, is continuously teased, but prevented from fully emerging, whereby readers are sustained in a state of suspended subjection, textual closure is denied, and the consolidation of a coherent ideological system, in which these disturbing misrecognitions would be resolved, refused. This marks the unsettling quality of the novel and the disconcerting reading experience and brings it close to a text of bliss – in Barthes’s sense one of a profound discomfort, loss, and unsettlement of reader’s values (Pleasure 14). As readers follow Moses in the process of creating, these scenes demand a correction of the errors in Moses’s perspective – and their own.

Yet while these elaborations imply that Selvon’s employment of artistic mythemes amounts to the advancement of an altogether cynical take on ‘postcolonial authorship’, he does posit a possible aesthetic for writing that suggests how ‘becoming-father’ and thus complicit with the Law could be prevented, and this involves the reader in meaning-making processes. This ‘other’ form of writing – and reading – relates to the character(s) Faizull/Farouk. Moses initially tries to exploit Faizull/Farouk’s stories for his memoirs, an enterprise that entails reinscribing them as homogenised ‘other’ for the pleasure of the reader, as he is not willing to “divide up the Asian races” (MA 51) and later attempts to substitute ‘Paki’s’ account with stories of “blacks” (MA 90). Moses’s steaming open of the letters that seemingly pass between Faizull and Farouk, rendered in terms of a forceful defloration (MA 60–61), further attests to the harmful repercussions of penetrating and commodifying the stories of others. The same experience is made by Moses himself at the novel’s end, where Brenda offers to incorporate “edit[ed] […] extracts in our paper”, as any “reputable English publisher” would reject the memoirs (MA 137), a nod towards the Black presses that emerge in the British literary landscape in the 1960s and 1970s. This possible fragmentation of Moses’s text and its “misconstrue[ing] […] for their own purposes” (MA 139), i.e., giving the text over to the readers and dissolving the memoir’s imaginary wholeness and cohesion, is, however, also rendered as a possible new beginning, as the ending has Moses rather hopeful: “I have an epilogue on my sleeve” (MA 140), rendering artistic – and subject – formation as interminable.

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282 Fanon describes this as a “racial epidermal schema” (112): “If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily economic; subsequently, the internalization, or better, the epidermalization of this inferiority” (13).

283 The increasing commercialisation and spectacularisation of literature, which becomes virulent from the 1980s onwards, is anticipated in Moses’s wondering whether Faizull and Farouk would “provide enough drama and intrigue not only for a book but for TV and the films” (MA 45). Visual media, in the novel, is associated with a US-market through ‘BP’, the US-American Black Power activist, which resonates with Lamming’s assessment that the United States can only provide economic capital and are less attuned to “the book”, the embodiment of British cultural capital (Dalleo 161). On a less cultural-elitist note, Selvon’s reference might also constitute a nod towards the rise of black British film, where filmmakers like Horace Ové are increasingly gaining critical acclaim for their work.
Farouk, as invention of Faizull, a fact that is revealed late in the text to both Moses and the readers, demonstrates the text’s revelling in staging the méconnaissance of ‘others’, which is counterposed against the author’s task of inventing and ‘fixing’ the subject. Moses can only encounter Faizull, whereas Farouk, on the other hand, constantly withdraws from Moses – “How is it, that I can never set eyes on Farouk?” (MA 58) – sustaining “the mystery” (MA 59) by, in a stance somewhat similar to Lamming, having the subject ‘flee’ the author’s gaze. His meeting with Moses is constantly deferred (MA 58), where mostly, as Faizull relates, Moses misses him just by a second (MA 60), and his place is assumed by others (MA 54–55), thereby spurring Moses’s – and readers’ – desire to ‘know’ Farouk. ‘Farouk’ is thus the ideal representation of the other and the ideal manifestation of the required reading process to encounter ‘otherness’, as this figure exposes its imaginary construction through preconceived notions and stereotypes. He is the epitome of the shifting signifier, whose enigmatic non/presence is crucial for Moses’s desire to write, which is in turn continuously deferred but sustained, in the same way as the ‘quest’ for Farouk sustains Moses’s dialogues with Faizull (MA 58–60). The text’s positioning of Farouk as gap, unable to be seen and fixed, encapsulates Selvon’s aesthetic theory as regards representations of ‘otherness’: the only possible non-violent form of representation, the text suggests, is to make it ‘legible’ only as empty signifier, thereby confronting readers with and pre-empting the stereotypes with which it comes to be inscribed. Selvon, then, renounces the author’s authority and delegates the responsibility to the reader.
7.4 Artistic Productivity and the Authority of Opposition in V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987)

Trinidadian-born British author V.S. Naipaul, while being the most critically acclaimed writer in this study, is probably the most controversial. Where Selvon has been faulted for his depiction of gender issues and a ‘postcolonial tentativeness’, Naipaul is often outrightly described as a ‘mimic man’, a “traitor to the colonized condition” suffering from “colonial nostalgia” (Casanova 212), whose strive to be “more English than the English” (211–212) and assimilation is seen as having ultimately been rewarded with a Booker Prize in 1971, a knighthood in 1990, and the Nobel Prize in 2001. The reception of Naipaul’s eleventh novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, one of only a few of his texts who are set largely in England, demonstrates these tendencies. Indeed, Dennis Walder’s famous concept of ‘postcolonial nostalgia’, describing a longing for the lost glories of Empire, also takes *Enigma* as a prime example in this regard. Anna Jörngården points out the vocabulary developed for this ‘complicity’ – Chris Searle terms it ‘Naipaulicity’ and Anthony Appiah the “Naipaul fallacy” (236; FN 2). Dagmar Barnouw finds that “the single most shocking aspect of Naipaul’s work has been the ‘metacolonial’ tentativeness of his observational position” and “Naipaul’s modern understanding of truth as processual trust in evidence shared with others is a priori suspect” in postcolonial criticism (1). Thus, a dominant strand in research reads what forms the basis of my enquiry – the novel’s self-reflexive staging of the desire to write a self – as yet another attempt to become ‘more fully English’ and to memorialise an almost-bygone England. Bruce King has rightly tied in the largely negative criticism with a critical propensity “to divide the world in such opposing polarities as centre […] and margins” and “to read literature as politics” (Naipaul 195), a fallacy I will also critically engage.

The work has, however, also triggered opposite interpretations that emphasise its inherent ambivalence or see it as more ‘postcolonial’ due to a rather reconciliatory portrayal of Trinidad that distinguishes it from previous novels. It is also this discordant reception that makes it such an interesting case study, as well as the fact that the novel is commonly seen as a watershed in Naipaul’s oeuvre. ‘Reconciliation’ is, in fact, a key term in this second strand of criticism

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284 References to *The Enigma of Arrival* refer to the 1987 Penguin Books edition and are henceforth abbreviated as ‘E’. All emphases and capitalisation trace back to the author Naipaul unless stated otherwise.

285 Walder does acknowledge, however, that the narrator’s identification “with the nostalgically imagined, idealised ‘other’ of England” also shows an understanding that “this other is a construct”, an “identification made, based on desire” (33; original emphasis).

286 This point has been repeated time and again; among its most prominent proponents are Edward Said, Derek Walcott, or Salman Rushdie. Gregory Strachan’s *Paradise and Plantation* (2002) provides an outline over earlier Naipaul criticism.

287 For readings that emphasise aspects of disjunction, performance, or dislocation, cf. e.g. the chapters and articles on *Enigma* by Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (2010), Sanjay Krishnan, “Formative Dislocation” (2013), and Peter Morey, “Performing Identity”.
that attempts to stress its ‘postcolonial merit’. Florence Labaune-Demeule, pointing out processes of revision and intertextuality in the novel, emphasises the reconciliation between “the man’s point of view and the writer’s vision” (“De Chirico” 113) into a “coherent personality” (117). Timothy Weiss notes the artist’s ‘split’ in conjunction with the ultimate “unification” and synthesis of diverging perceptions (Margins 210). Even newer work that is indebted to poststructuralist thought, for instance Philip Dickinson’s “Enclosure, Dispersal, and the Enigma of Arrival” (2016), which emphasises notions of dispersal, still cannot shed the idea of a teleological trajectory that sees the novel ultimately constituting “a space in which healing and a reconciliation with the writer’s historical contingency and finitude can be achieved” (61). These assessments already hint at the particular reception of a trope of the artist novel my reading will dispute: the ultimate ‘healing’ of the ‘split’ artistic subject, which I see as stemming from a tendency in postcolonial criticism to, as Sédimeier best describes it, approach ‘difference’ from within the hegemonic episteme and transform “the notion of being subject to a discursive formation […] into the idea of an identity script to be reclaimed and self-written” (5). My reading, while attuned more to this second strand of criticism that attests to the ambivalences of his work, disputes both of these tendencies in Naipaul criticism – the reproaches of Anglophile nostalgia as well as ideals of a ‘postcolonial reconciliation’, as both are based on notions of a uniform and cohesive identity.

In the novel, contrary to all other works discussed in this study, the – yet again – unnamed narrator, a writer from Trinidad with Indian heritage, educated in Oxford – one notes the similarities to Naipaul – is already an established author, who has produced some travel books, a work about Africa, and a historical narrative, upon which he also reflects in the novel. In his “middle life” (E 19), the narrator withdraws to a cottage in rural Wiltshire, on the grounds of a large old manor house in search for a “second life” (E 88). Accentuating aspects of landscape, ruins, the withdrawal to the countryside to ‘recollect’ one’s thoughts in tranquillity, and melancholic reflections, the novel obviously alludes to a Romantic artistic tradition, as Dickinson’s and Jönngården’s studies have pointed out, and it is in this vein that most readings also see it as attached to a glorification of England’s imperial past. Divided into five sections, the novel continuously returns to and revises earlier episodes. The novel starts with the chapter “Jack’s Garden”, where the middle-aged protagonist reflects on his years in Wiltshire in the 1970s, before moving back to his departure from Trinidad and arrival in London.

288 Similar tendencies prevail in Janice Valls-Russell’s reading of the novel’s ending as restoring vision and creativity in a ‘second birth’ (147), in Elisabetta Tarantino, who finds the novel’s main concern to be “the bringing together of man and writer” (170), and in Abdulrazak Gurnah, who sees a “convergence of the ‘writer and the man’ into a stable synthesis” (5).

289 As Jönngården states, the staged ‘ruin walking’ can be read as a “distinct mode of literary expression” (212). Dickinson, likewise, reads the formation of writerly subjectivity as based on a Romantic lyric form.
in “The Journey” as a young man. The subsequent chapters “Ivy” and “Rooks” return to Wiltshire, with both chapters frequently reverting to parts narrated in earlier chapters. The final, highly metafictional part “The Ceremony of Farewell” again shifts time and place by taking readers for once to the narrator’s present, i.e. the time of the novel’s production, and to Trinidad for the funeral of his sister. Both the second and last chapter highlight a common theme in the Künstlerroman: they reminisce and reflect upon the writing of the very book The Enigma of Arrival (E 91; 309).

With regard to the adherence to the genre of the Künstlerroman, Enigma is then also most acknowledged in this regard in scholarly literature of all the artist narratives discussed herein and its central topic of writing is comparatively given the most attention among these. King, for instance, states that art in the novel functions as privileged means to arrest the flux of the world (139), a statement that my reading will contradict, as I see the novel’s conception of the artist as rather foregrounding the versatility to respond to the constant flux. In terms of style, the novel has, again, reminded many of two other, famous Künstlerromane, as Richard Allen exemplary states: the novel “carries echoes of two of the most literary of all novels”, these are Joyce’s Portrait, by way of its short sentences, and Proust’s A la recherche, particularly through its allusive writing (“Post-Colonial” 148). In Naipaul’s case, as in many others in this study, the Künstlerroman mode is conflated with (auto)biography, which is triggered by the employment of an autobiographical avatar. The autobiographical implication also seems to underlie the scarcity of poststructuralist perspectives on the text. Gillian Dooley pointedly states that “[t]heoretical notions such as the ‘death of the author’ […] make little sense when discussing Naipaul and his work” (1). One of the few, and the most outspoken, exceptions to this pattern is provided by John Walker, who reads the novel as a “radical postmodern experiment” (67) in its “engagement with the retrieval of history and the re-ordering of the constitutive pieces of a complex mythology” (82). The prevailing unease with a postmodern or poststructuralist decentering of the autobiographical subject also leads criticism to neglect the complexities of writerly desire in the novel. It is arguably the image of the ‘split’ that then also splits the Künstlerroman from autobiography: the narrator’s focus on the chasm between man and writer, so often repeated in the novel, can also be read as a tongue-in-cheek nod to critics to detach the protagonist from his author.

290 While the paratext identifies the work as a novel, the similarities to Naipaul’s biography are obvious, even more so than in the other novels I focus on. Craig Raine calls the novel a “thinly disguised autobiography” (210) and Monika Reif-Hülser a literary self-portrait (234). Many others, too, employ the denominator ‘autobiography’, such as Michael Thorpe (501) or Bruce King (Naipaul 139), while Tobias Döring more tentatively speaks of an “autobiographical narrator” (123) and Sara Suleri of a “postautobiography”, as it implies an extension of the focus on the individual as ‘native informant’ to pondering the processes and ethics of representation (166).
In this chapter I propose that Naipaul’s text engages mythemes of the *Künstlerroman* to fashion an artistic subjectivity whose authority rests in processes of interrogation and adaption, which results in an ultimate reinstallation of the artist as a ‘refracted Romantic’, i.e. a more sensitive being, who is, however, astutely attuned to the demands in the literary field. Naipaul, other than Selvon, thus never completely abandons the belief in the artist as superior being as such and is therefore somewhat similar to Harris, yet his ideal of artistic originality is imagined as resting precisely in the versatility to react to the various crises – economic, spiritual, aesthetic – that stem from a changed cultural sphere under Thatcher and the author’s positionality in it. Through narrative strategies of repetition and revision, *Enigma* negotiates the minority writer’s embeddedness in a by now increasingly economised literary sphere where marginality is both a commodity and instrumentalised. The dominant tropes of growth and decay can here be understood as both engaging ideologies of productivity – economically and artistically – and a means to fulfil a Blochian ‘not yet’. The citing of authorial models and the hysteric-ironic strategy of staging an aesthetics of the unfinished, manifest in images of disillusionment and disappointment and the narrator’s constant re-vision, I contend, are less an anxious than a self-reflexive enactment of shifts – and contradictions – in the literary field in the 1980s and a means to respond to diverging demands. Most importantly, here, the desire of the Other is figured as the desire for representational means to criticise these developments and fashion a position of artistic opposition to the period’s politics, which manifests in probing subjectivities that are ‘other’ to the middle-class, ‘British’ values characterising the period.291

7.4.1 Solipsistic Interrogations and the Ideologies of the ‘Split Subject’

In tracing the narrator’s attempt to write the very novel we are presented with,292 *Enigma* is the only thoroughly self-begetting text in this study and, according to Hutcheon’s definition of the narcissistic narrative, most apt for an enquiry into metafictional strategies of literary self-fashioning. In this chapter I contend that the emphasis on the novel’s self-begetting nature serves as a strategy to ponder various forms of productivity, a theme the novel is centrally concerned with and which is connected to a variety of artistic and masculine myths. One of the most poignant mythemes cited in *Enigma* in this regard is the aforementioned ‘split’ between the writer and the man. Resonant with the split between art and life, and frequently emphasised in the novel – often directly addressed, but also manifest rhetorically through the continuous

291 Cf. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite on Thatcher’s ‘middle-class approach’. While Thatcher, as she points out, incessantly emphasised the ‘ordinary people’, the “‘bourgeois virtues’ that Thatcher thought united her constituency” were not restricted to the middle class but described values believed to be held by a majority of working people. In an attempt at embourgeoisement of a majority, but crucially not the entire population, ‘bourgeois’ was rebranded as ‘British values’ in an attempt to foster patriotism (159).

292 As the narrator states near the end: “I had thought for years about a book like *The Enigma of Arrival*” (*E* 309).
emphasis on ‘parts’ or ‘half’ – it constitutes a mytheme that is best understood as a conscious strategy of self-fashioning. It serves to probe different, even contradictory, authorial subjectivities in light of a dominant rhetoric of crisis and ‘British values’ as well as large-scale societal shifts in the 1980s and demonstrates an ultimate belief in the artist’s capacity to bring about a more ‘authentic’ vision. In this, I diverge from the dominant tendencies in criticism that see the hypostasised split between ‘writer’ and ‘man’ either as the text’s fear of “not knowing enough” (Barnouw 121), as a separation from the writer’s roots or, conversely, as an attempt “to heal a division” between England and Trinidad (Weiss, Margins 195) and to bring about a postcolonial ‘future’. It is fruitful here to first look at the novel’s ekphrastic mediations, which programmatically lay out the mytheme of the ‘divided self’.

In chapter two, the narrator finds a booklet with paintings by the Italian surrealist Giorgio de Chirico. One of these, The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon, which also lends the novel its (abbreviated) title and decorates the 1987 Knopf and Penguin editions, catches his interest and is figured as inspiring a story he “might one day write about” (E 92). This “pivotal act of ekphrasis” (Hamner 38) and central influence on the novel’s structural devices (45), i.e. the transforming of the painting into the story that ensues, constitutes a poetological comment on Enigma as artist novel:

My story was to be set in classical times, in the Mediterranean. My narrator would write plainly, without any attempt at period style or historical explanation of his period. […] He would move from that silence and desolation, that blankness, to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city […]. The mission he had come on – family business, study, religious initiation – would give him encounters and adventures. […] Gradually, there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. […] He would want to escape […]. At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. (E 92)

The painting describes the text in a nutshell: the narrator writes indeed plainly and without openly voicing historical classification through his arresting Wiltshire in a rather timeless image, the movement from door to door moreover reminds of the movement from chapter to chapter and concomitant different artistic habitus, from the writer’s isolation in the silence of Wiltshire in chapter one to his immersion in ‘life’ through the travels to different locations in chapter two. The journey pondered here also initiates the writer’s journey, which takes readers to different times and locales after the painting is introduced. As such, as Tobias Döring notes, the painting offers the writer “the desired mode to represent his life” (139); and ‘desired’ is the key word here: as David Kennedy argues, an image “is a safe environment in which to explore the desire that is always desire for the Other”, as the “Other-as-image cannot answer back”, and

293 Ekphrasis denotes a rhetorical description of a work of art, a written representation of a visual experience (Wagner 153). In Naipaul’s case, ekphrasis does not apply in its strictest sense, as the focus lies not predominantly on the description of the painting, but on the story the narrator imagines on its basis.
the subject can thereby fantasise an idealised response (134). W.J.T. Mitchell claims that the central goal of ekphrasis is “the overcoming of otherness”, the textual encounter of “semiotic ‘others’” (Picture 156) that rests, however, on oppositions constructed in form of ideologemes – such as visual/verbal, painter/poet, but also active ‘self’/passive ‘other’, which are always context-dependent (157). With these insights, we can approach the ideological function the ekphrastic description here has, especially as regards the text’s envisioning of the desire of the Other, i.e. the demands within the literary field, and the desire and role of the minority writer.

The rhetoric in the passage above is striking and illustrates that Naipaul envisions the artist as only instance able to bridge divisions in times of crises, through which he emerges with new authority. It must be reiterated here that this is a – narcissistically employed – strategy to increase symbolic capital, i.e. the text’s ideological project. In the quotation, the starting with ‘my story’, in a possible blurring of narrator-writer and protagonist, the narrator then moves on to the third person and performs a rhetorical split of ‘man’ and ‘writer’, a self-othering, an image that will come to dominate the novel from now on and form the ground for the ‘hysteric interrogations’ the text performs. This split extends in the description to an image of the artist as initially withdrawn and then entering life, citing a move from ‘Ivory Tower’ to the ‘Sacred Fount’ mytheme, i.e. the artist’s ‘tapping life’ for inspiration, achieving fame, even, as the progression from ‘houses’ to ‘temples’ indicates. At a ‘moment of crisis’, however, he figures the protagonist as withdrawing again, the image of the ship conjuring up a fantasy of returning to the womb as a withdrawal from life into art. On the level of the narrative, this is reflected in the story the narrator envisions to write at the time he encounters the picture, which should be set in a “classical Roman world” (E 92), vis-à-vis the book he is actually writing, which is about an African country, a book “violent […] in its emotions” (E 93); the description of the book gives it away as an intertextual reference to Naipaul’s novel In a Free State, published in 1971. This novel determined Naipaul’s perception as conservative and nostalgic and as guilty of “exaggerating the problems of the decolonized world for a metropolitan audience” (Ghosh 121).

The fantasy of artistic withdrawal thus demonstrates a desire for withdrawing from what the writer perceives as the Other’s desire, i.e. relinquishing “a free ride of the imagination” (E 92) for a more realist, ‘representative’ story, which renders the description of the novel about Africa highly metafictional: “It was a book about fear. All the jokes were silenced by this fear” (E 93). The ekphrasis here functions to mobilise the fantasy of the divided and suffering artist as a self-stylisation, a fact that is later emphasised with the narrator’s decaying health, whose unification and re-emergence as more ‘stable’ being the novel’s quest is structured around, and foregrounds the artist’s power of language through enacting and mastering the “desire to see the world in the word” which “after Derrida, we have come to term the logocentric desire” (Krieger 11).
Consequently, then, the narrator returns to this image in the last chapter, “The Ceremony of Farewell”: “The story had become more personal: my journey, the writer’s journey, the writer defined by his writing discoveries, his ways of seeing […] writer and man separating at the beginning of the journey and coming together again in a second life just before the end” (E 309). This self-declared integration of the authorial subject needs to be viewed sceptically, however, and alerts us to the strategic staging of the writer’s dual nature in Naipaul’s novel. Serving as a narrative bracket that introduces the ‘split’ and declares the healing of the same, the referencing of the painting is meant to suggest that in the process of self-begetting, the narrator has now arrived and made the story ‘his own’, has integrated all conflicts and a coherent artistic self, a “self-made hero” (Schuh 199) with a heightened sensibility is ‘born’, who is now able to finish the book. De Chirico’s painting constitutes a metafictional lens through which to understand the novel, or at least through which the text wants readers to conceive of the artist. While this is the desired mode of self-representation, the narrative switch to the third person gives away that ‘man’ and ‘writer’ are still ‘split’, the inscription into the symbolic has remained incomplete, and different subjectivities prevail. It is in this sense that the enigmatic emphasis on the ‘split’ in the novel and the evocation of artistic mythemes as answers to the Other’s desire should be read – as not (just) as a former colonial’s alienation, but as a rhetorical act that locates the writer’s literary authority in overcoming contradiction and crisis through constant self-interrogation and -repositioning, in line with Naipaul’s overall aesthetics of the unfinished and with fashioning cultural capital under an increasingly socio-cultural impetus of flexibility. In this sense, the novel, although formally quite different, is indeed similar to Harris’s, as both retain the belief in the author as agential and as possessing a heightened sensitivity and insight.

Yet contrary to e.g. Harris’s novel, Naipaul refrains from positing the artist as quasi-metaphysical figure, but more self-consciously reveals him as always already traversed by other desires and imagines his authority precisely in the versatility to respond to these differing demands, respectively envisions the ensuing semblance of authenticity – Döring on a related note speaks of a “tactics of sincerity” (125) – as the writer’s capital. Enigma is then a Künstlerroman of a special sort, as it portrays less a developing sensitivity of the artist but meta-reflects on the degrees of success of forming writerly subjectivity through processes of scrutinising, adapting, and discarding various modes and ‘models’, the writer’s ‘material’, through the presentation of diverging perspectives of narrating and narrated I. As such, one would not exaggerate to term the text’s aesthetic of the unfinished as a profoundly ‘hysterical’

294 According to Maack, this is a typical stance of self-reflexive novels. While they often begin with writerly anxiety, they ultimately portray “daß der Künstler seine persönlichen und ästhetischen Probleme gelöst hat und zum Schreiben zurückkehrt” (53).
Indeed, as Alan Badiou, drawing on Lacan, states, the hysteric’s condition is that of ‘not yet’, which simultaneously bars the master from mastery: “the hysteric comes to the master and says: ‘Truth speaks through my mouth, I am here, you have knowledge, tell me who I am […]’”, but whatever the master’s reply, “we can also anticipate that the hysteric will let him know that it’s not yet it, that the here escapes the master’s grasp, that it must all be taken up again and worked through at length” (1; original emphasis). I propose that this is the mode that best describes Naipaul’s text and the employment of the artist theme: a self-reflexive staging of the subject’s entanglement in a continuous probing of the Other’s Che Vuoi by citing different artistic fantasies and their rejection in an attempt to ‘do it again’ and ‘do it better’.

Processes of interrogation, seeing, or remembering are at the heart of the novel, and the creation of a ‘portrait of the artist’ takes place through different perspectives developed from the scrutiny of ‘material’ that the novel is centrally occupied with. This is located within a crisis topos that here extends to a changed cultural landscape and the status of art, but also the increasing destabilisation of the essential (black) masculine subject that has by now come under assault from both poststructuralist and feminist interventions. The posited ‘split’ manifests in observational pairs, where the narrating I revises the position of the experiencing I and, in the rewriting, foregrounds the aspect of ruin (Döring 123), that is, continuously undermines a more idealised image. Here, the author image itself is no longer a unified portrait but emerges as always shifting and processual, which strategically circumvents the need to take a definite position and presents the artist as ‘ideologically flexible’. In this way, the narrator’s focus on ‘revision’ that programatically starts the novel encapsulates the central theme of probing of different forms of subjecthood via the scopic register:

For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was. […] I saw fields with stripped trees on the boundaries of each field; and far away […] glints of a little river, glints which sometimes appeared, oddly, to be above the level of the land. […] Later – when the land had more meaning, when it had absorbed more of my life […] I was able to think of the flat wet fields with the ditches as ‘water meadows’ or ‘wet meadows’, and the low smooth hills in the background, beyond the river, as ‘downs’. (E 11)

The narrator is positioned as observer of the rural landscape, laying out the novel’s Romantic itinerary in highlighting a notion of “inward development” (Dickinson 56) and an interleaving of interior and exterior landscapes, emphasised through the narrator’s steadily decaying body that mirrors the increasingly derelict landscape. The narrator’s scopic and linguistic control suggest a mastery of this space: whereas the initial view yields ‘wet fields’ and ‘hills’, the mediated, temporarily removed view results in ‘water meadows’ and ‘downs’. Yet these lines,

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295 In fact, as Lacan proposes that the hysteric’s question is geared around duality – “Who am I? a man or a woman? and Am I capable of procreating?” (Psychoses 171; original emphasis) and thus fantasy often appears “in contradictory pairs” (Moncayo 192) – we might read the central split between man and writer in this light and conceive of the fantasies pertaining to ‘growth’ and ‘decay’ as possible answers to this question.
mediated through the “eye of literature” (E 22) also alert readers to the manipulation of these images and already hint at the metafictional nature of the novel: the rewriting of the initial, rather laborious description into the more poetic rhetoric of the ‘water meadows’ mirrors the process of writing the novel and, more specifically, a ‘self’ into being.

In performing a metonymical slide of the signifier – shifting between enacting progress and regress: “But just then […] all that I saw […] were flat fields and a narrow river” (E 11) – Naipaul introduces a poetics of self-interrogation via the figure of the temporally ‘split’ artist as a means to stage the writer’s conflicted interpellation into the social order and demonstrate the versatility to respond to differing demands. In foregrounding a form of sustained, yet always deferred desire that detains from reaching objet a in form of a definite image, it denies the subject’s full inscription into it. The narrator’s ensuing evocation and undermining of a picturesque gaze and the pastoral as domesticating mode (Casteel 11) questions how to position oneself vis-à-vis the imperial past and how to turn space into place at a time of political and societal transformation in the present, thereby turning the landscape into a palimpsest of past and present experience and corresponding to both a dominant desire for an ‘ideal’ countryside as place of national identity in the context of a Thatcherite heritage discourse (Loh 96) as well as a criticism of the same. It enacts what Dickinson has called a “poetics of disappointment” (“Dispersal” 47), i.e. the novel’s continuous frustration of literary perception through aesthetically compromising interventions or objects (52). I find this concept particularly useful for enquiring into the novel’s deferral of desire in form of a ‘not yet’ and the theme of ‘growth’ I will elaborate on later, albeit I disagree with Dickinson’s assessment that this is (only) employed, in typical Romantic fashion, to emphasise the novel’s ultimate achievement of reconciliation (61). The novel, in fact, employs this means on innumerable occasions,296 not least on the level of structure itself. Rather than ‘reconciling’ the racialised subject with its “historical contingency and finitude” (Dickinson 61), it hysterically foregrounds the Blochian notion of the not-yet in the artist’s constant return to his material and thus the mytheme of artistic revelation and constant engendering (“Artist” 276), of enacting the fantasy of the artist’s ultimate bringing about a social and aesthetic utopia and to counter the “de-deification of the world” (Zima 1; my translation).

The cited instances of circling back to an initial image and revising it are also exemplary of the narrative’s incessant drive to return to and rehearse events from the past, in form of a continuous repetition. In Lacan, repetition is figured as that which the hysterical perceives as

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296 “I saw a forest. But it wasn’t a forest really; it was only the old orchard at the back of the big house” (E 12). Another example is the narrator’s gaze on Stonehenge, initially rendered in sublime terms, which is disturbed by the view of roads and highways (E 15).
“initial in his trauma, a certain too-soon, a fundamental insecurity” (qtd. in Halpern 263), it indicates the *failing* of the process of subjectivation, as that which is repeated is that which threatens the subject’s boundaries. This can be fruitfully tied in with analysing narrative in *Enigma* as hysteric – not as pathological, but as a strategy to enact an unfulfillable desire, refusing to be “the cause of the Other’s *jouissance*” (Mukherjee 12) and consisting of taking paradoxes to its limits (135). The emphasis on the difficulty to create a ‘definite’ picture, that is, the ultimate integration of varying interpretations of experiences in the narrating I’s retrospectively revised, linear story of his past, which is what the referencing of the autobiographical framework or the *Künstlerroman* would lead readers to expect, implies that the text deliberately foregrounds processes of interrogation and figures the writer’s symbolic capital to lie in self-reflexivity, which implies a steady development of self-knowledge, and the ability to unite various facets and identities in one artist figure – the author here is figured as self-generating and ‘growing’. Often present as only a partial repetition, the text moreover stages that the mythemes are never fully compatible with a racialised subjectivity: concomitant with the division of narrating and narrated I is the emphasis on ‘parts’ as opposed to the ‘whole’ throughout the novel. In this way, the daily route of the narrator, for instance, is emblematic of his only partial acceptance into the landscape and the social order: “This was the manager’s run, almost circular. It was also Jack’s, and it was partly mine” (*E* 30).

The enactment of metonymic shifts of perception similarly have ramifications for the authorial and masculine models evoked. After all, Lacan defines the hysteric position as that where one suffers from the ambiguity of the signifier, and “its dialectization of desire through the movement of metonymy” (Eyers 101). In this sense, while in the first chapter, the narrator centres for large parts on Jack, who assumes an important writerly and masculine model (cf. chapter 7.4.3), his ‘arrival’ in the text is metonymically displaced: Jack is not the initial source of material for the narrator, as readers learn a few pages after Jack is introduced, “[i]t was not Jack whom I first noticed on my walks. It was Jack’s father-in-law. […]. The old man first, then. And, after him, the garden, the garden in the midst of superseded things” (*E* 20). A similar partial repetition and metonymic displacement occurs in the book’s relating of death and memory in the paratext and the text proper: here, the novel is dedicated to the “loving memory of my brother Shiva Naipaul”, while the narrated memorial is of the narrator’s sister Sita. More so, the very title itself constitutes a metonymic displacement – and partial repetition: *The Enigma of Arrival* is an abbreviated version of De Chirico’s painting *The Enigma of Arrival in the Afternoon*, the title of which, in turn, was given the painting by the poet Apollinaire. This

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297 I quote Richard Halpern (263; FN 66) instead of the original here, as he draws attention to a mistake in the English translation of Seminar III, which erroneously attributes the hysteric’s condition to the obsessive.
foregrounding of metonymy and displacement then also serves to undermine the illusion of, as Eleonora Ravizza describes it, “what Lecercle calls ‘a constructed mythical moment of origin’” (89) in favour of probing a ‘not-yet’. These instances of incessantly probing different visions are then not so much the narrator being “intent on contradiction” (Döring 124), but rather speak to the hysteric’s taking over the desire of the Other and probing different ways of becoming-subject in the literary field.

This underlines my view that the text presents an image of the artist as agential, but continuously in formation and adaptable, in a refraction of the original genius as self-creative, a stance that counters, for instance, Harris’s universalism or Selvon’s portraying of the artist as entirely heteronomous. In the text, not only are images, words, and phrases subject to constant revision, but the non-linear progression of time and plot, which aims to transcend “predetermined colonial and postcolonial binaries”, i.e. “colonial mimicry v. postcolonial authenticity” (Radovic 110), underlies the same pattern and hinders the transformation of perception into final product in a performance of converting unsatisfied desire into a “desire for unsatisfaction” (Žižek, For They Know 144; original emphasis). As such, the novel pre-empts the classical Bildungs trajectory as unsuited and defers arrival: while three of the five chapters are mostly situated in rural Wiltshire, the chapter “The Journey” and “The Ceremony of Farewell” constitute exceptions. Chapter two, “The Journey”, which focuses on the narrator’s pre-Wiltshire time, most clearly references the Künstlerroman, for once in the focus on writerly self-inspection and -description, and the section then also telling starts with the narrator’s musing on what it took “[t]o write about Jack” (E 91). Most overtly, it does so through the journey motif that is central to the genre’s trope of striving for upward mobility, on which this chapter self-consciously reflects.298

Yet contrary to the Wiltshire sections, chapter two, as most metafictionally concerned with writing and outwardly most closely corresponding to the trajectory of the Künstlerroman, is rife with undeveloped stories. The narrator’s musings on his acquaintance Angela’s time in Italy takes on exemplary character for this chapter: “There was a story there” and “a means of finding the story out”, yet, as he states before, “I could do little with the material” (E 129). Judith Levy has rightly described “The Journey” as the most linear of all chapters, endowing the Wiltshire chapters in comparison with a sense of ‘timelessness’ (103–104), which corresponds with the idealisation of the countryside as a place where ‘time stands still’, and presenting a narrative of coming-into-art in teleological fashion and the semblance of narrative control. In comparison to the other more circularly structured chapters and altogether highly

298 In the narrator’s case, these are journeys from Trinidad to London in 1950, travels back to Trinidad, Barbados, St Kitts and Anguilla, and other locations in the Caribbean, and his arrival in Wiltshire.
layered narrative, this parenthesis of a ‘Bildungs chapter’ can be apprehended as probing and abandoning this structure as insufficient for fathoming an immigrant subjectivity and, most importantly, for the text’s project to draw literary authority from an ‘aesthetics of unfinishedness’. Here, the text cites and refuses these genre-typical mythemes, and the ‘unfinishedness’ of the artistic quest becomes most manifest in the narrator’s statement that his latest book had been rejected by the publisher, and it is telling that the themes the envisioned book touches upon and the order it is arranged in are revealed as fashioning a myth of origin and steady development, from which dissenting stories are excluded:

For two years I had worked on an historical book about the region where I had been born. [...] I was supported by my story, the themes it touched on: discovery, the New World, the dispeopling of the discovered islands; slavery, the creation of the plantation colony; the coming of the idea of revolution; the chaos after revolutions in societies so created. [...] I thought it would find the readers that my books of the previous twelve years had not found. (E 94–95)

Abandoning the ideal of teleologically progressing towards artistic maturity constitutes a strategic manoeuvre to “put Western individualism in question” (Goebel 118) and to avoid inscribing the ‘other’ into this ‘grand narrative’. Reflecting on various times and locales, this chapter also takes readers on an artistic quest while simultaneously refusing the linearity and ultimate emergence as product, as book, of the same. The ‘vision’ the narrator states to have attained, narratively manifest in shifts of tense from present perfect to past perfect, is continuously interrogated and corrected, rendering the theme of linear ‘growth’ futile.

In this vein, these hysterical strategies and the related poetics of unfinishedness, while constituting forms of interrogating the ‘master’s knowledge’ and of expressing one’s dissatisfaction with the assigned place in the symbolic order, that is, the position in the literary field and the integration of the racial ‘other’ into the order of Britishness, do not amount to an outright criticism of the literary field in Naipaul’s case. Rather, they are here figured as sustaining the writing subject. I propose that this staged ‘unfulfillment’ is figured as a new artistic subjectivity that is most apt to react to the neoliberal zeitgeist of self-improvement and productivity, and in this sense, it is also precisely the authorial gesture of staging dissatisfaction “with […] [one’s] phantasm”, aiming for “something else, something better” (Lacan, qtd. and trans. in Bernstein 98)299 that is envisioned as granting literary authority, as occupying a position within the literary field that is neither oppositional, nor entirely hegemonic, a factor that might contribute to Naipaul’s being read as ‘complicit’ or at least as politically evasive. As lacking future orientation, hysteria is moreover undermining notions of productivity and...

299 Lacan discusses the hysteric’s belief in the (lacking) great Other with regard to Freud’s case of Dora in Seminar VIII, Transference.
constitutes a feminising condition, as reacting to gender ambivalence (Brivic 71), a point I will look at in the next chapters.

7.4.2 Fantasies of (Un)Productivity: Impotence as Artistic Counter-Discourse

The interrogation of mastery as artistic self-fashioning practice and the concomitant evocation and discarding of artistic mythemes in an aesthetics of the unfinished in Naipaul’s novel also underlies the citing of authorial fantasies in the context of masculinity in its intersection with race. The novel is intricately concerned with matters of cultivation and growth, symbolic for the writer’s wish to ‘seed’ a tradition or legacy, which encompasses both its literal sense, i.e. the cultivation of land, and its figurative meaning in reference to both self-improvement and cultural production. In resorting to artistic mythemes that echo both notions of productivity and unproductivity, it indicates possible subjectivities under now dominant tendencies that require “members of Western societies […] to place their very selves at the centre of their own life-planning and practice” (Honneth 469), of artists as defined by their market value, as well as under Thatcher’s ‘attack’ on the racial ‘other’ as posited enemy of the white working class and a simultaneous instrumentalisation of artists for a “neoliberalist multicultural agenda” (Rogers 86) that delegates the amelioration of racial conflicts to the cultural realm. This latter point hinges on the homogenisation of the diaspora under the moniker ‘black’, a factor towards which Naipaul’s narrator displays palpable unease. While mostly inferring his racial otherness just in terms of being a ‘stranger’ to the Wiltshire landscape, on several occasions his narration implies the complexity of race and ethnicity in the Caribbean region, for instance by comparing “the Negroes, the people with the hair” with the “Asian-Indian community, the people mainly threatened, not black, not white” and his own experience in St. Kitts, which had “no Asian-Indian population and therefore, for me, no personal complication. To the Negroes there I was just a stranger, someone not black, and with straight hair. Judgements could be as simple as that here” (E 147). Reflecting on his Indian descendence and his family history of indentureship within an ethnically diverse Trinidad and describing himself as “not black” attunes readers to the intricacies of ethnic and racial subjectivity and criticises the homogenisation of the racial ‘other’ in Britain.

Such outspoken comments on racial and ethnic intricacies are, however, always relegated to elsewhere – on the level of story to encounters the narrator made on his journeys or to the

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300 At one point he speaks of “the colonial plantations or estates of Trinidad, to which my impoverished Indian ancestors had been transported in the last century” (E 52). Indentureship describes a form of temporary non-paid servitude in exchange for passage to the colonies that was implemented to respond to the need for cheap, or rather free, labour after slavery had been formally abolished in the British Empire in 1833 in various Caribbean colonies. Indentureship applied particularly to South-East Asians, who were shipped to plantations e.g. in Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago, or Guyana.
Caribbean, and with regard to the novel’s structure restricted mostly to chapter 2, “The Journey”, which is set outside of Britain. Although he does sometimes refer to his Trinidadian-Indian background, race relations, much less (contemporaneous) riots, in Britain are never mentioned. While this seems to confirm Naipaul’s perception as ‘mimic man’, it enacts rather a disavowal of ‘otherness’ as regards artistic position-taking in the literary field and of authorial responsibility to speak for ‘the’ black subject as part of a multicultural agenda that serves to veil the state’s role in disenfranchising minorities.\footnote{A similar episode occurs on the passage from New York to England, where a black man is brought to the narrator’s cabin and both are disconcerted that they are put together because of their shared ‘otherness’ \textit{(E 116–117)}.} Yet this is not to say that race is absent from mediations on becoming subject in the public literary sphere; rather, racial ‘otherness’ is here more subduedly rendered through mediations on rural Wiltshire as a “nostalgic site infused with cultural and racial sanctity” \textit{(Loh 96)}. As such, Naipaul on various levels connects to a discourse of (critically) engaging with the influence of Thatcherism that occupied writers in the 1980s, often in form of parody and satire \textit{(Horton et al. 1)}, yet in \textit{Enigma}, criticism is much more subtle and emerges rather through the narrator’s resorting to authorial fantasies connected with aestheticist ideals of autonomy and with a romanticisation of a rural working life sensibility, both as alternatives to authorial subject positions produced by a multicultural regime. The political and socio-economic context in the 1980s has not yet been sufficiently connected with Naipaul’s novel, with the exception of Lucienne Loh, who has read \textit{Enigma} through the lens of a bourgeoning heritage industry. She convincingly describes Thatcherite efforts at conserving the rural landscape as a place that offered a refuge from upheavals in urban areas, such as the Brixton or Handsworth riots in 1981 and 1985 respectively, and where identities based on “white and imperial ideologies” could thus be retained \textit{(96)}. I take my cue from Loh in acknowledging that the countryside, in Naipaul’s novel, is as an overdetermined space, an imaginary ‘battleground’ for the conservation of national identities in the face of demographic, political, and social developments. Further, Jay Rajiva, in a recent article, has written on Naipaul’s challenge to the Bordieuan notion of a generational replication of ‘cultural capital’ and finds that the narrator disavows “the world of prestige and publishing” while he simultaneously desires it \textit{(48)}. Both positions are insightful for the novel’s staging of ‘fantasies’ of Englishness – and in Naipaul’s text, conditioned by Thatcher’s ‘little England’ values, it is a more particularised English- rather than Britishness that is in question – and the mobilisation of artistic and masculine ideals, here evoked via differing forms of white, English, male ideals of authorship, all of which are especially tied to class, particularly the gentry or country upper-class and the working class, the
farm labourers. The narrator’s ‘flight’ to the countryside – with its associated aspects of the
garden and the manor – can here be understood as the imaginary phase in the mirror stage and
as a hysteric probing of different fantasies in light of the contradictory desires that the dominant
discourse initiates and the crises underlying these.

In this vein, Naipaul also enacts the artist’s ‘split’ by contrasting two artistic images, both
associated with different connotations of cultivation and masculinity and indicative of the artist
as probing subjectivities outside Thatcherite doctrines. One dominant subject position the novel
probes as a counter-measure to both ideologemes of productivity and minority
representativeness is associated with the landlord of the manor and Alan, two writer figures
who have, however, little literary credentials and are associated with an idea of l’art pour l’art
and dandyism, and thus as (supposedly) standing outside the forces of the market as well as of
ideals of masculinity. Most criticism has identified the landlord as an embodiment of a last
remnant of imperial glory, a “false writer”, “an embodiment of England’s Edwardian imperial
power and security which allowed its artists to turn inward from external realities to refinements
of feeling, eroticism and playfulness”, and as “figurative of the decay and eventual end of a
formerly influential British literary tradition” (King 146–147).302 Yet what needs to be
differentiated here is what function the dandy mytheme takes on for the writer in 1980s Britain.
I contend that it should be read as a mode of authorship associated with fantasies of ‘pure art’
outside social responsibilities, and as importing a discourse of autonomy that was already
prevalent in the immediate Windrush-period but had subsequently become unsuitable for the
minority writer. This fantasy of autonomy, but unproductivity is ambivalently cited by the
narrator, as both anxiety-inducing due to its lack of providing recognition of cultural capital
and sexual ambiguity, but also as a counter-discourse to the economisation of the cultural sector.

Similar to the novel’s overall Conradian influence,303 the landlord constitutes Naipaul’s
“latest version of Kurtz” (Nakai 14), and the novel stages an ironic reversal of the Marlow-
Kurtz relationship in the English countryside. Like the enigmatic figure in the Congolese jungle,
the landlord is situated at the ‘heart’ of the estate, in the manor, and like with Marlow to Kurtz,
both the narrator’s ears and eyes are geared towards him. In this sense, albeit the manor is set
at the centre of decay, the landlord still resembles an objet petit a towards which writerly desire
is oriented, and this manifests narratively and on the level of speech. For once, the narrator only
hears about him – “stories had come my way” (E 191), mostly through “second accounts […]
[a]nd some […] even [of] a third account” (E 230), but never first hand – and consumes his

302 Labaune-Demeule calls him the “antithetic representation” and Alan an “exact double[…]” of the narrator (63).
303 For the relation between V.S. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad cf. e.g. Shirley Chew, “Postcolonial Translations”

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products, in form of little drawings, poems, and stories, which are handed to him by Bray and the Phillipses, employees at the manor. The gaze on the landlord is also obscured – the narrator only ever catches two glimpses of him (E 167), or sees him in a photograph, in a gaze once removed, but is, in turn, “as nervous myself of being seen as he was” (E 191). The imagination of, and identification with, the landlord’s reaction here shows the subject’s adoption of the authorial fantasy connected with him, which is strengthened in the impression gained in the narrator’s second glimpsing: this sighting is only from the back, this fact is mentioned twice (E 167; 191), and suggests that the narrator thus sees through his eyes. The in-depth description of the landlord’s wishes and dreams (E 192) speaks to that, as well as the frequent imaginations of what he sees from his window. Yet the questioning as to what the landlord sees and the fact that he imagines himself as object of the landlord’s gaze from the manor – “the view through which I walked […] was of a Nature almost unchanged” (E 185) – also shows the artist’s dissatisfaction with the fantasy of merely ‘entering’ an existing tradition, but in a hysterical imagining of himself as the possible object of the Other’s desire suggests his mastery (Fink, Clinical 123). Christine Crowle states that the landlord’s point of view is “constructed like a phallus – a linear line of sight, a linear penetration of the landscape” which the narrator cannot intrude upon, suggesting the foreclosure of a “phallic economy of power” (105), yet the text proves her wrong, as he is figured as crossing the landlord’s view.

Yet while seeking identification with the myth of the unencumbered dandy here serves to promise autonomy from social responsibility, its relation to the economic sphere is rendered much more anxiously. The text’s probing of the fantasy associated with the landlord is not just to be understood as a comment on artistic instrumentalisation on the basis of identity politics, but also constitutes a comment on the economisation of the cultural market, particularly in its contrast to the other aesthete, Alan, who is positioned as abject that polices the boundaries of accepted cultural production in the literary field, and the simultaneous desire and disavowal of his art is a clue to the changes within the same and the arising anxieties. Initially, similarities between the landlord and Alan, a “distant relation” (E 230) of the former, prevail: both are figured as dandyesque and thus associated with a conception of l’art pour l’art, a discourse that slowly (the landlord’s accidia) or rather abruptly (Alan’s suicide) fades away, yet the narrator’s glance at the landlord is less problematic than that on Alan. Other than the landlord, for whom art constitutes nothing more than a leisurely activity, Alan’s art is harshly denigrated: the

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304 Cf. e.g. the narrator’s assumption of the landlord’s view: “He would have looked out on something like perfection” (E 185). This imaginary identification can be tied in with Jörngården’s observation that the pleasure the narrator gains from walking ‘amidst ruins’ resembles the landlord’s love for Ivy (234), which is often also read as a symbol for decay.

305 Cf. for instance his questions: “What did he see?” (E 194); “Did he in fact see decay?” (E 195).
narrator shows indignance that, despite his impotence to produce something that lasts – he *does* produce little radio programmes, but “no book came from Alan” (*E* 259) – he still “behaved like a writer” (*E* 259). The description of his literary approach as marked by a frankness on issues of “homosexuality, masturbation, social climbing” (*E* 260) gives away the reasons for this anxiety, and they must be contextualised within a changing economic situation in the 1980s: considering fantasies of sexual reproduction as connected to artistic production, both homosexuality and masturbation are foreclosing ‘production’ and constitute a break with the Law of the Father, the imperative of productivity. It seems thus no coincidence that Thatcherism’s ‘imagined community’ of commonly held values conceived as bourgeois and British rested on the exclusion of those outside the hegemonic gender norm, particularly the “supposedly effete, gentlemanly elite, and those who were reliant on the state” (Sutcliffe-Brathwaite 159).

This focus on productivity, or lack thereof, is foregrounded with the fronting of the product in describing what remained after Alan’s suicide: “Of Alan’s books and ‘notes’ there was of course almost nothing” (*E* 265). The emphasis on the product, reiterated at the end in the narrator positing *Enigma* as *his* product, initially renders the narrative firmly within the bounds of a heterosexual ideology, where identification with Alan is figured as threatening the Oedipal trajectory of becoming a ‘strong poet’ in the contemporary literary field. In a changing literary market that is increasingly commodified and structured by meritocratic ideologies, this entails literary output and having one’s symbolic capital recognised. Next to mourning the little output that constitutes “the sum of Alan’s work, life” (*E* 231), the narrator’s lament, “such a slight name, though, such a slight achievement for someone nearly forty” (*E* 231), here mirrors not only the encroaching forces of the market on the literary sphere, but also the subscription to the imperative of literature’s ‘prizeability’, with prizes such as the Man Booker gaining rapid currency in the 1980s. Alan as ‘unproductive’ subject, who moreover depends on his “rich friends” (*E* 260) for his subsistence and stands thus counter to the Victorian ideal of self-help revamped under Thatcher, is figured as a threat to these ideologies.

As such, this model is, however, also attractive to the narrator, as it constitutes the most radical counter-discourse to contemporary ideologies and against ideologies of literary filiation. A look at the images of masculinity and fantasies of the artist-as-begetter here illustrate this. Both Alan and the landlord are, it is inferred, homosexual, and these subject positions are

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306 The reference to the occasional radio programmes Alan does also hints at the origin of West Indian literature in Britain, the radio programme *Caribbean Voices*, and indicates that there has been a shift from the possibility of gaining recognition from ‘ephemeral’ products, such as radio, towards more tangible output. This is visible in the curious comparison of Alan to the narrator’s own idea when coming to Britain (*E* 259), as later, he identifies himself as having done some radio work for the “BBC overseas services” (*E* 273).
rendered as tendentially deviant. With the landlord, this is hinted at in the statement that he is the narrator’s “opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual” (E 174), the sentence itself hinting at the intricate connection of gender and creation. Moreover, his sexuality is pathologised by an equation of his sensual preferences with his illness, described as “something out there, something outside himself, and eventually an aspect of his accidia, the curious death of the soul that had befallen him so early in his life” (E 193). Valls-Russell in this regard crucially ties the ominous illness to its literary-historical association with one of the deadly sins (141). Crucially, and counter to the openly voiced abjection, the subjectivity embodied in the landlord and Alan is figured as always already part of the ‘self’, in form of an alterity, as both Alan and the landlord are also the narrator’s ‘doubles’: their abjection is not absolute, as the above discussion as well as the fact that the narrator conceives the landlord as “as the other side of my own” (E 53; emphasis added) and sees in Alan “an aspect of myself from some years back” (E 260) implies.

Moreover, the ‘unproductivity’ associated with these figures also characterises the narrator in its metaphorical form as sexual (re)production, which is entirely disavowed: compared to the other artist narratives in this study, Enigma is certainly the least openly ‘erotic’, and Naipaul’s narrator is intricately concerned with feigning an inexistent desire.307 Derek Walcott’s comment implicitly relates this omission to the genre of the Künstlerroman by highlighting sex as the driving force of narrative, stating that while we get a lot of information that coincides with Naipaul’s biography, “mischievous uncertainty irritates us because of the suppression of those things that advance fiction: whether […] [for example,] he [the narrator] avoided, for the sake of art, the temporary solaces of sex or marriage” (“Garden” 28). Indeed, sexuality is almost only present as negation, as Naipaul’s narrator is keen on distancing it form the writer, which gives us another clue as to the ideologies inherent in the text’s dwelling on the ‘split’ between the ‘man’ and the ‘writer’: here, it also encompasses a demarcation of the sexed subject from the exalted writer, which provides the fantasmatic ground for the narrator in the self-begetting text to both identify with notions of ‘pure art’ without sacrificing creative energy, before unifying ‘man’ and ‘writer’ at the end in a self-declared reconciliation. Next to the absence of sexual relationships, he thus emphasises his own youthful “sexual inadequacy” as remaining part of his “colonial’s nerves” (E 95), refers to the “sexual impulse” as clouding and distorting people (E 112), has a fear of “sexually unbalanced people” (E 115), and ties in a

307 The near absence of sex and sexuality has also occupied critics: as Selwyn Cudjoe pointedly summarises it, “[i]n Naipaul’s work, not one character enjoys a sexually satisfying experience” (193), and Fawzia Mustafa (168) and Gillian Dooley (13) too, have speculated on the omission of marriage from the novel.
female clerk’s sexual fulfilment with an “absence of ambition”, which he crucially infers from her handwriting (E 152).

Similarly, images of bodily fatigue and decay dominate the novel, i.e. an aesthetics of pathology, and many of the (male) central characters are characterised by a lack of vitality and energy or sickness. Next to the landlord and Alan suffering from accidia, Jack and the narrator are both afflicted with a weakness of the lungs, which ultimately “did away with whatever remained of youthfulness in me […], diminished my energy” (E 83), resulting in “a great tiredness” that is, however, “not unpleasant”, as it comes with a creative delirium (E 179).

Impotence and infirmity are here elevated as artistic traits, connecting to a décadence discourse of aestheticising morbidity and a revaluation of the genius myth that now hinges on staging flights into illness, as physical or mental exaltation, as a last resort of artistic self-aggrandisement (Neumann 155) and, importantly, as a counter-discourse to a middle-class self-sufficiency, sturdiness, and economic power (156). Resorting to Bourdieu’s contrast of l’art bourgeois and l’art pour l’art, this décadence discourse constitutes a rejection of the heteronomous principle, where artists “make temporal failure a sign of election and success a sign of compromise with the times”, i.e. the establishment (Rules 217). Contrary to the other artist narratives, ‘sex’ and ‘art’ remain – at least on the textual surface – utterly distinct categories in Naipaul’s Künstlerroman, and sexual abstinence and libidinal exhaustion serve as potential criticism of the dominant ideology. In this way, the frequently cited pair of ‘man and writer’ functions as a textual mantra to remind readers that art and life are to be understood as separate and that art necessitates the repression of other desires. This subjectivity proves attractive for the Caribbean writer, as it also constitutes a counter-image to the overemphasis on and (hyper)sexualisation of the body of the ‘other’ and the “racial epidermal schema” (Fanon 112). Contrary to Lamming’s emphasis on the objectification of the West Indians by the English or Selvon’s strategic appropriation of an exaggerated hypersexuality, Naipaul’s text envisions an escape from this discourse by disavowing the narrator’s sexuality altogether.

Impressions of ruin, inscribed both in the Wiltshire landscape and the writer’s body, and associated images of (sexual) unproductivity also speak to interrogations of authorial filiation, more so as hindered filiation is a theme that permeates the novel as a whole. This is

308 An exception is the narrator’s brief mentioning of Angela’s sexuality, which, while the narrator states that he “had written about obsessively in those early days”, is only given one sentence of elaboration (E 131) and regarding the “sexual knowingness” he presumes in Angela he states that he “could do little with the material” (E 129).

309 The bodily symptoms in the novel are also in line with the hysteric structures, as in the hysteric’s body, “psychic affect crystallizes into somatic effect”, rendering it an “expressionist apparatus, converting and codifying messages otherwise marginalized by the dominant logos” (Mukherjee 34).

310 Jack, an authorial model I elaborate on later, has no children, and his wife does not carry on the tradition of farming (E 48). The Philips’s son, with the Phillipses as another symbol of an older order, dies, leaving them childless. Filiation is also foreclosed for the landlord, as elderly bachelor (E 53) and emblem of the ruins of Empire.
emphasised in fantasies of castration that permeate the novel, most violently rendered with regard to the gelding of a pony (E 38), an image that comes to haunt the narrator and is later semantically associated with the landlord (E 195), and infers both a loss of sexual and artistic productivity, in the sense of utility. But the association of sterility that accompanies the artist image is yet a more complex one that also serves to reinstall the author as agential. While little discussed in Naipaul scholarship, two scholars have commented on the importance of the trope of castration in Naipaul’s work, particularly in the context of the colonial subject’s relation to Empire and the Caribbean. With regard to Enigma, Christine Crowle reads the castration motif as making readers aware of the masculine subject being denied his virility in the colonial discourse of Empire (106). In a different context, i.e. Naipaul’s engagement with Caribbean history in The Loss of El Dorado, William Ghosh has recently pointed out that Naipaul has repeatedly been described with “metaphors of reproductive damage or infertility” (120–121), and he refers to Lamming’s denigration of Naipaul’s “castrated satire” (Pleasures 225) as well as Brathwaite’s reproach to Naipaul’s ‘infertility’ in 1975:

The seed and root of our concern had little material to nourish it. Patterson’s view was that we should accept this shallow soil (we begin from an existential absurdity of nothing) and grow our ferns in a kind of moon-dust. Fertility would come later; if not, not. Naipaul refused to plant at all. (“Timehri” 42)

Ghosh mentions these in the context of Naipaul’s denial to participate in a search for a new paradigm to engage Caribbean social history (121), yet in Enigma, they take on yet a different meaning: images of castration, here, can also be read as an engagement of precisely these criticisms, whereby they become an intricate part of the staged authorial self-fashioning, in form of demarcating the ‘right kind’ of artist and artistic production. This is in line with positing the ‘impotent’ artistic discourse of Alan and the landlord as an escape from the artist’s instrumentalisation for a doctrine of multiculturalism. As illustrated with the instances to which ‘impotence’ and ‘castration’ refers to above, the artist therefore rather emerges as fantasmatically identifying with a gardener who selects and prunes his material and cultivates his own authorial image, through a preclusion of the discourses he wishes not to be associated with. The employment of these metaphors must thus be read as a conscious engagement with the author’s own reception in the literary field and a belief in the agency of the author’s power to control his own artistic ‘portrait’.

These fantasies of interrupting productivity, in an economic, meritocratic, but also hypersexual sense, by drawing on an older, aestheticist discourse then constitute one, hysterically probed, response to the shifting desires structuring the literary field, particularly as it relates to the literary sphere’s desire to criticise Thatcherite ideology, and its effects for the minority writer, for whom incorporation into the literary institutions entailed “ameliorat[ing]
racial discontent” (Rogers 86), a fact that clashes with ideals of aesthetic innovation. An alternative to notions of productivity is probed with the ‘fertile garden’ and the order of the English canon.

7.4.3 Authorial Self-Begetting: Ideal Gardens and Female Intruders

The novel intertwines the above-mentioned counter-discourse to both notions of representativity and market economy with a discourse of fertility, which on the surface seems to lack ideology-critical potential, as it is more in line with the ‘Little England’ values indebted to Victorian idealisations that characterise Thatcherism. The text’s other dominant authorial fantasies hinge on the working-class and peasant characters, most notably in form of a heroised rural working-class masculinity that signifies both literary ‘vitality’ and robust, inartificial maleness. Whereas the idealisations of rural Wiltshire have mostly been interpreted as a (nostalgic) employment of the pastoral mode to negotiate an immigrant identity (Casteel 21–50), and while these interpretations certainly have their merit, I propose that a focus on the artist novel mode here suggest a different reading. The text’s positioning of a fantasy of a ‘natural’ form of growth, productivity, and cultivation, embodied in Jack and Jack’s father-in-law and transfigured through the lens of a literary tradition that is mythicised as ‘authentically English’, constitutes the minority author’s probing of the subject position of another ‘other’: the rural, classed other. This constitutes another means to fashion a position of distinction within the literary field increasingly dominated by commercialisation on the one hand and the ‘burden of representation’ for the ethnically marked author on the other, and further a means to position the minority author as the successor to an English literary tradition.

The last point is symbolised in the book that is passed on by the landlord to the narrator via the working-class character Bray (E 253) and with the landlord’s poems as typed out and handed over by the servant to the manor, Mrs Phillips, rendering her “the living link between my landlord and me” (E 192; emphasis added). This implies the invigoration of the literary field through art associated with the working class and the ethnic ‘other’, as both the book and the poems are denigrated for their naïve clichés, old-fashionedness, and otherworldliness (E 193; 253). The narrator’s inheriting of Mr Phillips’s walking stick (E 302–303), through the association of it with a “stick-fighter’s staff” (E 303) resonant with a calypso tradition (Rohlehr, “Calypso” 67), also speaks to this fact, and to a mixture of English and Caribbean traditions. More intriguingly, in the discourse of the 1980s, these metaphorical transfers suggests that the literary baton has been passed on to the minority writer, who is tasked with a ‘bardic role’ (Brooker, Literature 142) but, albeit in form of tokenism, also increasingly prized.
The trope of the garden in the novel stands emblematic of a patrilineal literary tradition, carrying both symbolic value in terms of growth, fertility, continuity, and of ‘Englishness’, a notion to which the narrator fashions himself as a ‘stranger’, which serves him to mediate on the Other’s desires and literary productivity from within the fantasy of detached observation.\textsuperscript{311} With this trope, the text draws upon a Renaissance commonplace, associated with creating order and embellishing.\textsuperscript{312} As such, it also functions metafictionally and resonates with the very book written, which is so intricately concerned with embellishing, pruning, and reordering stories and episodes. Where Lamming has exposed the garden with its connotations of a fixed natural order as instrumentalised in veiling the immigrant’s gaze on economic realities, Naipaul posits it as a still more idealised trope in associating it with authenticity and a more ‘natural’ yet, crucially, working-class sensibility. At the same time, the influence of the spectre of capitalist modernity and Thatcherite restructuring on the landscape is, however, also already palpable, which renders the garden and the gardener an a priori fraught fantasy, marked by crisis, and leads to the narrator’s hysteric probing of various mythemes associated with it. The garden is, rather unsurprisingly, evoked in religious terms as well, with the description of the gardener as close to “the idea even of the god of the node: the gardener as the man who caused the unremarkable seed to grow into leaves, stalks, buds, flowers, fruit, called this all up from the seed” (\textit{E} 214). The closeness of ‘god’ and ‘artist’, cited so self-consciously here, refers in a mock-nostalgic fashion to the power attributed to the artist to fill the void left by secularisation processes; drawing on a pseudo-opposition, as both art and religion were from the mid-nineteenth century onwards already increasingly recognised as mere sub-systems of a secularised market society (Zima 3).

Further, this ideal of Englishness is not unabatedly compatible with a racialised subjectivity, as the evoked mythemes, while serving to fortify the ‘right’ kind of production, are also always fraught and speak to only a partial inscription into this order, i.e. of the artist’s incomplete resolving of the Oedipal struggle and, on a second level, into the literary tradition associated with them. The artist’s negotiation of a patrilineally structured literary tradition are most evident in the narrator’s relation to Jack and Jack’s father-in-law. The narrator repeatedly calls forth the aforementioned “literary eye” to heroise the working-class man, which manifests in the fronting of ‘literature’ to describe Jack and, resonating with the predominance of the

\textsuperscript{311} Shelley Saguaro’s \textit{Garden Plots} (2006) analyses the garden in \textit{Enigma} with regard to the narrator’s rootedness/-lessness and traces historical connections to colonialism, but does not connect this theme to authorship.

\textsuperscript{312} Cf. exemplary Elizabethan writer George Puttenham on this image. The poet, he states, is a maker, like the gardener “using nature as a coaditior, furders her conclusions & many times makes her effectes more absolute and straunge” (257). Alessandro Serpieri comments on this image in \textit{Shakespeare}, stating that the poet “transforms the naturalistic paradigm of \textit{growth} (which inevitably carries the implication of decay and death) into the cultural paradigm of \textit{engrafting}” (34; original emphasis).
paternal metaphor in the artis novels and again not in direct lineage, but a once-removed form, the father-in-law: “Of literature and antiquity and the landscape, Jack and his garden and his geese and cottage and his father-in-law seemed emanations” (E 25). The scopophilic view on the landscape and Jack and the father-in-law as fragments of it reveals a sense of pleasure and a desire for a stable model of authorship to resort to, which is historically and symbolically gendered male, to assuage the notion of racial ‘otherness’, the feeling of being “[a] stranger here” (E 22). As such, the father-in-law is equated with the artistic ‘father’ Wordsworth, he is twice named a “Wordsworthian” figure (E 20; 26), and Jack’s geese associated with Shakespeare, as these help him understand “something in King Lear” (E 23). The father-in-law constitutes a crucial subject model here, and the imaginary identification is strengthened through the father-in-law’s function as mirror by reflecting back the narrator’s displaced darkness (Nakai 13): repeatedly, the narrator terms him a ‘gipsy’ (E 25; 26; 28), who, through the emphasis on his ‘swarthiness’, rendered as most similar to the narrator. The incessant probing of this model is telling, as the ‘gypsy’ also functions as a chiffre of artistic outsiderdom (Feulner 442). The heroised rural labourer is connected with the ethnic ‘other’ in an imagination of shared marginality and a position of ‘otherness’ to a more elitist cultural sphere, embodied in the landlord, and thus serves to “elevate[] the postcolonial outsider’s perception and reinvigorate[] the Wiltshire locale in the process” (Rajiva 55).

This is emphasised in the narrator’s and the father-in-law’s linguistic similarity. Other than is the case with Jack, the reader briefly hears directly from the father-in-law, speaking to the paternal function as grounded in linguistics: “He croaked. ‘Dogs? Dogs?’ […] ‘Dogs,’ he muttered, the word choking in his throat. ‘Worry pheasants’. […] He subsided; the brightness in his eyes went out. And I never heard him speak again” (E 25–26). Similar to the narrator’s compulsive drive to repeat, the father-in-law, too, repeats the only words he utters. Here, however, the dialogic repetition between narrator and father-in-law does not initiate the ‘Caribbean son’ to the order, but causes the father to fall silent and to lose his power connected to seeing alike, which suggests a frustration of both the scopic and invocatory drive, and a halting of desire. The thus inferred failure of the paternal metaphor, the Name-of-the-Father, briefly traverses the fantasy of achieving artistic and masculine ‘wholeness’, it interrupts the Oedipal inscription into the ‘order of literature’, its transmission from English ‘father’ to Caribbean ‘son’, and returns the subject to his inevitable status of ‘split’ in an instance of Entfremdung (Evans 9).

313 For a reading of Naipaul’s intertextual engagements cf. Morey, who states that “Naipaul’s elegiac evocation of the Wiltshire landscape famously draws on Wordsworth, Cobbett, Hardy, T. S. Eliot and a host of others” (89).
314 The narrator describes himself “in terms of gipsiness […] twenty times as swarthy” (E 26).
Yet, in line with the positing of the artist’s duality as narcissistic strategy, this is also envisioned as prerequisite for the artist’s ‘self-begetting’ as ‘postcolonial successor’, comprising a heightened sensibility and deeper insight into the intricacies of post-consensus Britain. The most prominent authorial fantasy the narrator hysterically probes is then the authentic, hard-working, rooted gardener as suggestive of authenticity and organic creation, embodied in Jack, the narrator’s neighbour. After all, as the ending states, it is Jack, the gardener, who inspires the book to be written in the first place (E 318). This image is mobilised as both a form to correspond to demands of productivity while simultaneously becoming ‘other’ to notions of representability circumscribed by the author’s ethnicity that structures ‘postcolonial’ literature through the identification with a working-class masculinity. Jack as an emblem “of labour and fertility” (Chew 125) signifies stability, rootedness, continuance; characteristics that also pertain to the frequently cited literary forebears, such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Hardy, Goldsmith, or Gray, that structure the narrator’s vision and the English literary tradition in which the narrator was raised and through which he mediates his experiences. Next to both the ending and the chapter title emphasising the significance of Jack, his introduction follows the narrator’s inability to find the right path (E 13), but the break of the momentary confusion of the narrated I with a retrospective assertion on part of the narrating I that “[t]hose two lanes meet at Jack’s house” (E 13) structures the artistic quest centrally around Jack. For the minority writer to ‘arrive’, i.e. to succeed, this suggests, he must retrieve the stories of the ‘folk’, and crucially, here, this is not the Caribbean ‘folk’, but the white, English working class which occupy the narrator’s attempt to engender the Blochian ‘not yet’.

Jack, who “had created his own life, his own world, almost his own continent” (E 87), constitutes the text’s central objet petit a which initiates the narrator’s desire to write, and the fantasy of self-begetting is also enacted in the novel’s conflation of product and process and the sexual apathy. In focusing on a “solitary and single” protagonist (Kellman 8), who identifies with both parent (the father-in-law) and child (Jack), the text corresponds closely to Kellman’s notion of the self-begetting text, where the author emerges with the novel he writes as self-made hero in a “fantasy of immortality” and “timeless personal omnipotence” (8). The notion of ‘seeding’ and ‘disseminating’ – plants, but also ideas – as well as cultivation and growth associated with the garden form the centre of narrator’s desire: “In the middle of farmyard dereliction and his own insecurity in his job and cottage, Jack kept his elaborate gardens and did his digging for vegetables and flowers and kept his plots in good heart” (E 201). This sketches the task of the writer as excavating stories, ‘tending’ one’s literary work and one’s reputation, and elevates the author as steady centre in times of crisis, which reverberates with the contemporary socio-political context. Rendering the gardener as a man “who possessed the
mystery” (E 214) and the vegetable wall that encloses the “hidden garden” the landlord has opened for renovation as “false books on a shelf” (E 213), which the narrator had passed obliviously every day, suggests a further semantic similarity between the garden/plants and library/books and thus the author as gardener. With the image of the library hidden from the world, resonant with the private library as the aestheticist’s sanctuary, “eines der bürgerlichen Lebensphäre typischen Entwurfs einer Gegenwelt” (Willms, qtd. in Kreutzer 62), and the hint at the artificiality of the books, the landlord stands as a countermodel to the artist as gardener.

Jack-as-gardener provides a fantasmatic screen of self-generation and -cultivation that underlines the image of the author as ‘flexible’ – corresponding both to hegemonic (economic) demands but also to desires for the author as critical voice vis-à-vis socio-cultural developments. In line with this, it is an inherently ambivalent image. On the one hand, the garden is connected with a racially exclusive form of Englishness. The narrator’s desire is oriented towards this ideal of creation, as signifying rootedness (E 19) vis-à-vis the narrator’s “insecure past” (E 87), which also speaks to the perceived ‘stability’ of the English canon and a still tentative Caribbean literary tradition, and concomitantly, the narrator’s ‘otherness’ is increasingly veiled, “passing from object of curiosity to unremarkable subject” (Rajiva 55) in the post-imperial landscape. On the other, it provides the means to imagine a Caribbean-English cross-cultural tradition, “the remnant of a ritual relation to the earth and a measure of self-sufficiency and independence, at ‘home’ and abroad” (Saguaro 186). The notion of masculine productivity serves to express the Caribbean author’s attempt to create a literary tradition ‘from the seed’, which, as stifled by the ideological inscription of Englishness ‘at home’, tied in the novel to images of “servitude and ugliness” (E 216), can only take place ‘abroad’, i.e. is rendered as needing to be recovered in England. Much less a mere glorification of an English idyll, which is already portrayed in decay here, the garden as ‘literature’ and author as gardener come to evoke images of creating a ‘new text’, consisting of an ‘impregnation’ of the English text with the seeds from elsewhere, a reciprocal fertilization, and the novel continuously performs this idea: the narrator’s childhood memory is triggered by “English allotments” (E 216), and descriptions of the ‘English garden’ in the novel are frequently interspersed with images of Trinidadian flora and fauna or landscape in general.

The narrator’s fantasy of self-establishment through a writerly and masculine ideal that is built around notions of a mythologised form of Englishness, here rendered as rural and working class, and the pre-empting of the same are emphasised in his focus on Jack’s eyes, “oddly obstreperous, oddly jumpy, that gave him away, that said he was after all a farm worker [...]”, an observation that disconcerts the narrator as it interrupts his image of Jack as “a man with a high idea of himself, a man who had out of principle turned away from other styles of
life” (*E* 32) – mirroring the artist as self-stylised ‘other’ within the contemporary literary field – and reveals him as a mere participant in the dominant order. The shift from the process of gazing onto Jack’s actual eyes then also reveals the narrator’s misrecognition in this image: being confronted with the eye as signifier of “cogito – the conscious, self-reflexive subject and the subject of knowledge” (Berressem 175) highlights the uncertain status of his own subjectivity. Reminiscent of the split between the eye and the gaze that underlies the scopic drive, it also indicates a gendered – and racial – divide, a distinction between active seeing subject and passive seen object. Similar to the narrator becoming part of the landlord’s view, being seen by Jack speaks to a fear of reversed roles and of becoming feminised, the object of the Other’s desire, a profoundly hysterical strategy. Concomitantly, this manifests in bodily symptoms: the narrator’s suffering from weak lungs, an infirmity similar to Jack’s pneumonia, tellingly breaks out when he passes Jack’s cottage (*E* 82), which, following Crowle, signals the fragility of “a particular identity script, a particular cultural fiction” (107). The realisation of Jack’s heteronomy thus interrupts a fantasy of autonomous, male (self-)begetting and fashioning as “self-professed [postcolonial] outsider[]” (Rajiva 41) by appropriating this subjectivity. Implying the misrecognition of Jack as romanticised rural, classed ‘other’ to the dominant middle-class values, the image threatens to refuse mythologisation, yet the text reinscribes and contains this, in line with the narrator’s professed deepened insight through constant revision, at the end of chapter one: Jack’s death is now heroised from a position of detachment, which is mirrored in the shift in tense, suggesting the maturation of his vision: “I had seen Jack as solid, rooted in his earth. But I had also seen him as something from the past […] The bravest and most religious thing about his life was his way of dying: the way he had asserted himself, at the very end” (*E* 87). As such, the text endorses an authorial subjectivity that acknowledges, but ultimately overcomes contradictions and ideological gaps.

I have stated that hysteria functions as a strategy for self-fashioning in *Enigma*, but it also is, as mentioned before, considered a feminine or feminising condition, and concomitantly, writerly self-interrogation then also extends to questioning the status of the ‘feminine’ with regard to literary production. The dominant, contrasting artistic identity scripts elaborated on above, serving to probe different forms of artistic counter-discourses to contemporary ideologies, are both premised on masculine-connoted mythemes. To these, the novel figures the ‘feminine’ as interruption into the male text that needs displacement, as uncanny element and the text’s real that fantasies of male authorship as screen struggle to contain. The novel not only rehearses male subject positions but also brings female characters into perspective, most tellingly again in the garden, and their portrayal is illuminating with regard to male subject formation – and literary authority – when considering the ‘female’ as a textual position the text
is challenged by.\textsuperscript{315} The novel introduces Brenda as \textit{only} challenger to the narrator’s self-fashioning as artist, but does so only to ultimately dismiss her in an attempt to reinstate the coherent subject: “She had no great regard for me”, “the way I lived”, and “the work I did”, which does not fit into “her own idea of what was to be respected” \textit{(E 63)} and does not see him as “artistic” \textit{(E 64)}. By implication, this interruption of his self-fashioning also pertains to the patrilinear tradition on which the narrator draws in order to establish his ‘literary eye’.\textsuperscript{316}

On the level of content, the reproach of Naipaul for his portrayals of women seems to be supported by the narrative instance’s incessant focus on the bodily attributes of Brenda in the chapter ‘Jack’s Garden’ and the sense that other than with the male characters, where the main sentiment is one of empathic nostalgia, the women of the text are most often distanced, mocked, or criticised. Repeatedly, and always at the beginning of their introduction, women in the narrative remain nameless. In this way, when introducing a new couple that has moved to Wiltshire, the gaze immediately centres on the ‘wife’s’ nakedness and the narrator, refusing this subjectivity through dismantling the “orthopedic” wholeness of her image \textit{(Lacan, Écrits 78)}, emphasises her breast, “heavy thighs”, and her self-deception as “immensely desirable” \textit{(E 42)}. Other than the male characters, she does not undergo an idealisation through the narrator’s ‘literary eye’. Considering that both “the woman as Other and the racial Other are sexualised categories of mirrored difference from the universal male Self of Western discourse” \textit{(Crowle 100)}, Brenda’s denigration serves a similar strategy than the narrator’s displacement of racial conflict to the Caribbean, i.e. to veil the narrator’s own otherness and thereby to reject notions of representativeness.

His gaze on Brenda is also subject to revision: while the initial view of her conveys a rather positive impression connoted with innocence (“a girl”) and similarity, rendering her alike to the narrator and the male characters through the novel’s typical strategy of partial repetition – “[s]he was half familiar to me” \textit{(E 61)} – the ‘other’ is here denied ambiguity through his claim that “[n]ow I knew her” \textit{(E 62)}, and subsequently takes on more negative aspects. Moreover, and most telling with regard to the image of the garden as emblematic of the narrator’s fantasy of self-begetting and ‘sowing’ cultural seeds, he renders her as an intruder into the garden: “She

\textsuperscript{315} While the women are not necessarily relegated to the margins of the narrative in \textit{Enigma}, at least in terms of the narrative space they occupy, they constitute rather a blind spot in the secondary literature, where – if at all – they are only mentioned in passing and in line with Naipaul’s supposed misogynistic world view. The sole exceptions are articles by Christine Crowle, whose article on the ‘unbearable body’ in \textit{Enigma} contains a short discussion of Brenda as subject to the narrator’s “voyeuristic contemplation” without “risk to Self” \textsuperscript{(108)}, an assessment my reading of Brenda disputes, and by Gillian Dooley, who focuses, however, only on Naipaul’s omission of his own wife Pat from the narrative.

\textsuperscript{316} The text here curiously reminds of Selvon’s character with the same name from \textit{Moses Ascending}, who is also a young female contender challenging the middle-aged man with artistic ambitions and unsettles the writer-muse paradigm, thereby interrupting the symbolic order of a male literary tradition.
walked on the lawn, and directly in front of my windows. The Phillipses never walked in front of my windows; they allowed me the privacy in the openness of the lawn” (E 61–62). The garden, carrying connotations of an ‘organic’ state of male authority and the dissemination of ideas, also suggests a “male takeover of female space”, and is, as one step in spreading authority via the garden to nature, by no means a space remote from ideology, but a “fully politicized” image (Fay 29–30). Reading the garden, moreover, as associated with literature, as illustrated above, this is telling, as it figures the female ‘other’ as disrupting the order: as an allusion to the Garden of Eden, Brenda’s invasion can be read as the female ‘other’ interrupting a tradition associated with a heroised form of (artistic) masculinity and – as shown with the connection of Jack and Jack’s father-in-law with the garden – literary patrilineality.

In this sense, it is telling that she is rendered as boundary threatening:

When the Phillipses went on their holiday, Brenda took over at the manor. […] Brenda was carefully got up. Jeans and blouse; her full lips painted, something done to her eyelashes, emphasizing the stare of her unsettling blue eyes; her appearance at the same time suggesting an immense idleness in the Phillipses’ quarters. Servant and not servant; and now not particularly attentive to me. She said she had seen no letters. (E 66–67)

Brenda as returning the gaze, her ambiguous status (‘servant and not servant’), and, most tellingly, her moving into the seat of authority, the ‘literary centre’ – the manor – and thus her entering of ‘the house of literature’ signals a disturbance of male literary subjectivity and consequently constitutes a threat to the narrator’s writing, further emphasised by her withholding his letters, which are later passed on to him by Mrs Phillips.317 The woman as withholding the writing is most telling here, as its suggests an interruption of a literary tradition in a male line. Brenda embodies the challenge to a literary tradition (black British, Asian, or Caribbean) that, as Stuart Hall states, was “stabilized around particular conceptions of black masculinity”, but which came to see more forceful assaults from both feminist and queer theory in the 1980s (“Ethnicities” 446).

As this indicates, this inscription of the woman-as-other into this order is already fraught and insightful regarding the anxiety of artistic prowess she signals. In another revision of the gaze, a hysterical interrogation of the knowledge the narrator supposedly possessed, her picture is crucially altered: While the initial description catalogues her desirable attributes and claims that the narrator “knew her”, the revised gaze alters what had been presented as knowledge:

[T]hat [initial] impression, arrived at from a distance, was added to now by the clearer and fuller sight I had of her on the lawn. To […] this voluptuousness were now added the stare

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317 The reference to her ‘unsettling eyes’, resonating again with the gaze located at the site of the Other/other, is crucial: ‘unsettling’, in the novel, occurs two further times in connection with women and writing, emphasising the threat to a male order: it is repeated in his description of Angela, who is also connected to writing, and with regard to an episode the narrator experienced on a journey. Here, the sexually ‘inappropriate’ behaviour of a “dainty girl who spoke to me about poetry” is also described as unsettling (E 112). The further occurrences also suggest moments of boundary disturbance, where it refers to open doors or gates (E 55; 247) and to the realisation of the industrialisation of the landscape (E 199).
(rather than the fire) in her unsteady light eyes, the greediness expressed by her mouth with its seemingly swollen lower lip, and by the distinct spaces between her top front teeth. (*E* 62–63)

The switch to the passive voice – to these aspects ‘were now added’ – in rendering her sexually ‘aggressive’ qualities demonstrates the phallogocentric structure of the symbolic order. The picture, by means of association, is automatically, that is, subconsciously, completed and ‘woman’ inscribed into it. Crowle reads the voyeuristic gaze on Brenda as the postcolonial male subject’s defence against an introjection of a colonial discourse of the body by projecting this onto the body of the woman and the body as a site of resistance (110), but this introjection has always already happened, as the subject is only emerging in this symbolic order in line with the desires of the Other: as such, Brenda’s ‘unsettling’ eyes remind of Jack’s ‘obstreperous’ eyes, and her ‘idleness’ renders her somewhat similar to the dandies Alan and the landlord, and she has thus already ‘infiltrated’ the novel’s dominant artistic fantasies. Brenda here serves rather as an instance where the feminine, in the sense of an indeterminate part of the ‘self’ comes to the fore, concomitant with the hysterical questioning ‘of the subject’s sexual position’ (*Evans* 80). This is further illustrated as her name is only revealed when the narrator admits that ‘I was nervous of Brenda’ (*E* 63), and in the fact that while the narrator uses the term ‘stranger’ mostly as a self-descriptor, twice this noun is also associated with Brenda (*E* 65; 67). While withholding her name serves to heighten the impression of submitting the female element in rendering her anonymous, ‘nervousness’, as anxious affect, then breaks this mode of repression and causes the name to come the surface.

The break of the disavowed feminine, constituting the real, into the masculine symbolic of the text culminates in the rendering of Brenda’s death. While the threat to the male writer subject is thereby seemingly displaced, even on the narrative level, as it is rendered in telling rather than showing mode, suggesting detachment and indifference, the disaffected façade is countered on the level of speech. Thus, the episode of her death is introduced with an exclamation on the narrator’s part – “[c]ountry darkness!” (*E* 70) – and Mrs Phillip’s account of her death accompanied by another interjection: “Saturday night!” (*E* 71). These affective eruptions already mark instances of the repressed breaking through the surface; the following obsessive rendering of Brenda’s “taunting”, which the narrator misinterprets as having “sexual connotations” (*E* 71), culminates in an affective violent outburst on part of the narrator: “And it was hard not to feel that she didn’t have some idea of what she was provoking. And how, having started on the job of destruction – he had used a kitchen knife […]”, how he must have

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318 Similarly, Simon Cooke states that the exclamations in the novel, “even those called up by pain or horror”, are “expressions of wonder and invitations to wonder” (*Traveller’s* 126), and they nearly always “concern that which is somehow not seen, or forgotten, in the past or the present” (127). For him, these interjections mark the “deepest ethical dimension of the book: its recovery from disappointment and exhaustion” (127).
struck, until the madness and the life was over!” (E 71). That the rendition of Brenda’s killing marks an instance of the return of the repressed is supported by the exclamation that highlights the narrator’s taking over of another subject position (that embodied by her husband Les, who murdered her) and the irrationality of the account that is mirrored in the syntactical confusion.

Not only is Brenda returning as a spectre here, ‘haunting’ the re-established order, but the intense account also indicates the desire for a surplus jouissance that briefly disrupts the symbolic. Following this outburst, the narrative voice quickly returns to a matter-of-fact tone again and displaces the assessment of her guilt due to her ‘taunting’ from the narrative voice onto society in general, showing how the Law of the Father and the social order is “based on the murder of the mother” (Irigaray 47): “She ‘taunted’ him – it was the verdict. And all hearts were with the living, the survivor, the man” (E 71). The novel’s engagement of the feminine principle is thus a further means of acknowledging the gaps in the ideologies that structure the socio-cultural field without forfeiting authority: on the one hand, it illustrates how fantasies of Englishness and the nostalgic idealisation of the English countryside under Thatcher as a site of stable identities are based on the hierarchically inferior position of racial (the narrator), gendered (Brenda), and sexual (the landlord, Alan) ‘others’, all of which are subject to feminisation, and makes legible these disavowals. At the same time, as the texts of these others – as all of these are associated to some extent with writing – are valued in a contemporary literary sphere that desires opposition from authors to Thatcherite ideologies, the narrator enhances his authority by dismissing these contenders to his ‘postcolonial authority’. Enigma is then not subversive in yielding the male author’s authority in light of these fissures or figuring the narrator as artiste manqué, but evokes these contradictions as a means of temporarily acknowledging an ‘outside’ of the dominant order only to hedge it in.319 The ‘contenders’ to the male artist subject are ultimately contained through their expulsion from the narrative, and their brief evocation as a disturbance of the male order hence also serves as a narcissistic strategy to fortify the male artist subject by acknowledging, probing, and ultimately foreclosing their threat.

7.4.4 “nothing happens”:\textsuperscript{320} Desire’s Deferral and the Potentials of Ennui

Naipaul’s aesthetics of the unfinished also extends to the reader, who, like the narrator, is suspended in a process of ‘arriving’ and implied in the aforementioned processes of revision that function within a hysteric discourse of interrogating the symbolic order. Particularly, the

\textsuperscript{319} This impression is strengthened in the fact that the passage on Brenda carries similarities to the narrator’s later musings on Angela, an acquaintance he knew in London and whose letter reaches him in his cottage. In Angela’s case, it is her letter and handwriting in particular which disturbs male subject status (E 159–162).

\textsuperscript{320} This is taken from Derek Walcott’s writing on Naipaul’s novel (“Garden” 29).
resulting postponement of the fulfilment of desire in an “endlessly deferred arrival” (Lanone 239) serves to prevent readers from forming a coherent image. Often emphasised in critical literature is Naipaul’s technique of creating ‘slowness’ (Moslund 197; Jörngården 216), usually tied in with the narrator’s slow realisation of change and his return to and revision of earlier episodes. Valls-Russell enigmatically states that the novel “gains depth not only form what it tells the reader as from what it refrains from telling him” (139). Less generous in this regard are reviews of the novel that term it outrightly ‘boring’ or ‘dull’; a reviewer in the *New York Magazine*, for instance, states: “Sometimes he [the narrator] writes, sometimes he thinks about what he used to write or what he would like to write; occasionally he goes out for walks […]; a pipe bursts; grass grows; trees fall down, possibly of boredom” (Koenig 80).

This scathing criticism is due to the novel’s heightened emphasis on verisimilitude and seemingly trivial circumstantial detail, in the tradition of formal realism, which pertains especially to the narrator’s superfluous employment of adjectives and the obsessive enumerations, creating an impression of slowness. As a means of authentication, it resonates with what Dooley calls the creation of “an illusion of knowledge” (11) and Döring a strategy of sincerity that aims to persuade (125). Walcott’s assessment that ‘nothing happens’ in the novel (“Garden” 29) suggests that what disturbs readers is a sense of waiting and the frustration of the rhythms to which we are accustomed. As Elizabeth Grosz, drawing on Henri Bergson, states, “[w]aiting is the subjective experience that perhaps best exemplifies the coexistence of a multiplicity of durations, durations both my own and outside of me, which may […] delay me and make me wait” (197). While the narrator-author in *Enigma* is figured as aware of his inevitable determination by the Other’s desire, I contend that the text enacts a strategy of conscious deferral that serves to frustrate easy readerly pleasure and thereby unfolds ethical potential, as it circumvents glossing over ideological incongruencies. A highly metafictional passage in the novel highlights the danger of catering to readers’ easy consumption by encouraging, as Barthes has it, readers’ historical and cultural assumptions – in other words, of making too quick judgments. Musing on a journey to New York, the narrator outlines how memory and a text come into being:

I preferred to remember the taxi-driver as being talkative, because that was the way taxi-drivers were. […] I remembered the Negro […] who talked like a Negro in a book or film (‘Dis city never sleeps’ or ‘Dis city sho don’ sleep, man) […]. The talkative taxi-driver, the quaintly-spoken Negro – I cherished them because I felt I knew them, because I felt they were confirming

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322 Cf. here also Thieme’s review of the novel, which sees the “essence of the realist novelist’s craft” to lie in “an accretion of precisely realised circumstantial detail” (1377). The novel exhibits countless instances of giving circumstantial detail, cf. for instance the details surrounding the stacking of hay in the shed (*E* 16-18).
so much of what I had read, were confirming so much of my advance information. […] And in their familiar aspect they were material, suitable for the writer. (E 104)

The novel features several such instances, where ‘knowledge’ of others is superimposed through books.323 The narrator emphasises literature as performative: art does not mirror life here, but the other way around, hinting at the power of literature and reading, which in this scene amounts to a reinforcement of stereotypes. His uncertainty as to the details of the dialogue, however, implies that the inscription of the ‘other’ is always incomplete and not all of the subject can be present in the symbolic order, there remains an otherness that escapes signification. His further statement that their stories were ultimately “edited out of the diary which I wrote” (E 104) also renders this form of ‘knowledge’ insufficient.

The text’s emphasis on ‘slowing down’ must in this regard be read as an attempt to frustrate precisely such kinds of reading, a reading that aligns readers’ encounters in fiction with pre-existing assumptions. To enquire into this effect, it bears to return to Barthes’s definition of the text of bliss as a “text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom)” (Pleasure 14) and his comments on ennui: “if the prattle-text bores me personally, it is because in reality I do not like the demand” (Pleasure 25). Sommer, as I have stated, likewise points out prattle as a potentially ethical, as it confronts readers with their function as readers. For Barthes, the text that ‘bores’ is in contrast to the text that contents and, in the state of loss it potentially effects, demands readers to revaluate the parameters with which a text is approached and to become ‘writerly’ participants in the meaning making process. As Barthes continues: “Boredom is not far from bliss: it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure” (26). The ‘slowness’ associated with boredom, thus, prevents readers from arriving at a final meaning and textual closure. I do not wish to state that Enigma is a ‘boring’ novel but rather that the emphasis on tiredness, slowness, repetition, and absence of passion, which certainly posits a demand many critics and reviewers found difficult, frustrates easy consumption. Hardly ever are we confronted with instances of outright pleasure or of the erotic in this novel, yet despite the near-absence of plot, action, and sexuality, Naipaul’s text is still, in Barthes’s sense, potentially affecting bliss, and this manifests in its appellation to the reader. ‘Ennui’ is, as such, a helpful analytical lens to enquire into the demands the text makes.

Slowness or inertia might initially seem a counter-intuitive lens, as the novel outspokenly emphasises ‘change’, with the narrator repeatedly stating that “I lived with the idea of change, of flux” (E 190). But the change that takes place is of a gradual nature and the novel, as Moslund has it, rather performs a “discursive economy of slowness” (197). Yet while Moslund finds that

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323 A similar instance is, for example, the narrator’s recognition of Bray’s anti-elitism, which he can only understand through William Cobbett (E 222).
slowness shows a “reluctance […] to let go of the centripetal forces of sameness” (198), I contend that it has actually quite the opposite effect on readers and makes aware of the ‘gap’ in symbolic knowledge and the writer’s inability to mend it. This ‘slowness’ is exacted both in terms of imagery, but also manifest on the very level of narrative, where repetitions, particularly in form of anaphora, often dominate: the – each four – instances of verbal repetition of the “daily” walks of the narrator (E 23), the musings on “the hay” (E 17), and on the new farm workers – “they” (E 42) – are just a few examples of how the narrative pace is slowed down and a sense of monotony created. On a global scale, the chapters themselves are rewritten instances of each other, which are pitted against the impression of a circular progress of time as exemplified in the change of seasons and thus suspended in return and sameness. Judith Levy has characterised the novel as evidencing a “repetition compulsion”, which, as bringing readers in tune with a “primal experience”, serve to gain “ego mastery and control” (111). While I agree with repetition being consciously evoked as a strategy for gaining control, I see the effect in Enigma amounting to precisely the opposite.

What are readers then to make of these repetitions without a – seemingly – crucial difference? We can resort here to Lacan’s notion of ‘automaton’ as that form of repetition that serves to veil the real, as the “automatic functioning of the signifying chain” (Fink, Lacanian Subject 31). In this sense, repetition is a means to protect the subject from its original trauma but simultaneously indicates its presence: “The real is that which always lies behind the automaton” (Lacan, Four 54). What the text here performs is a readerly protection from the real through constant repetitions, while simultaneously enacting that the subject’s trauma is always only temporarily held at bay, like a “knock on the door that interrupts a dream” (Evans 25). This takes place by performing repetition – as basic structure of the subject – in extreme form and by thus exposing how it keeps subjects ‘in place’ and makes change difficult. It also illustrates why ‘boredom’ – through seemingly inert repetitions – is a state between pleasure and bliss: on the one hand, the subject is sustained in its position through the soothing method of repetition. On the other hand, as the novel performs and I will show below, the trauma beyond the surface is a constant threat.

Through readers’ ‘slow discovery’, they are aligned with the narrator, whose scrutinising and revising of landscapes or people as well as, on a macrolevel and considering the text as the narrator’s product, the novel’s chapters here mirror the reading process. In terms of temporality, it problematises any notion of an authority of experience, as it draws attention to the laborious task of bringing an ‘authentic’ past into being that simultaneously collides with a disparate view on the present. Further, the text’s emphasis on repetition, slowing down, and moving back counters the notion of an ‘origin’ and disinterpellates the reader as a detective who is geared
towards an Oedipal denouement, in Bloch’s sense. Making readers witnesses to these workings and effects of repetition as that which suppresses difference simultaneously serves to expose the function it performs. One instance here is the narrator’s constant suppression of racial difference. Writing about a Gala night, where he is confronted with a young American Southerner’s racist remark, he confesses himself “taken aback” but quickly displaces the topic of race from his writing: “It was too close to my disturbance, my vulnerability, the separation of my two selves. That was not the kind of personality the writer wished to assume; that was not the material he dealt in” (E 114–115). Performing the repression of the topic in terms of language through resorting to the third person, the awareness nevertheless comes back – in form of repetition: immediately after, he thinks about the “Negro at the hotel” whom he had edited out of his diary (E 115), and, at a later point where he professes to be in a state of anxiety, this memory returns again (E 150). Repetition, here, troubles the narrator’s own repression of his racial difference, so muted in the Wiltshire episodes, and emphasises that his first ‘reading’ of the man above, whom he felt he ‘knew’ due to previously acquired knowledge, does not hold – in uncanny fashion, this scene returns and troubles his own status as subject and writer, and serves readers as a constant reminder of the racial trauma.

Other instances of repetition as masking trauma extend to the ‘trauma’ that infects the landscape in a time of rapid industrialisation and globalisation. Here, forcing readers to ‘slow down’ and frustrating expectations of linearly progressing functions as a means to counter ideas of progress and to question subjectivities under capitalism and the relations to others these entail. This is salient in passages where readers are thrown back to earlier perceptions and where different temporalities are present at the same time. On various occasions, the industrialist restructuring of the Wiltshire landscape is slowly unravelled as infiltrating the pastoral landscape and intervening in the narrator’s emphasis of the “ancient” nature of Wiltshire (E 27), the adjective repeated four times here, by means anaphora: “I saw the farmer or the farm manager making his rounds […]. I saw the modern grain barn at the top of the hill. I saw the windbreak up and down that hill and saw that it had been recently planted […]. I saw the hand of man, but didn’t sufficiently take it in” (E 27). While this has been mostly interpreted as Naipaul’s “nostalgia for the Empire” (Van der Veer 99), the copresence of plural perceptions in fact serves to attune readers not just to the capitalist restructuring of the Wiltshire idyl, but to the fact that the idealised countryside has always been a construct only and, moreover, ‘exploited’ – both economically and, under Thatcher, ideologically in positing it as fantasy that serves to veil economic and social ideologies.

More so, it also exposes how this fantasy prevents from relating to others. A telling example is the narrator’s perception of Jack’s father-in-law. The narrator posits him as the
‘origin’ of his Wiltshire experience, repeatedly emphasising that he saw him first (E 20; 25; 168), as intricately coalesced with the landscape and, as elaborated on above, similar to his own status as a ‘stranger’. With regard to this figure, the text emphasises how the subject’s insistence on objet petit a, which triggers repetition – in the narrator’s case, “seeing what I wanted to see” (E 27), i.e. an unchanged landscape and subject – ‘lulls’ readers into complacency and oblivion to change: the above-mentioned lengthy anaphoric musings on what the narrator saw, which then slowly interweave signs of the father-in-law (E 27–28), slow down the reading to such an extent that the following more abrupt claim that readers have actually glanced at a ‘dead man’ all along through the narrator’s eyes, i.e. at the father-in-law’s remnants, in a swift culmination of the narrative’s Thanatic structure, carries a certain potential of disturbance:

A whole life, a whole enduring personality, was expressed in that ‘run’. And so strong were the reminders of the old man’s presence, so much of his spirit appeared to hover over his run […] so much did all of this speak of the old man moving slowly back and forth on his errands, that it was some time before it occurred to me that I had not seen him for a while. And then I understood that what I had been seeing for many weeks past, many months past, were his relics. He had died. (E 28)

The repression of seeing “the hand of man” (E 27), i.e. the influence of industrialisation and the modernisation of the Wiltshire countryside, has also entailed the failure to ‘see’ the other man and recognise his absence, his death. The accustoming to and repression of the effects of capitalist modernity, this implies, also entails becoming oblivious to one’s fellow human beings.324 In this way, the text complicates readers’ idealisation of ‘little England’ and renders it difficult as a space for idealised notions of national identity. Where the narrator-writer cannot fully traverse his fantasies and clings to repetition as a hysterical interrogation of the Other’s desire, thereby, as Loh has it, foregrounding the impossibility of “constructing a postcolonial epistemology within Thatcherism” (97), it is at the site of the reader where particularly repetition as both indicating the absence of a secure origin and frustrating an Oedipally structured denouement, thereby signalling the inaccessible remnant of an original trauma, which in Enigma sometimes breaks through the textual surface, unfolds ethical potential and where the ideal of opposition that structures the artist’s desire can be realised.

324 In the same way, the narrator intermittently subtly intersperses the transformation of the Wiltshire landscape with the capitalist transformation of Trinidad and parts of South America, interweaving both England and the former colonies in an image of global exploitation.
7.5 Haunting Pasts, Imminent Futures: Historicising the Artist in David Dabydeen’s *The Intended* (1991)

David Dabydeen’s first novel *The Intended* (1990)\(^{325}\) is the last case study in this thesis and the only novel written by a so-called ‘second-generation’ Caribbean-British writer, albeit Dabydeen, too, was born in Guyana and came to England as a teenager. This generation’s literary output, as Stephanie Pocock Boeninger points out, demonstrates a paradigmatic shift: “For the current generation of Caribbean writers, the task of positioning their writing in relation to colonial history has been in some ways eased, in others complicated by the relative success of the previous generation” (462). Dabydeen’s work not only engages influences of a Western literary tradition, but *The Intended* especially shows a more overt engagement with his Caribbean predecessors. Thus, finishing my analyses with Dabydeen’s novel should not imply a culmination, much less as a definite end of a phase where the Anglo-Caribbean novel focused intensively on the artist theme. Rather, the novel concludes this study because, written in 1991 but set in the 1960s and 70s, it employs patterns of the *Künstlerroman* to simultaneously reflect on discourses affecting the first generation of *Windrush* authors and to compare and contrast these with incipient discourses at the end of the twentieth century, particularly with regard to newer ideologies of a by now more institutionalised discourse of multiculturalism in its neoliberal form but also with newer concepts of language and subjectivity.\(^{326}\) Like Naipaul’s text (and to some extent Harris’s), it participates in a trend to attend to the “historicity of Black British experience”, whereas earlier texts centred on “immediacy and ‘nowness’” (Procter, *Dwelling* 156).

This chapter argues that Dabydeen’s text enacts a ‘historical gaze’, i.e. through its artist characters presents readers with epoch-specific conceptions and forms of instrumentalisation of authorship and their influence on artistic subject formation. The text’s uneasy engagement of a loss of authorial certainty and the writer subject’s ultimate aphanisis express a now trenchant awareness of art’s depletion of inherent aesthetic or social value, its reduction to a commodity, as well as the dismantling of the ‘essential male black subject’. The novel’s probing of different forms of artistic production as well as discourses associated with different periods in Anglo-Caribbean writing is an expression of the uncertainty of the author’s role and agency in responding to nascent discourses of a ‘positive multiculturalism’. Dabydeen’s text is a logical end point to this study, as it answers the artist’s aporia neither through remythologisation or at least reinstallation of the (male) author’s privileged sensibility and insight, like Harris and to

\(^{325}\) References to *The Intended* refer to the to the 2005 Peepal Tree Press edition and are henceforth abbreviated as ‘TI’. All emphases and capitalisation trace back to the author Dabydeen unless stated otherwise.

\(^{326}\) Crucially, little attention has been paid to the implications of these two time frames, and if so, it has been traced back to the inferred (auto)biographical nature of the novel.
some extent Naipaul do, nor by a complete rejection of the author as collective subject, as Selvon’s Moses trilogy stages it, but cites and simultaneously problematises these trends in the Caribbean artist novel, thus providing a meta-perspective on the artist theme in post-Windrush Britain. In this way, Dabydeen’s text is also special, because, other than his contemporaries like Hanif Kureishi, who in, for instance, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), another artist novel, envisions a new, “funny kind of Englishman” (3) in a more unapologetic fashion and is lauded precisely for portraying the diversification of subject positions (Hall, “Ethnicities” 444), it demonstrates scepticism towards this diffusion of the subject and an awareness of the limitations of a ‘new’ kind of hybrid British- or Englishness, particularly under the auspices of the instrumentalisation of the same, which will come into full fruition at the turn of the century under New Labour and Britain’s self-branding as liberal ‘Cool Britannia’.

The novel centres on a group of adolescents in London’s working-class neighbourhood Balham and their – academic and sexual – education. Readers follow the again unnamed narrator, a young aspiring writer with Indo-Guyanese roots, whose narration interweaves episodes from his childhood in Guyana with his present in 1970s Balham and, in prolepses, his studies at Oxford University in a rather classical coming-of-age story. Well recognised in academic scholarship is especially its engagement of ‘multicultural identities’ (West, “Middle Passages”) and its intertextual references to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (West-Pavlov, “Daft Questions”; Cimarosti, “Migratory Bird”, Mark Stein, *Black British Literature*; Kevin Frank, “Two Kinds of Utility”) or Shakespeare’s *Othello* (Schamp, “Written”). While a detailed analysis of the protagonist’s artistic formation is as of yet missing, scholars have already hinted at the ‘artist novel nature’ of the text. Margery Fee, for instance, calls it a “portrait of the artist as a young man” (109) and finds it to adhere “fairly traditionally […] to the Bildungsroman plot” (108). A further impetus for this line of inquiry is indeed found in scholarship on the theme of *Bildung*, such as in Mario Relich’s “Literary Subversion in David Dabydeen’s *The Intended*” or, most detailed, Mark Stein’s *Black British Literature* (2004). Most recently, Lisa Ahrens’s *The Transformative Potential of Black British and British Muslim Literature* (2019) has attended to the novel’s negotiation of spatial formations and the ‘Oxford Myth’.

My enquiry into masculine subject formation as intertwined with fantasies of authorship extends readings of *The Intended* that have so far foregrounded the implication of female subjugation in legacies of Empire (Jackson, “Voyeurism”), the shared experience of othering of non-white characters and women (Fee 117), or the melancholic nature of gender relations as a negotiation of its intertext *Heart of Darkness* (Richler 30–63). The issue of writing and related

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327 Dabydeen’s first novel follows two collections of poetry, *Slave Song* (1984) and *Coolie Odyssee* (1988), both of which anticipate the topics of colonial and migrant experience that *The Intended* thematically continues.
broad questions regarding representativeness and representability have only been implicitly raised in secondary literature. Indeed, Erik Falk rightly claims that the dilemma of postcolonial writing and questions of (self)expression and representation without retreating to stereotypes constitute an ever-present theme in Dabydeen’s work but have received little attention (85). Some studies have hinted at Dabydeen’s engagement with the ‘burden of representation’ and aspirations to authorship as entrance into British mainstream culture; here, assessments differ: where Relich perceives the novel’s foregrounding of the protagonist’s literary aspirations as ultimately redemptive (53–56), Döring argues in the opposite direction by seeing the protagonist’s pretensions to it as an “assimilationist ambition” of “seeking sanctuary” within “English literacy” (117–118) and as ending in “recontainment” (119). Despite these observations, the text’s engagement with artistic mythemes and the functionalisation of the artist novel framework has not yet gained attention. Through the artist theme, and in The Intended, this is now manifest in form of writing and filmmaking, ideologies that have characterised earlier decades are engaged, such as the Arnoldian legacy of culture, the idea of a homogenous black subject, notions of representability, or the mode of social realism, and more explicitly contrasted with newer concepts of subject formation, while synthesis or integration is withheld. The latter relate particularly to masculinity, ethnicity, and author/ity as influenced by poststructuralism. Now, as this has become a dominant theoretical and philosophical paradigm, the challenge to the humanist, coherent subject is more sceptically and anxiously negotiated.

Further, it is also in Dabydeen that the material dimension of writing as well as artistic production in form of a ‘division of labour’ is most pronounced, which demystifies the artist as original creator by exposing artistic work as a capitalist form of production and speaks to changes in the cultural market due to the entrenchment of neoliberal politics. Aspects of productivity have already occupied Naipaul, yet the artist’s uneasy positionality in a literary field now more openly recognised in its economic dimension, where artistic integrity, however, still hinges on veiling this aspect, becomes even more emphasised in Dabydeen.328 In contrast to the former, Dabydeen demystifies the artist as occupying a “special position vis-à-vis capitalist value” (Brouillette, Literature 51), an idea that still holds some appeal for postcolonial artists’ negotiation of their own positionality in the literary field. Writing in Dabydeen is, despite the narrator-cum-writer seeking to be disembodied intellect only, I propose, figured as laborious practice, and the author subject as meticulous craftsman, which puts the

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328 As Castellano shows, the artist novel’s focus on aesthetic growth and artistic sensibility tends to veil the dimension of the material, which then, however, moves centre stage in times of socio-economic change or upheaval (12–14).
economisation of the cultural sector, production-aesthetic aspects, and questions surrounding the value of artistic work centre stage. In the narrator’s striving for erudition, the text also refracts the *poeta doctus* myth. The novel here posits a more conventional discourse of representation and of ‘becoming English’ as dependant on the inscription into a patrilineal literary tradition and the hegemonic order against discourses of the subject’s diffusion, which are relegated to the realm of the real. In this regard, the novel continues and culminates all the novels discussed in this study: all figure the artist’s vision, at least to some extent, challenged by another perspective, embodied mostly in other characters who figure as critics, contenders, or subversive ‘others’.

### 7.5.1 Artistic Mirror Stages and the Artist as Young *Poeta Doctus*

As in Selvon’s and Naipaul’s works, *The Intended* features the writer protagonist consistently as autodiegetic narrator. In distinction to earlier texts by Lamming and Harris, this speaks to an overall trend of foregrounding an individual and a seemingly stable and coherent authorial voice. With the young narrator’s outspoken wish to become a writer and a “fairly traditionally developed character, theme, image” (Fee 108), Dabydeen’s text most closely resembles the more rigid definition of the *Künstlerroman* as a novel of formation: portrayed at a liminal stage in his life – in the narrator’s present, where his departure for Oxford is imminent – he narrates his childhood in Guyana in a poor peasant family in analeptic episodes that are interwoven with the narrator’s more recent past in Balham. Structurally, the novel cites a rather genre-typical formation of artistic sensibility and the artist’s emancipation vis-à-vis literary and other ‘fathers’ and stages a desire for ‘authorship’ as, in Foucault’s terms, “a privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science” (“Author” 300). As such, it presents readers with a classical form of a journey in form of a rite-of-passage trajectory, which is most relevant regarding the metaperspective it presents on the development of the artist theme in the post-war decades and on a possible ‘reconciliation’ of artist and society.

Victor Turner’s definition of the *rite de passage* (94–96) as comprising stages of separation, liminality, and reaggregation is insightful here. In the novel, ‘separation’ manifests as the narrator’s leaving his impoverished childhood in Guyana, his youth and young adolescence in Balham constitute the liminal state, and the teased resolving of obstacles suggests a possible future state of reaggregation. The last stage, entailing the subject’s incorporation into the social – or symbolic – order, is dependent on the narrator entering Oxford University, which, as readers are told in a brief prolepsis, was successful (*TE* 139). His further development there is, however, left open at the text’s ending, which also leaves the narrative of
Bildung and the artist’s final ‘submission’ to hegemonic demands incomplete. The text highlights the interminability of writerly desire and suspends the artist protagonist in a stage of liminality and indeterminacy and thereby foregrounds the attempted quest for ‘definition’ in Oedipal form as the novel’s core concern. Considering the novel’s expression of a “historical consciousness” (Procter, Dwelling 156), this speaks to a continuous sense of artistic ‘entrapment’ that characterises both the time of the novel’s setting, the 1970s, where it also figures so prominently in Selvon’s text, and the present 1990s and can be interpreted as a comment on the Caribbean writer’s continuing precarious interpellation. Considering that Turner also describes the liminal phase as anti-structural, the novel, to my view, ties the struggle for artistic maturation also to a struggle for structure, that is, to finding appropriate means of representation to restrain indeterminacy, which is then manifest on the levels of plot, narration, and language.

I contend that the novel here proliferates competing discourses of authorship as differing modes of subjectivity that relate to different periods of the Caribbean presence in Britain, which intersect at the site of the narrator. As Stein has argued, the novel depicts “a variety of character developments [which] allows the narrator-protagonist’s formation to be seen in context” (150), and I see this to apply to the rehearsal of contrasting artistic subjectivities as a means to fashion authorial agency within a by now highly differentiated literary field. In the novel, this is often visualised through the circle of friends reflecting the nature of an artistic community and through their Kunstgespräche, i.e. through discussions of literature and art and their relevance for the narrator’s and his friends’ – racialised and gender-insecure – presence, which, by their very definition, reflect on the work’s own poetics. The novel, concomitantly, draws on more than just one ‘artist figure’: the narrator’s friend Shaz, fancying “poetic words and modern images” (TI 7), desires to be a musician (TI 8), a fact that his father denigrates as unmasculine by calling him a “pansy” (TI 8). Patel’s “artistry” (TI 9) lies in pickpocketing, which foreshadows the novel’s intricate mediation on authorship and artistry between autonomy, materialism, and social responsibility that is later led ad absurdum with his producing of pornographic films, and Joseph resorts to filmmaking to find a new aesthetics for the ‘black experience’.

329 For a detailed analysis of the novel’s citing of the ‘Oxford myth’ cf. Lisa Ahrens (85–116). While I find Ahrens’s study insightful for the enquiries into Oxford as a transformative space, I am not fully in agreement with her overall assessment that this myth and related ideals, signifying exclusion and tradition (90) and naturalised in the narrator’s mind, are never questioned from his perspective and rather set as norm. This, to my view, misses the more trenchant ironies of the text that arise from its self-reflexive negotiation of various myth(em)es of identity and creation. I see the narrator’s perspective, which readers follow, foregrounded as always already fraught by gaps in the symbolic order, which renders the narrator as a staging of the ‘mimic man’ a textual function to expose ideological incongruencies.
As the narrator constitutes the text’s central nexus through which these conflicting aspects and desires are mediated, it serves to first enquire into the artistic subjectivity he strives for and the portrayal of its formation. The novel here stages the artist’s ‘quest for self’, his move through the mirror stage and towards individuation, as grounded on the desire for emancipation not only from the “community of artistes” (*TI* 57), but also from a collective determined by racial and ethnic markers. At the novel’s outset, the narrator, Shaz, Patel, and Nasim are introduced via a racial taxonomy, as embodying different forms of a hierarchically conceived ‘otherness’, whereby the text programmatically foregrounds its own play with epistemological certainties: the narrator equates their external immaculateness in looks and dress with the different “shades” of “the brownness of our skins”, where being “two shades darker” equals being “two shades less immaculate” (*TI* 8). With the author-protagonist as a self-identified “Indian West-Indian Guyanese”, the “most mixed up” of his group of friends (*TI* 8), issues of (an ambiguous) racial and ethnic belonging and the resulting agon of authorship are always on the surface and intervene in the artistic mythemes the text evokes. The narrator’s categorisation speaks to an internalisation of the belief in what Graham Huggan in a different context has called a “postcolonial pigmentocracy” (*Interdisciplinary* 172), here in form of a ‘hierarchy of the races’ on the schoolyard. The introjection of racial beliefs also constitutes a reference to Shakespeare’s *Othello*, which forms one of the novel’s intertexts, yet the self-reflexive citing of this regime of representation serves to confront readers with possible prejudices they might hold about ‘the Asian diaspora’. Moreover, it also posits a comment on the now more hegemonic multicultural doctrine and concomitant preferences in the literary market that increasingly hinge on the valorisation of concepts of hybridity and ‘diverse’ stories, yet work under the same ideologemes of producing ‘knowable’ postcolonial subjects.\(^{330}\)

With the narrator, the text enacts subject formation akin to a ‘racial Oedipal complex’ that hinges on the fear of ossification of the racial ‘other’ at a biological, specifically genital level (Wapeemukwa 87) and of becoming the embodiment of the coloniser’s “repressed Oedipal desires” which society needs to disavow (87). In *The Intended*, the narrator envisions becoming-writer as dependent on – in alluding to *Othello* – this disavowal of the ‘other’ within, which speaks to an introjection of the coloniser’s discourse, and this is manifest both in the novel’s overall structure as well as on the level of speech. Structurally, the fantasy of individuation is enacted in the progression of the chapters, where chapters one to three each

\(^{330}\) The concept of hybridity – closely associated with Homi K. Bhabha and his 1994 work *The Location of Culture* – lies at the heart of postcolonial theory, but has long been controversially discussed and ‘demystified’ itself, and scholars have outlined its neglect of the material dimension of the context of colonisation. For earlier criticism grounded in materialist theories see, for instance, Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura” (1992) or Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies* (2004).
initially focus on either a friend or the group and the value they have for the narrator-as-artist’s maturation and his gradual inscription into the dominant order. Chapter four then begins with the narrator as “I”, suggesting a successful overcoming of a – here racially and ethnically circumscribed – state of undifferentiation, where his being “excited” (TI 149) speaks to the “jubilant assumption” (Lacan, Écrits 76) that accompanies the formation of an “ideal-I” (76). The mastering of the mirror stage and the thereby insinuated finding of one’s place in society is underlined by the temporal shift from the past tense to the present in the last chapter – “I wait for the taxi to arrive, early in the morning” (TI 149) – and the culmination in the last sentences in future tense.

The transcension of the inscription into a “racialized regime of representation”, to use Hall’s words (“Spectacle” 245), is further presented as contingent on demarcating the artist’s refined ‘self’ from what the narrator sees as the opposite of it – a “noisy West Indian-ness” (TI 127), embodied in a group of black West Indians he encounters in a bus and in whose image he fears to be misrecognised: “I’m different really. [...] I hope the whites can see that and separate me from that lot” (TI 127). In an act of foreclosure, ‘black West-Indianness’ is excluded from the symbolic and imaginary registers of subjectivity by inscribing the men as thrown back to their corporeal features, as corps morcelé, standing in contrast to the narrator’s self-conception as ‘pure’ intellect: described as roaring, kissing, grabbing breasts, only wanting to “dance and breed” and foregoing “stay[ing] home and stud[y]ing” for “dance hall and shiny shoes and expensive clothes” (TI 127), they mark the abject to the narrator’s ethnic, masculine, and artistic fantasies of ‘white civilization’, which is imagined as transcending these ‘primal’ urges and as distinct from corporeal features: “I’m decent and quietly spoken and hard-working and I respect good manners, books, art, philosophy. I’m like the whites, we both have civilization” (TI 127). Echoing the stereotypes surrounding West Indian men as sexually aggressive, promiscuous, and unambitious serves to fetishistically fix the ‘other’ through an ascription of a heightened physicality (Ahmed, “Racialized” 51–53) and to disavow it as part of the self.

As I have stated, Dabydeen’s artist novel mode effects a diffusion of ‘the artist’ through the employment of different (historical) artistic mythemes and authorial discourses that present readers with a history of Caribbean presence and literature in Britain; it stages a ‘splitting’ of the subject into subjectivities associated with ‘life’ and ‘art’ respectively and probes their relevance at a time imbued with “a sense of promise” and progress (Tew et al., “Recovering” 2). The narrator, here, at a first glance quite oddly, embodies an anachronistic subject position, as the reluctance to identify with any ‘black’ or ‘brown’ collective already indicates. In artistic terms, he self-fashions as true epigone, less creative genius or artist-seer, but intent on achieving artistic excellence through meticulous imitatio and faithful adherence to norms. This is evident
in his imagined ascent to becoming “a celebrity, or writer, or something” through following a linear trajectory of Bildung, from A levels to B.A. degree and a Ph.D. (TI 83), and most overt in the attempt to compose an epitaph for his landlord’s sister, his “first venture into poetry” (TI 103), in form of an adaptation of William Blake’s “The Tyger”: “It was more difficult that I thought to find exact rhymes, […] and it would probably take ten more lines before I had space to fit the tiger in” (TI 105). The narrator’s imaginary misrecognition also constitutes a pun on the reception of postcolonial authors as forever reduced to an imitation of their English forebears. The narrator’s deferential habitus illustrates his epigonism – his aim, after all, is to “rival Conrad and the other writers” (TI 104; emphasis added), but he never desires to surpass them. In foregrounding literacy and education as central for his envisioned authorship and envisioning himself as “professor” (TI 143), he also self-fashions as modern poeta doctus, as learned poet whose idea of art is grounded in knowledge and imitation of literary fathers (Hoffmann & Langer 142–143), which rests on his study of the English canon and a methodology of close reading. It is thus especially the narrator’s positionality as reader that is insightful, as this is marked by a belief in literary value and literature’s ability to create “a spiritual wholeness out of conflicting elements” such as “mind and body, intellect and feeling, self and world, form and content” (Newton 112). Likewise, his imagined epitaph is premised on “build[ing] up a human profile” which consists of “a sense of character, setting, mood” (TI 103) and a subsequent universalisation of Mrs Ali’s life by inscribing it into “symbols to do with human vulnerability, delusion, expectations cheated by death, and so on” (TI 104), the ‘and so on’ exposing the formulaic nature of such an attempt. The narrator – both as reader and writer – quilts the meaning of singular symbols to an overarching interpretation, in an attempt to foster an organic wholeness, and one can detect here an allusion to a discourse that dominated the British cultural sphere and West Indian writing in the 1950s.

As this demonstrates, authorial and masculine self-fashioning here hinge on the imaginary identification with male role models like William Blake, John Milton, Percy Bysshe Shelley, or Joseph Conrad – in fact all the author models the narrator draws on are male – and the assumption of respective speech patterns, which are most often immediately traversed. The novel’s foregrounding of its own intertextual nature in this regard has so far mostly been read within the context of ‘canonical rewriting’, as the enactment of a reverse journey into “the heart of whiteness” (Stein 160),331 or as a sign of the commodification of canonical figures and their rhetoric in younger Caribbean-English texts (Döring 115). Yet the text is, to my view, less concerned with ‘rewriting’ these intertexts and more with the narrator’s misrecognition of the

331 Most emblematic of these is of course the eponymously cited “Intended”, as a nod to the oblivious, sepulchral figure of Kurtz’s fiancé.
author names and literary references as embodiments of humanism, literary autonomy, and a belief in the subject’s mental faculties – in a dualist view of mind as dominating matter – and the consequent apotheosis of the ‘white, male, rational subject’ as (invisible) norm and thus enabling his becoming a writer.332 Books, art, and philosophy, evoked as transcendental master signifiers of ‘white (male) civilization’, constitute the objet petit a for the narrator, which corresponds to his envisioning himself as Cartesian disembodied existence, as ‘pure intellect’. In line with the narrator’s artistic fantasy, his initiation is then inscribed within a rather traditional idea of artistic influence: becoming ‘visible’ within the ideals of the English canon follows the trajectory of a Bloomian Oedipal struggle and a creative misreading of the ‘greats’ of literary tradition in a teleological and filial transmission of authority, yet ‘misreading’ is here to be taken literally, as, for instance, the profound ironies and ambivalences inherent to Conrad’s novella continuously escape the narrator.

The literary canon constitutes a fetish object for the narrator and the narrator fashions himself as its “guardian” by “occupying the position of ‘professor’ (94)” (McIntyre 170), and acts of literary interpretation and declamation are repeatedly resorted to in times of crises to mask the lack in being. In arriving at a writerly impasse for the epitaph, he immediately turns to Milton’s “Lycidas” and “declaimed it, as if to drown the banality of what I had written” (TI 106), and after an unsuccessful attempt at sexual intercourse with his girlfriend Janet, their dialogue is rerouted to Shelley’s Apology for Poetry and the narrator’s explanation of it to Janet (TI 146). The shift between different canonical figures and intertexts, McIntyre calls this the “pervasive presence of the canon” (168), without finding stability reminds of Homi Bhabha’s notion of fetishism as a “disavowal of difference” and the registration of the subject’s original lack, manifest textually in form of metonymy (74–75). In the novel, this disavowal rests on the narrator’s racial ‘otherness’ as – seemingly – detrimental to his sexual, artistic, and ultimately social mobility, which renders the subject position tied to the narrator a fairly archaic one: it is neither in line with the discourses of the 1970s that demand a reclaiming of difference for committed, politicised authorship, nor the late 1980s and early 1990s that envision the differentiation of the ‘black subject’, but best described as a citing of the cultural values espoused by Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis, ideals that influenced early postcolonial aesthetics (Kalliney, Commonwealth 16) into which the Windrush writers of the 1950s were often still interpellated. These hinge on the belief in an essential, timeless subject and a more universal notion of Britishness. The narrator’s quasi-Leavisite approach to texts through ideologemes like timeless values, organic communities, and culture as operating

332 Most telling, yet also more ambivalent in this regard is Joseph Conrad as literary precursor, and references to “the Conrad” (TI 63; 76) as well as to his novella Heart of Darkness (1899) proliferate.
outside ideology crucially all hinge on eliding difference, which shows analogies to a discourse of the 1950s and 60s, where, despite the Windrush generation’s confrontation with racism in Britain, a belief in individual effort as leading to integration into the British, white mainstream and in the next generation’s full assimilation still dominated (Ebke 52). These ideas thus provide the fantasmatic fabric for probing ‘wholeness’ and overcoming the ‘split’ that marks the artist subject in a transitional phase, at the ‘end of an era’ at which the novel emerged – hopeful for possibilities in the post-Thatcher period, wary of what this might entail, and uncertain as to how artists are supposed to negotiate the “trauma of diaspora” (Upstone 134).

This subjectivity is, as indicated, continuously foregrounded as an instance of misrecognition and the imaginary projections of wholeness interrupted. The idea of epistemological certainty and clearly definable identities is, for once, undermined in the narrator’s own namelessness, a fact that he shares with Naipaul’s (and Harris’s) author figure. The models the narrator draws on, the master signifiers of English culture, and ‘Englishness’ themselves are always already exposed as fraught, as the attributes associated with it – white, pure, culture – are in turn equally non-descript and constitute empty signifiers, often only repeated as function to quilt meaning in the face of insubstantiality, yet the disavowal of this fact constitutes part of his méconnaissance. Countering Patel’s problematisation of his notion of ‘white Englishness’, for instance, the narrator claims: “At least they write books and all that” (TI 142). This statement illustrates a further strategy that is typical for the novel. While the traversal of the narrator’s authorial fantasies sometimes takes place outspokenly, e.g. through the narrator disclosing his attempts to sound impressive as “foolish and pretentious” (TI 146), most often it is manifest as a more subdued speech pattern: the device of ellipsis that marks the narrator’s speech, the empty signifiers – “or something” (TI 83), “and so on” (TI 104), “and all that” (TI 142) – that often culminate the enumeration of his desires, introduce an element of the unspeakable, the real that linguistically undermines the tenability of the evoked mythemes and corresponds to a feminine principle of immeasurability and excess that has already infiltrated language. Likewise, in other instances, ‘Englishness’ is already rendered as traversed by alterity. In reading Conrad as embodiment of the ‘English values’ he aspires to, the narrator misrecognises the author’s Polish background. Moreover, the narrator’s “renunciation of temporal profit and the disavowal of the economy” (Bourdieu, Rules 255), which will

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333 Leavis’s statement that “[t]here is, then, a point of view above classes; there can be intellectual, aesthetic and moral activity that is not merely an expression of class origin and economic circumstances; there is a ‘human culture’ to be aimed at that must be achieved by cultivating a certain autonomy of the human spirit” (35; original emphasis) suggests the irrelevancy of markers of difference, under which then race, ethnicity, and gender next to class must also be included, for the production and reception of literature.

334 For an analysis of the intertextuality between Dabydeen’s and Naipaul’s text cf. Döring (131–136).

335 This is one instance where the assumption that the narrator has fully internalised the English ‘standard’ is, to my view, not tangible (cf. my assessment of Ahrens’s study in this regard above).
characterise the discourse embodied in his friends Shaz and Patel, in form of a romanticisation of the artist as outsider to a capitalist order is immediately undermined. The narrator answers Shaz’s question as to why he does not just “get a job with lots of money” as follows: “‘Because that is the way I am,’ I told him mysteriously, ‘money’s not everything,’ and as soon as I spoke the words the memory of a drunken Richilo sliding about in the mud […] returned” (TI 83). The exposure of his self-fashioning as ‘mysterious’ and particularly the interruption of the authorial fantasy through a memory of the narrator’s uncle Richilo in Guyana, who, in his connection to poverty and rum, figures as an embodiment of the effects of a continuum of the (neo)colonial, capitalist exploitation of Guyana,336 foreclose notions of artistic detachment for the colonised subject and hint at the writer’s inescapability from the responsibility to – now, by the 1990s – attend to the history of ‘black Britain’.

7.5.2 Oedipal Triangles and the Aesthetics of the Folk

As the quote above indicates, the narrator’s artistic fantasies not just relate to the literary models of the English canon, but also to aesthetic principles central to the foundational phase of Caribbean literature in Britain. Here, a closer look at the narrative’s interweaving of different time frames is insightful. The fantasy of coming into writing as an epigone in the narrator’s present, through imitating the English literary ‘fathers’, is frequently interspersed with analepses to his childhood in Guyana. The novel’s structural fragmentation, in which the “rupture between childhood and adolescence” is most pronounced (Relich 46),337 enacts the artist’s flight to an – imaginary – origin, both as regards the narrator’s artistic formation and, metaphorically and in tune with the elaborations above, a return to the early phases of West Indian literature in Britain, to find a – masculine – literary voice. In terms of aesthetics, this echoes demands in Caribbean literary criticism in the more immediate Windrush years, where a ‘return’ to the rural ‘folk’ was championed and can, in the context in which the novel emerged, be interpreted as an authorial insecurity of how to respond to the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject. Through the interspersal of the narrative with analepses, the interminability of the subject’s desire is both foregrounded and the subject’s aphanisis that the journey’s – and the novel’s – end entails deferred. By evoking male father substitutes, which are emblematic of a peasant masculinity, the text performs the pursuit of a speech congruent with such representational demands as further objet a. This speech is portrayed as

336 Cf. Eric Williams on the economics of slavery in this regard: “Rum was indispensable in the fisheries and the fur trade, and as a naval ration. But its connection with the triangular trade was more direct still. Rum was an essential part of the cargo of the slave ship, particularly the colonial American slave ship” (78).

337 Relich here compares The Intended to the Bildungsroman genre and to Dickens and Joyce.
phallogocentric, i.e. firmly within the rules of the phallus, and probed to counter the subject’s fraught adaptation of masculine scripts in the narrator’s present.

Similar to Harris’s novel, the initiation of artistic vocation is predicated on the absence/presence dyad of parents, particularly the father, and dependent on the metonymic substitution of the paternal metaphor. The narrator’s father constitutes a thematic vacancy, playing only a minor role in his childhood memories, which implies an insecure origin and descendancy that threatens coming-into-writing as resting on filial structures. Dabydeen’s text here also reminds of Harris’s enactment of the failure of a patrilinear transmission of authority through removing or blurring lines of descendancy. The father is first conjured up by the narrator in a twice-removed stance, citing the direct speech of his friend Nasim’s mother, who in turn reports Nasim’s speech, which speaks to rejection of the imaginary father through creating distance: “Nasim say your father give you to Welfare people to look after, your father drink very much whisky. Why your father leave your mother and run away to England and then send for you but not look after you? […]” (TI 23). The narrator’s silence,338 evident of the subject’s incomplete initiation within the (phal)logocentric order, here also suggests a possible interpretation of the novel’s title: as the intended search for the father as initiator into the social and literary order, in whose image speech and culture is developed. Consequently, after the confrontation with the paternal gap, the narrative shifts to the past and to two substitute fathers. Yet contrary to Harris’s use of this gap to create a new myth through fantasies of self-begetting or Selvon’s rejection of literary ‘fatherhood’, Dabydeen’s text enacts these imaginary flights to the past in instances where the narrator is challenged in the present.

With the symbolic father, who is predicated on the imaginary father as “father in individual prehistory” playing precisely this part as oedipal father (Kristeva, Black Sun 23), constituting a gap, developing a literary language and coming into writing is probed through resorting to male relatives as anti/heroes, both poles of which function to delimit norms of masculinity. This can be identified as a melancholy strategy, but must be read beyond its connotation of mourning, a distinction that Sigmund Freud has already made in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), but rather as a failure to move from the imaginary to the symbolic based on the failure to accept loss.339 The melancholic mode signals the narrator’s inability to accept

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338 The narrator emphasises this twice: “I didn’t know what to say”, “I merely stared at my shoes glumly, unable to answer” (TI 23).
339 Following Freud, melancholia refers to the subject’s excessive relation to the lost object of love. Contrary to mourning, in melancholia, the cause and nature of loss is unconscious, the ego cannot de-cathex from its loss but incorporates the lost object into its own subjectivity – it ‘cannot let go’, causing a “narcissistic identification with the object […] as a substitute for the erotic cathexis” (249). The object, here, can be anything from a lost person to a more abstract idea(l). Relating this to desire, the unfulfilled desire for the object (as erotic practice) is internalised and constitutive for the subject. Different from Freud, Julia Kristeva, emerging from Lacan, regards melancholia not as a relation to an object, but as emerging from the subject’s failure to symbolise such an object.
the subject’s lack of origin and stability and his ‘flights’ to the past constitute a narcissistic probing of a seemingly more stable subjectivity, i.e. that of the ‘folk’. This resonates threefold with the novel’s time of publication: it indicates a flight from the desire in the literary field for representational means to correspond to a more diffused notion of the ‘black subject’ since the 1980s, refers to a loss of authorial certainty brought about by newer developments in cultural theory that entailed the dissolution of the Cartesian, coherent subject, and, in contrast to these developments, points to an increasing instrumentalisation of authors for a multicultural doctrine.

One such model evoked in the analepses is the narrator’s grandfather, who, as poacher, also constitutes one of the novel’s “avatars of the travel figure” and is thereby tied to the theme of the middle passage (West, “Middle Passages” 223), an image that undermines the notion of origin itself. The grandfather, for the narrator, takes on both imaginary and symbolic value: he is at once an idealised image of a protector but likewise performs as symbolic father, not as a concrete model of speech but, in a rather Freudian psychoanalytic function, by embodying the prohibiting function of the Law that intervenes in the boy’s potentially incestual relationship with the mother figure and initiates him to the signifying meaning of the phallus, which here is tied to both a ‘heroic’ form of peasant masculinity and English education. In this vein, the narrator’s description of the grandfather and his initiation of the boy to ‘culture and civilisation’, rendered as male domain and manifest in the symbols of food and clothes, reads like Freud’s description of psychosexual development:340

I was lying warmly in the bosom of my grandmother, her arm hugging me steadfastly. […] He eased me from her grasp, plucked me up an took me to the posy at the far end of the room to urinate. Then he gave me some clothes to wear, took me to the kitchen, and after I had washed my face, I sat down at the table to eat a piece of bread and drink from an enamel mug steaming with hot milk. We headed for the savannah, walking forever that morning in semi-darkness. […] I listened out for his stick scraping the earth and followed his sound. The ground was hard and painful to walk over [...]. (TI 25)

This performance of masculine ‘rites of initiation’ here also implies the steps in authorial maturation: the ‘scrapping stick’ evokes the image of a pen scratching over paper, and the ground ‘hard and painful to walk over’ the aspiring writer’s struggle with the literary ‘fathers’ that will occupy the narrator later in England and particularly Oxford.341 Concomitantly, the few impressions and utterances of speech readers receive from the grandfather are either related to the narrator’s education, his going to England and coming back as a doctor (TI 29; 31), or the

(Black Sun 23) and to overcome the “weight of the primal Thing” (42). In extreme form, melancholia ends up in “asymbolia” and “loss of meaning” (42), i.e. it hinders the subject’s move from the imaginary to the symbolic and to accept the lost object as such (22–23).

340 Crucially, the grandfather is also represented as carrying a stick, a phallic symbol, which, for the narrator, resembles “a wand which with one wave conjures up a dream world” (TI 25).

341 It is also this memory that the narrator resorts to later in the library in Oxford (TI 140), which emphasises its relevance for his artistic formation. I will return to this scene in chapter 7.5.4.
initiation to manhood by partaking in stealing and butchering a lamb, which is rendered not as necessity out of poverty, but as a rural habit and masculine ritual (*TI* 27). Both the peasant manhood and the telos of ‘enlightening’ the village through education, concomitant with ‘becoming English’, are cleverly united in the grandfather’s imperative to the narrator to “[l]ight lamp” (*TI* 28) when both cut up the lamb. In locating the origin of the narrator’s desire to write in Guyana, the text suggests a return to the Caribbean ‘fathers’, which demonstrates the second-generation writer’s awareness of a by now already established canon and history of Caribbean writing in Britain, but a simultaneous exclusion from the mainstream and from a narrowed concept of Britishness.

The fantasy of a stable origin and masculine self-fashioning based on patrilineal (*Ersatz*) structures and a linear journey is, however, presented as unreliable, as the narrator’s memory is revealed as fabrication: “perhaps in the treeless cold of Bedford Hill, [...] I fabricate his memory [...] . Perhaps I am still dreaming in the hammock and the last day I saw him [...] never existed except as a romance of the mind” (*TI* 25). The recognition of an idealisation of the grandfather suggests an imminent traversal, and this is even more emphasised in the reference to the ‘romance’: as a metafictional hint at the subject’s lack of essence and the importance of generic structures for bringing it into being, it indicates an awareness of the textuality of existence, the narrator’s ‘perhaps’ constituting a remnant of the belief in a past as coherent and whole. Moreover, the fact that the narrator does not reproduce speech from the grandfather, who is rendered as mostly silent, speaks to a melancholic mode vis-à-vis this figure, a breakdown of symbolisation and thus a foreclosure of moving into the symbolic by a recourse to this image. As a self-reflexive commentary on the literary landscape in the early 1990s, this implies a shift in conceptions of diasporic subjectivity, as now more diffused, and the unsuitability of the ideals and trajectory embodied by the grandfather. As such, the author is figured again suspended in a liminal state between essentialisms, the ‘stable black subject’ that characterises the 1970s in particular, and their diffusion, in emphasising the subject-as-narrative.

The second male figure which is intricately tied to the narrator’s artistic formation is the grandfather’s brother Richilo, whom the text presents as influential for the narrator’s literary language. While quite different from the grandfather, both are to be understood as complementary rather than competing forms of masculinity, and Richilo as supplementing the envisioned stability of folk manhood with the subversive aspect of a more vulgar form of speech
and masculinity. The grandfather and Richilo as the two central male figures embody two extremes in a narrow spectrum of masculine subjectivities available in large parts of the postcolonial Caribbean and correspond somewhat to the aforementioned and much-discussed dialectic between respectability and reputation (Wilson 1973; Sampath 48–51; Besson 12–14). The former, as a form of masculinity that is rooted in colonial structures, i.e. European values, lifestyle, and education, is mirrored in the grandfather’s focus on ‘education’ and ‘England’ as goal. Reputation, as a creole counter-culture to the same, based on notions of freedom and egalitarianism, tied to lower-class actions, hedonism and live-for-today enjoyment, and historically to slave resistance and rebellion, is embodied in Richilo.

Tellingly, it is most often Richilo to whom the text shifts in moments where artistic creation is hindered, and it is only Richilo’s language towards which the narrator’s desire is geared. Constituting the ‘obscene father’, the “uncanny, shadowy double of the Name of the Father” (Žižek’, Enjoy 180), and as such the father in the real, marked by unlimited enjoyment, Richilo is portrayed as a violent drunk and swearing, yet it is precisely Richilo’s ‘bruteness’ and “whiplash language” (Relich 50), his “poetic[…]” expressions (TI 45), “power of speech”, and cleverness “in seeing things and words” (TI 161) to which the narrator is linguistically attracted. Richilo’s speech is steeped in sexual and racial vocabulary throughout and firmly located in a phallic economy (TI 45; 161): he describes, for instance, the narrator’s grandmother as “a tar-baby, a low-caste, louse-ridden, yam-headed, dog-eared, hungry-belly, black-skinned, buck-toothed whore, more sour-mouthed than tamarind, more hard-hearted than turtle shell, more slimy than fish-guts, stinker than latrine, more pissy than monsoon, more …” (TI 161). Yet the wish to “describe things like Richilo” (TI 161), that is, the access to a ‘precise’, phallic form of language is, from the perspective of the now adolescent narrator’s point of view, rendered as unfulfilled, as his own description of his grandmother via the image of a cow’s skull stuck on a pole in the garden shows:

I screwed up my forehead for at least half an hour trying to figure out what the cow’s skull resembled. […] I felt hatred for her again. I wished she would tell me things when I asked. […] I looked at the cow’s skull, ugly and broken and scared by the weat her and time, its jaws set in silence, its eyes empty of feeling, suddenly knowing that it resembled the whole of Ma. (TI 162)

This complementary rather than competitive relation is visible in the fact that whenever Richilo falls into one of his vulgar outbursts, the grandfather is fast asleep (TI 45) or absent (TI 162), hinting at the Ersatz nature of both masculine models.

Cf. Žižek’s description of ‘father figures’ in Conrad’s novels here: describing Kurtz of Heart of Darkness or Mister Brown of Lord Jim as embodiment of the failure of the paternal metaphor, he likens the “emergence of the obscene father who supplants the father living up to the symbolic function” to a figuring of the feminine as “occupying the impossible place of the traumatic Thing” (Enjoy 182).

The narrator’s excitement at both the vulgarity and linguistic prowess of Richilo is already hinted at earlier in the novel (TI 45–46).
While the content of the description – the grandmother’s ugliness and lack of empathy – is similar, *form* is different: where Richilo’s language is rendered within the certainties of phallogocentrism, coining its own similes and images, for the narrator, this linguistic prowess is inaccessible. His interpretation is only advanced by means of metaphor and allusion to the skull and is already canonically inscribed, as it is reminiscent of the spiked heads in front of Kurtz’s station in *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 57) and its white bones evoke the novella’s imagery of ivory. As an embodiment of the language of Albion Village, Richilo’s “vivid curses” are also equated with the “black words” the narrator has to find to compose an epitaph for Mrs Ali (*TI* 107). Crucially, the narrator’s evocation of Richilo also takes place in a moment where both sexual and authorial mastery is impeded in his present and where he seeks Joseph as an intermediary to explain the meaning of “black words” in order to deflect from Shaz’s “questions about my sexual progress with Janet” (*TI* 107). As the significance of ‘black words’ remains impenetrable for the narrator, Richilo’s phallic language is then foreclosed both as authorial instrument and as providing an understanding of the diaspora in Britain.

While Dabydeen’s text is not unique in its interruption of the transmission of language and authority from ‘Caribbean father’ to ‘Caribbean(-British) son’ and the ensuing undermining of myths of origin, as this theme is also present in Harris’s work, *The Intended* refuses the male author’s domination of the female native muse and the mystification of Guyana as inspiring ‘womb’ of creation, so central a theme in *Scarecrow*. The text rather cites these mythemes self-reflexively: initially, the portrayal of the ‘feminine’ in the novel is firmly within the semantics of the mysterious and pre-linguistic, in a rather conventional evocation of the female-as-obstacle on whose mastery the formation of the ‘mythical male subject’ is predicated. Both the grandmother and Auntie Clarice, who are also evoked in analepses, are frequently associated with ‘mystery’, often silent or their speech rendered as posing a riddle to the narrator (*TI* 32; 109). Resonating with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in *The Intended*, it is the woman who seems to constitute the ‘impenetrable jungle’, as the grandmother’s body, exposing the male poet’s dependency on a tradition of what Neluka Silva calls “woman-as-terrain” (153), is likened to the land: “I […] noticed how cracked the soles of her feet were. There were lines everywhere, running in all directions, like a spider’s web or a complicated map of the world tracing roads and rivers and other routes” (*TI* 30). Interestingly, it is precisely this “eulogiz[ing] [of] his grandmother” that Mark Stein interprets as the originary moment of a “powerful post-colonial voice” (163). Yet while the narrator here might ‘produce’ a beautiful eulogy, he cannot

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345 The reference to the skull, the shifting of perspective to decipher its meaning and the connection to the phallus as creative force also resonates with the anamorphic image in Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533) and is evident of the larger structural field of perception and image distortion in the novel.
reproduce this in written form later on when faced with the composition of an actual epitaph for Mr Ali’s sister, his first commissioned work – that is, he cannot commodify the inspiration gained from the native woman, and the native ‘muse’ thus rather serves to signal a crisis in narrative.\(^{346}\) William Boelhower aptly comments on this scene as demonstrating the existence of a “rival savoir” to the literary texts the narrator studies in England, an intervention of a “concrete – as opposed to abstract – fantasy” (131). This has implications for the narrator’s artistic development, which is most visible in the grandmother daring the narrator to spell out words for practice:

“You can count?” she challenged. [...] She [...] dared me to spell ‘mouse’. I did so. ‘And “cockroach”? [...] I followed her spelling the word aloud. ‘And “centipede”? And “mosquito”? And “snake”? And “woodworm”? I stood at the top of the stairs spelling and watched her slowly move down from board to board. She scrubbed and wiped, as if to banish all the pests and hazards she was asking me to spell. (TI 109)

The semantics of space are telling here: the grandmother challenges the narrator, who here stands at the top, from below, and her metaphorical erasure of his words render her a subversive element that defies the insignia of an English colonial education and the Name-of-the-Father. In undermining the certainties which the narrator seeks, she resembles Joseph as destabilising element (cf. chapter 7.5.4) and intervenes in the narrator’s identification with Western, male knowledge.

The recourse to the past places masculine and authorial subject formation in an Oedipal triangle of child, father, and mother (substitutes), who for the artist embody the struggle over his poetic language. The text here exposes the fallibility of the paternal metaphor for acquiring literary authority and thereby also demystifies the ‘folk’ and a ‘peasant masculinity’ as stable cultural reference point. It also destabilises its inscription into narrative form, which would imply a linear movement and sequential structuring of events, ultimately geared towards a conclusion, but rather has the Oedipal struggle for authorial subjectivity infiltrate the events in the narrator’s present. In this sense, the connection to the next paragraph that takes readers again to the present can also be understood as a textual undermining of notions of a secure origin from which to start one’s (literary) journey: Patel’s “[g]oodbye white man” to the narrator (TI 162) suggests a traversal of the narrator’s fantasy of a journey into, as Stein calls it, the “heart of whiteness” (160). The authorial subject position tied to the narrator is then a profoundly liminal – and anachronistic – one, oscillating between the ideals of a much earlier phase in British cultural discourse and a return to a Caribbean ‘origin’ and aesthetics of the folk. In the

\(^{346}\) Similarly, Auntie Clarice’s “African face” is described as “sprouting hairs between the cracks, like a golden-apple seed” (TI 31). The repeated emphasis on ‘cracks’ is reminiscent of the hard ground he and the grandfather walk over in the scene of the narrator’s ritual initiation and, in the association of the cracked land with a text into which the narrator must palimpsestically inscribe himself, also hints at the gendered implications of authorship.
context of the late twentieth century, the evocation of these discourses speaks to a nostalgic flight to the origins of Caribbean literature in Britain, perceived as possibly less restricted for the Caribbean writer, which, through the incompatibility of the models probed, is, however, always exposed as the writer’s misrecognition.347

7.5.3 Pornography and Unruly Muses: The Materiality of Authorship

The narrator’s fantasies are also traversed by a competing authorial discourse, which finds its embodiment in the narrator’s friends Shaz and Patel and intervenes in the narrator’s anachronistic concepts of ‘Englishness’ and particularly ‘author’ by emphasising its complicity with commodification. Notions of the ‘material’, in this respect, manifest in various forms and serve to foreground this dimension inherent to concepts of ‘author’ and ‘text’. As in e.g. Selvon’s text, art and economics are intricately connected in The Intended, yet here they culminate exaggeratedly in the production of pornographic movies and the exploitation of the female body for artistic endeavours, which constitutes a pun on the muse discourse. This serves a twofold function: for once, it alerts readers to accelerated tendencies of commodifying and functionalising the ‘ethnic text’ in the literary field, which has intensified under Thatcher, and pre-empts the value of the artwork as resting on concepts such as originality and authenticity by juxtaposing it with pornography. Secondly, it constitutes a materialist counter-discourse to the ideal of literary autonomy, the artist as free from instrumentalisation, and the striving for a higher order of ‘truth’, an existence as ‘pure mind’, which marks the narrator’s aesthetic ideal, and thereby also hints at what Eagleton calls the ideology of the aesthetic, i.e. the evocation of the aesthetic to veil the realities of (re)production and to maintain class hierarchy (Ideology 3).348

The positions embodied in Shaz and Patel continuously subvert the idea of aesthetic experience as positively transformative, the artist as bearer of utopia, and the idea of art as potentially outside ideology. Where Adorno characterises the aesthetic experience as potentially effecting a counter-discourse to the reigning ideology, in a belief in the relative autonomy of the artwork –

By the affront to reigning needs, by the inherent tendency of art to cast different lights on the familiar, artworks correspond to the objective need for a transformation of consciousness that could become a transformation of reality. (Aesthetic 330)

347 As Sarah Lawson Welsh states, “the prevalent view of Caribbean-British writing from the 1970s onwards has been that it is limited by its primarily social and political ‘Black’ themes and performative modes, both of which have been leveraged to argue that it is not properly literature” (259).
348 This materialist discourse also clashes with the most radical artistic position taken in the text, Joseph’s embodiment of antilogocentrism.
Shaz and Patel, having both been educated by the narrator in the ‘classics’, use their knowledge to create “the real book” (TI 143) the narrator had envisioned and transform ideas of aesthetic autonomy into their own economic autonomy. They use the ‘weapons’ of the European literary tradition and unite to produce pornography to cater to a predominantly white, English, working-class audience, who are now imagined as body-only, “[w]alking banknotes” with skin “shiny like coins” (TI 142), and whose ‘baser needs’ are exploited. Focalised through the narrator, the text shows him continuously oblivious to these intricacies, trapped in a misrecognition of art as freed from ideology, yet they constantly intervene in his fantasy of literature as aesthetic, autonomous domain: “Patel […] pulled out a document marked ‘Business Plan’ […]. No more tigers ‘embellished’ by the sun’s rays or ‘sepulchral in the moonlight. His business plan banished all wildness, removed the animal claw and fang, replaced them with colourless, neural integers” (TI 143). Using Blake’s “The Tyger” as stand-in for a Romantic notion of authorship, echoing Patel’s and the narrator’s own ‘rewriting’ of Blake’s poem earlier in the novel (TI 12–13; TI 104), deconstructs this ideal and speaks to an awareness of art as always already infiltrated by the logics of the market. The economic sphere here traverses the literary sphere as field of autonomy and undoes it as an “economic world inverted” (Bourdieu, Rules 83): rather than mourning the loss on the “symbolic terrain” (83), the narrator’s desire is drawn towards the “power to crush heads” and the sexual prowess it promises – “the most beautiful and inaccessible of women falling greedily upon your lap” (TI 143).

The friends’ performance of each different roles in this regard, where “Shaz would procure the girls, […] Patel would fund the whole project, […] Joseph would operate the camera”, and the narrator “write the script” (TI 141–142), is here less reminiscent of a collective notion of authorship and knowledge production, but the assignment of specific roles follows the economic principle of a division of labour as industrialised process and most efficient use of different skills to achieve the greatest possible profit. In this way, it poses an intricate comment on the myth of the author as original genius and the postcolonial writer as received within a Romantic paradigm of autonomy (Brouillette, Postcolonial 73) and hyperbolically cites the trend in the humanities and arts of perpetuating idealised artistic stereotypes by insisting on a mystified idea of “solitary initiation” (Woodmansee 289). Connecting ‘business’ and ‘literature’ and premising both on the resource of sex foregrounds, in an almost exaggerated manner, the ‘erotics of the text’: with the friend’s joint venture, the underlying structure of desire culminates in a literal reciprocity of sex and art, revealing the intricate connection of sexual and writerly desire and the predication of writing as signification process that is based on sexual differentiation.
Yet the text also approaches the erotics of art more critically. Kevin Frank has commented on the friends’ dialectic as a necessary “struggle between utilitarianism and romanticism that Caribbean writers inherit from the Victorians, an ideological struggle they must negotiate in their quest for a literary tradition and a sense of cultural identity” (“Two Kinds” 10), and to some extent, his comments resonate with the plight of ‘life’ vs. ‘art’ so inherent to the Künstlerroman. Yet I doubt that the text endorses Frank’s teleological notion of ‘inheriting’ and ‘negotiating’ a European tradition to ‘arrive’ at a cultural identity. What I rather propose here is that Shaz and Patel’s ‘utilitarian art’ as a counter-discourse to the narrator’s concept alludes to both the disavowal and commodification of ‘otherness’ in the literary market. Profiting from bodies through pornography, Shaz and Patel reference and make visible a displaced genealogy of exploitation through Empire and of the feminine in art and turn it around: instead of black, white bodies – female and male – are now commodified.349 The advertisement for a movie Patel sells displays

a beautiful woman lying on white satin sheets, her clothes dishevelled from a struggle or else in preparation for one. It was difficult to tell whether the look on her face was one of alarm or anticipation. A man loomed over her, his shadow darkening the whiteness of her thighs. (II 162–163)

The novel here reflects a literary tradition that predicates male artistic power on the subjugation and objectification of the female (body), amounting to what feminists have termed an equation of writing with murder, the trope of “killing [of] women into art”, which constitutes less a process of sublimation than a symptom of attempting to uphold the symbolic order through a systematic suppression of the female position in society (Stephan 90). Moreover, the exaggeration of the colour symbolism, resting on an allusion to Othello through the white – dark imagery, the deliberate ambiguity of female ‘lewdness’ or victimhood (with the woman on the poster being either ‘in alarm’ or ‘anticipation’), and the implication of femicide serves as a comment on the hypersexualisation of black masculinity and is indicative of traits of late modern capitalism, where the fear of the hypersexualised ‘other’ and anxieties regarding racial mixing and miscegenation have already been commodified and become part of the logics of the cultural market.350 The narrator’s inability to read, i.e. to correctly interpret the woman’s look and whether the fight has already taken place or is about to, whether the woman is a victim or equal participant, moreover points towards an epistemological gap and alerts readers to the

349 Jackson, assessing Dabydeen’s work, attests him an “extensive and sustained engagement, from a male perspective, with the radical feminist idea of sexuality being the basis of women’s oppression” (“Voyeurism” 432).

350 The association of ‘darkness’ with violence and the conscious mixing of sensual with violent imagery here also amount to a criticism of the depersonalisation and aestheticisation of the ‘other’s’ suffering for the satisfaction of the viewer’s or reader’s scopophilic pleasure. In his narrative poem Turner (1994), an ekphrastic response to J. M. W. Turner’s painting The Slave Ship: Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon Coming On (1840), Dabydeen poses a similar criticism. There, however, it is the slave instead of the female body that is submitted to the painter’s aestheticisation and the viewer’s pleasure.
ideological function of representation. It disturbs, in Barthes’s terms, an Oedipal pleasure of denouement, of knowing beginning and end (Pleasure 10) and thereby exposes how cultural processes gain their authority always a posteriori through representation.

The ‘material discourse’, then, suspends the narrator’s fantasmatic imagination with the ‘ivory tower’ mytheme by exposing art, in a stance akin to Eagleton, as relying on the treacherous notion of the aesthetic as free from ideology, which ultimately strengthens the hegemonic middle-class, white order. The narrator’s traversal of this fantasy is also underlined by the fact that the narrative briefly switches to the present after this reflection on Patel’s ‘art’ – “All that is behind me now, I will never come back this way, I tell myself” (TI 163) – which suggests a brief return to the previous imaginary, but pulls him back to the past in Patel’s shop, where the latter crucially tells him that “Oxford can’t give you nothing man” (TI 163). Oxford, as myth (Ahrens 85–92), is here emblematic of an upper- and middle-class education and as such implied in the ideology of the aesthetic, i.e. complicit in the apotheosis of art as disinterested and thereby in naturalising the dominant ideology. Shaz and Patel figure as representatives of a discourse where racial and ethnic difference is claimed emphatically for emancipatory purposes and a resulting more phallocentric black manhood as it characterises the 1970s, which stands counter to the narrator’s fantasies of a universal white masculinity.

The intertwinement of art and erotics, a sexual undercurrent that underlies the former, is most present in the novel’s drawing on the Künstlerroman pattern of the artist’s sexual experience as premise for artistic maturation. Narrated and focalised through the adolescent narrator and thus suggested as a ‘natural’, inconspicuous process and step in the rite of passage, the text aligns the Oedipal trajectory and the boy’s striving for knowledge with male initiation. In this vein, the quest for cultural literacy is predicated on sexual literacy, and the very first lines of the novel demonstrate that this desire is again located at the site of the Other, with Shaz here embodying the object-cause of desire: “Shaz knew more about sex than any of us boys and it was his erudition which drew me to him. At an early age he was versed in mysterious acronyms and abbreviations like CP, DOM, SUB, ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels” (TI 7). Education, signifying access to culture, and sexual maturation are thus intertwined from the outset and are, in the novel’s narrated present, reciprocally rendered in terms of penetration, where literary creation is framed along the metaphors of potency and impotence, and sexual im/potence through literary metaphors. The text here probes the mutual substitution of the foreclosed access to a Caribbean cultural origin with a conventional Western discourse of male creation, hinging on the binary of nature vs. culture, as a fantasmatic Ersatz strategy to come into authorship.

The novel’s self-reflexive staging of the myth of the female muse, as securing both intellectual and sexual mastery, is a case in point here. The narrator continuously evokes his
girlfriend Janet’s image in moments of authorial crisis as a means to sustain writerly desire, but defers the fulfilment of this desire by having her slip his mastery. Contrary to Harris’s revelling in the jouissance the muse as ‘other’ induces and the authorial self-destruction through her encounter in Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*, Dabydeen’s text here remains ambiguously positioned, congruent with the overall ‘double vision’ the text exerts, a complex ‘looking forward and looking back’: it acknowledges the incompatibility of the literary tradition for the immigrant subject, but simultaneously demonstrates a persistent anxiety in the face of a diminishing of authorial and masculine authority and is reluctant to ‘let go’ of these mythemes.

Like Selvon’s narrator, Dabydeen’s protagonist frequently suffers from writer’s block. The impending loss of masculine procreativity – when attempting to compose a poem, he pauses “in self-doubt”, unable to “think beyond the first stanza” (*TI* 104) – is deflected by the text’s installing of a gender hierarchy to ward off the threat of boundary excess. Echoing what de Lauretis has theorised as the narrative reinstatement of the masculine as ‘mythical subject’ through submission of the ‘female obstacle’, defined by passivity and an identification with the image, like the body or landscape (*Alice* 144), the narrator turns his gaze to Janet, figuring her as muse and the obstacle that must be overcome, and equates her body with language, which he imagines mastering:

> My thoughts drifted off instead to Janet, I imagined her curled under the blanket like a comma, or, touched by a wisp of dream as ticklish as the tips of my fingers stoking her naked back, she straightened like an exclamation mark and her nipples confronted me like a colon daring me to conclude what I had timidly begun or to explain it away. I knew that I would take the latter course, stumbling and apologetic as usual, unsure of myself. I emerged from all this literary fantasy and nonsense with a real feeling of incompetence. I put pen to paper again, driven this time by a sense of the pity of my life, the uselessness of it, and the words came in a torrent more real than any Indian monsoon[*]. (*TI* 105)

This scene has yielded similar interpretations so far: Stein reads it as proof of the narrator following the “‘cultural grammar of Englishness,’ to borrow Gikandi’s term (1996, 192)[*] […] to the dot” and thus as “a transference of the epistemological violence experienced by him as a black Briton into the domain of gender violence” (157), and Schamp as leading to the narrator’s “feelings of inadequacy and pain” in face of a “Western cerebral aesthetics”, where Janet comes to embody the “yoke of logocentrism” (137). While I do agree with both to some extent, I see the reading of this scene under the auspices of the narrator confirming to a discourse of assimilation, i.e. of fulfilling a teleological journey to Anglicisation, as lacking. Schamp also concludes that the narrator becomes “visible in the tradition of the British canon” (138) and Stein finds that Oxford ultimately enables him to see how the English language was always already part of his own language (168). In inscribing a narrative of transition to the ‘house’ of English literature, these readings somewhat neglect that Dabydeen here ambivalently draws on gendered clichés of artistic creation, a staple trope of the artist novel, to create a text that *haunts*
I will elucidate Dabydeen’s employment of these clichés in the following by drawing on Bloom’s discussion of the muse and demonstrate how this passage is part of a larger textual discussion of the artist-muse discourse that speaks to an anxiety of literary belatedness in line with the narrator’s ‘search’ for a literary parental figure and for a way forward at the threshold of an era.

As the attainment of the muse is congruent with poetological demise because it would terminate desire (Bloom 13), here, it is precisely Janet’s recalcitrance to the narrator’s fixed image of her that sustains creation. Under the narrator’s imagined touch, Janet transforms from a comma into an exclamation mark, inferring his commanding of control over the text, more precisely, the transformation of part of a sentence (comma) into a finished statement or text (exclamation mark). Her withdrawal even in the narrator’s imagination, the metonymic shift of images, and his being challenged by the muse – confer the ‘daring nipples’ – result overtly in desperation and self-declared impotence, but actually sustain writerly desire, and the text envisions this sexual failure as the motor for creation, as afterwards, “the words came in a torrent”. In a Lacanian sense, the muse functions as a fantasy of male mastery and a stabilisation of the phallogocentric order but is here foregrounded as linguistic in nature, in employing the semantic field of grammar for sex and vice versa by equating Janet with the text and language.

Throughout the text, the narrator’s initiation to culture, portrayed at the novel’s outset as a visit to cinema, is rendered as a “trial of strength, a test of masculinity, to overcome all the obstacles between the glass door and the padded doors […]. You push the door and with a sense of immense relief you find it actually opens” (TI 10). The rhetoric of cultural initiation is reiterated in the narrator’s actual attempt to lose his virginity with Janet which, akin to the forestalled attainment of the muse as sustaining writing, remains unsuccessful: “I […] moved towards her and lowered her to the bed, […] when I tried to push my stiffness into her and found the hole unmanageably small. I paused, then pushed again, but nothing gave, no sudden opening, no delicious force sucking me in” (TI 145). The conventionality of this discourse of male artistic formation is also manifest in the text’s echoing of Bloom’s description of the muse trope, which he develops in Freudian terms: “In the wholeness of the poet’s imagination, the Muse is mother and harlot at once” (63). Janet assumes both the position of love interest and mother, with the actual figure being an absence in the text. In a motherly substitute act, and the narrator’s last attempt at a flight into a pre-symbolic state of symbiosis with the (absent) mother,

351 Although Schamp mentions that Janet “does not epitomize an inspiring female European muse” (137).
352 This is suggested by Bloom’s tying in the preservation of the artistic quest with the forestalling of the Muse’s attainment: “Each strong poet’s Muse, his Sophia, leaps as far out and down as can be, in a solipsistic passion of quest” (13), and the Muse’s aid in the face of poetic anxiety “means to foretell and put off as long as possible the poet’s own death, as poet and (perhaps secondarily) as man” (61).
it is Janet who prepares him for his departure and initiates the next step in his rite of passage by giving him “the white shirt” and kissing him “on the cheek, saying goodbye” (TI 173). She speaks with “the authority of a mother” (TI 171), and the narrator even imagines himself as her child: “I will be her dark secret, her illicit pregnancy, her undeveloped child” (TI 173). This culmination of the encounter with Janet-as-muse shortly before the novel’s end as a flight into a pre-symbolic state of undifferentiation evokes Joyce’s apostrophe in A Portrait: “O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh” (236), and speaks to a wish to renew himself through Janet not only artistically, but also ‘ethnically’ – emerging as ‘author/ised’ as opposed to as illicit, ‘bastard’ child. Crucially, both his imagination as being in the muse’s womb as well as his desire to return from Oxford as “my own photograph, sharply defined, […] somebody definite” (TI 173) also put the artist in the vicinity of an emerging text, drawing on the notion of the body-as-text, an aspect that will become crucial at the novel’s culmination, as I elaborate on below.

While Janet is imagined by the narrator as “pure” (TI 170) and “fragrant” (TI 171), she is revealed as unruly and thus somewhat similar to Moses’s Brenda and Harris’s Hebra. This speaks to the anxiety of literary belatedness, the possible disturbance of poetic wholeness, and the infiltration of language – embodied in the muse, as evidenced in Janet’s equation with the text before – by ‘another’: “His word is not his own word only, and his Muse has whored with many before him. He has come late in the story, but she has always been central in it” (Bloom 61). Janet troubles the narrator’s rite of passage when she, after their failed attempt at sexual intercourse, challenges the narrator’s interpretation of Shelley’s Apology for Poetry by putting forward a more insightful reading of Shelley’s comment on ‘seed’, in a quasi-feminist criticism of the text: “I bet Shelley was thinking of daffodils. Men always go for vulnerable images, things they can control and dominate” (TI 146). Fee has read Janet as “vagina dentata” (119) in this regard and suggests Janet as gatekeeper for white culture, but her function is yet more complex, as it serves to illustrate the author’s imagined position at a ‘discursive threshold’: the possible access to the cinema mentioned above that contrasts with the failed sexual act and subsequent mastery of Shelley for once hints at the intangibility of the form of ‘high literature’ the narrator pursues and is exemplary of a critical discourse of literary authorship that has for a long time denied Caribbean writers acknowledgement for their aesthetic innovations, by reducing texts to mostly sociological analyses. Further, it also hints at a demystification of ‘high art’ vis-à-vis popular culture and the commercial, which become intricately intertwined in the

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353 Similarly, it also resembles Joyce’s letter to his later wife Nora: “My body soon will penetrate into yours, O that my soul could too! O that I could nestle in your womb like a child born of your flesh and blood, be fed by your blood, sleep in the warm secret gloom of your body” (Selected 169).
post-war period, and a concomitant loss of belief in the artist as extraordinary being (Schrödl 194), an anxiety Lamming’s text has already illustrated. Not least, Janet’s reinterpretation of a male, European tradition constitutes an intervention in the transmission of literary authority from English ‘father’ to Caribbean ‘son’ and complicates the ‘anxiety of authorship’, already exacerbated by the factors of race and ethnicity, by exposing the mythical narrative on which masculinity rests.

As the text employs the mytheme of the artist’s utilisation of the muse for literary production self-reflexively, the text that is produced after the confrontation with her is then an unfinished, ‘bastardised’ piece of literature, evident of both the process and product of writing, containing both the artistic telos and its undermining. In an explicit metafictional instance, after the narrator’s imagination of Janet-as-grammar, readers are presented with a handwritten sketch of a poem (TI 105), the only actual fact of creation and manifestation of the above-cited ‘torrent of words’ readers witness. The manuscript, constituting both a mimicry of a European literary tradition and its revision, can be read as haunted by and haunting this tradition, and the artist novel as part of it. Interestingly, even though the narrator teaches the pentameter to Shaz before, the poem only rudimentarily corresponds to this metre. Brathwaite has explained the importance of pentameter for Caribbean literature: “What English has given us as a model for poetry […] is the pentameter” which “carries with it a certain experience” (History 10). The deliberate forgoing of this metre hence reads as a break with the English tradition, corresponding to the ‘unruliness’ of the muse. Following Vilém Flusser’s definition of writing as gesture, which sees it as inextricably tied to rules of linearity that in turn structure “our way of being in the world” (20), the written text exposes the teleological structures that serve to strengthen Western – and also masculine – epistemes and power. Here, the visible deletions in the text, as conscious processes of rewriting and still visible for readers, speak to this attempt, yet simultaneously attest to their failure. As traces of a failed performance, of that which has been foreclosed to the real, they haunt the text and hint at the formation of the symbolic order through foreclosure. Authorship is, again and in line with the novel’s foregrounding of its material dimension, presented as labour and comes into being both present and absent, as visible in the deletions, and thus both linear and anti-linear, as past and present is visible at the same time.

354 As Flusser states: “The gesture of writing follows a specific linearity. […] It […] gives a form to (in-forms) a whole dimension of our existence in the world. We enter into it as a form that is historical, logical, scientific, and progressive and also as a form whose specific linear character has made our gesture of writing irreversible. To alter one single aspect of this accidental structure, for example, to suggest writing in reversible directions as the ancients did, would mean to change our way of being in the world (20).
This demonstration of the text’s infinity and the traversal of the fantasy of art and aesthetics as “non-alienated mode of cognition” (Eagleton, Ideology 2), by foregrounding “the fact that it is manufactured [rather] than its own inner constitution” and thereby its status as “social labor” (Adorno, Aesthetic 4–5), serves as a threefold poetological comment. It is for once a strategy to create an aura of authenticity and is as such also reminiscent of a younger discourse of authorship that necessitates its spectacularisation: the uncertainty of the author’s authority is highlighted by the fact that the narrator must prove his writing process and product precisely by including the manuscript as ‘ocular proof’, fitting to the novel’s overall nod to Othello; in order to convince readers of the originality and individuality of his art. Further, it also makes aware of the primacy of language in meaning-making processes and the constructed nature and textuality, even palimpsestic nature of all existence, this more so as it presents us with deleted passages. Reminiscent of Barthes’ scripteur, the text and the narrator here are portrayed as coming into being at the same time and only preliminary, denying any anterior claim to authority. Considering this conspicuous insertion in the light of the artist novel’s play with orders of observation, readers are here not just made aware of the narrator’s own blind spots, but also the fictional acknowledgement of the same and thus reminded that any representation or attempt at it is always only provisional. The manuscript then also demonstrates that any notion of Englishness, towards which the narrator strives, has itself only come and is perpetually coming into being through careful revision and re-writing.

Finally, the emerging text is not only inspired by Janet as recalcitrant ‘muse’, but she also haunts the very text produced: the first, corrected, line reads “Hands clasped tight, lips/That whisper and pray” (TI 105), and this echoes Janet’s assessment of men’s poetry as “always go[ing] for vulnerable images, things they can control and dominate”, whereas she thinks “poetry is a meat-eating, cunning flower that traps your tongue and never lets go” (TI 146): the ‘whispering’ and ‘praying’ lips – as homophone of ‘preying’ – resound uncannily with Janet’s meat-eating, cunning flower, which shows that Janet’s poetics has already infiltrated the narrator’s creation and decentres the male text by portraying it always ‘other’. As such, the manuscript embodies the novel’s overall artist novel mode of exerting a double gaze on the history and presence of Caribbean experience and literature in a nutshell: it both acknowledges

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355 Othello is another intertext frequently, although less overtly, cited. References pertain for instance to the theme of ‘appearance and reality’, Janet’s similarity to Desdemona, as she, too, ‘devours’ the narrator’s discourse, and of course the difficulties of interracial relationships, as visible in Janet keeping the narrator from meeting her parents (TI 172).

356 The manuscript in The Intended here also fulfils a role similar to the Pearsons’ bookshelf in The Emigrants, as in foregrounding the materiality of authorship it is at once indicative of the workings of desire and demystifies the author as writing under a genial stroke of inspiration – despite his own claims.
cultural, theoretical, and aesthetic shifts, yet the unfinished piece of writing also indicates an anxiety as to what the future holds and what role the artist is to play in it.

**7.5.4 Utopian Desires, Mad Geniuses, and the Liminal Author**

This anxiety as to ‘diffuse’ the ‘essential black subject’ is most manifest with the figure of Joseph. While both Janet as ambivalent muse and the grandmother constitute temporary interruptions of the patrilineal order and the phallogocentric text, the concept of the coherent author subject is most urgently destabilised through the subjectivity associated with him, the narrator’s Rastafari filmmaker friend, who figures as the text’s boundary excess. Dabydeen’s is then the only *Künstlerroman* in this study that also associates a male character with the feminine principle. Joseph constitutes the most enigmatic figure in the novel and has yielded quite different interpretations. Kevin Frank reads him as the embodiment of a Romantic literary tradition and the manifestation of Joseph Conrad’s influence (“Two Kinds” 11), an interpretation the narrator’s and his friends’ enchantment and following Joseph like “disciple[s]” (*TI* 62) supports. Russell West, on the other hand, sees his complicated relationship with the narrator as vehicle for a “clear distancing from the Rastafarian movement as a bearer of disappointed hopes” (“Middle Passages” 232).

Karen McIntyre provides the, to my mind, most intriguing interpretation of Joseph, seeing him as an interrogation of various binaries: he effects “a supplanting of these oppositions by a seemingly inevitable blurring of the discourses of order and chaos”, where the “resistance to classificatory processes […] has clear repercussions for literary studies” (154). I particularly take my cue from McIntyre’s assessment of Joseph as troubling classificatory systems and propose to read him as a destabilising counter-discourse to the two artistic subjectivities discussed so far and as the text’s engagement of the mytheme of the artist as bearer of a utopian desire for a not-yet: he constitutes for once the staging of a traversal of the narrator’s early-*Windrush* – yet now anachronistic – fantasy of the ‘ivory tower’, i.e. the author’s belief in the “world of the imagination” (Kalliney, *Commonwealth* 10) as “exempt from the systems of racial and political hierarchy operative elsewhere” (viii), and secondly a complication of a later discourse that necessitates artists to negotiate their habitus in relation to a socioeconomic circumscription of authorship, as embodied in, and exaggerated with, Shaz and Patel. Joseph embodies an absolute alterity to both of these discourses, which both presuppose authorial agency. Dabydeen’s artist novel mode here also unsettles mythemes of artistry and masculinity by introducing a poststructuralist ‘intervention’ in discussions of subjecthood and the author with Joseph. In the text’s ambivalent engagement of this destabilising element, it continues and contests Lamming’s text, where anticipations of the subject’s dissolution were figured as
potentially circumventing the Caribbean subject’s discursive incorporation via essential
categories, but less overtly celebrated than in Harris’s novel. As the “fiction’s figure of a
utopian desire” (Parry, “David” 87–88), the enigma towards which the narrator’s desire is
oriented, Joseph here also constitutes the, for Bloch fundamental, utopian element of the
_Ästhetikerroman_, an engagement of the “portrayal of the desire to articulate […] that which has
never been heard” (‘‘Artist’’ 275).

As illiterate and lacking formal education, Joseph is the most marginalised within the

group of friends, rendering his inscription into dominant cultural discourses via reading,

following Barthes’s dictum “I write because I’ve read” (Preparation 131), a priori foreclosed.

This is crucial, as it figures him somewhat outside the logocentric structure and potentially less
interpellated into the dominant order. In this sense, Joseph’s development within the novel is
insightful, as he, I contend, constitutes a nexus of the discourses into which Caribbean writers
have been interpellated post-Windrush and enacts their gradual refraction, ultimately
culminating in the ‘death’ of the author. Initially, he assumes the position of postcolonial ‘re-
writer’ of colonial inscriptions, but rests itself on essentialist notions of the subject, on “merely
oppositional strategies” (Lionnet 66) and “binary categories of postcolonial counter-
discourse” (76) as it characterised the early stages of Caribbean literature that were often
engaged in decolonial politics. Joseph initially aims to fill in the blanks in _Heart of Darkness:_
“‘But what ‘bout the way he talk ‘bout black people?’” (TI 72). He desires to create a film that
“you will think is Africa” (TI 80) and rewrites the romanticised African images at the Battersea
Fun Fair by palimpsestically adding to these the disavowed discourse of colonial desire and
fetishism. Painting white men “sucking on a bone” and “tugging at ivory tusks” (TI 82), he
visualises the sexual undercurrent of colonial exploitation and foregrounds ivory as phallus,
and thereby also makes legible what is only implied in the intertext _Heart of Darkness._
Gradually, his art leaves the paradigm of ‘writing back’, moves through the stages of committed
authorship in probing a different poetics of the subaltern by creating a memorial for Mr Ali’s
sister through “a new language with film” (TI 115), which is reflective of the discourses of the
1970s that tasked the writer with distinct, yet positive representations of the ‘black subject’.
Ultimately, his art moves on to the deconstruction of essentialisms, focused only on the in-
between, “the spaces between one rib and the next”, as he describes his filmmaking later on (TI
167). Joseph is interested in “nothingness, colourlessness”, endlessly “tossing out […] images”
and focusing on the “pure space” between things rather than concrete objects (TI 76). His art
becomes a performance of _différance_, an enactment of the metonymic shift of signifiers. Relich
argues that Joseph as film artist constitutes a “hidden polemic against the aesthetics of film”
and the “lure of media” (50), but the effect he has on the narrator is less indicative of a
competing notion of artistry, which would result in a perpetuation of dominant cultural values, but of a profound anxiety due to his function as a signifier of the subject’s ontological insecurity: Joseph constitutes an abject precisely because he embodies the shifting discourses within the literary field, which serves as a reminder that the Other, and the subject itself, is always marked by lack.

Joseph’s unsettling function is most prevalent in his undermining of the narrator’s knowledge and his attempts to write: “‘What is it that you’re reading?’ he asked again after a while, pointing to the novel held in my hand. ‘It’s another book,’ I answered automatically, putting pen to paper, but knowing that the effort was futile” (TI 62–63). Through Joseph, the narrator’s desire to establish a linear story is rendered as constantly undermined by the textual desire that runs counter to the surface, continuously disturbing the meaning that is tentatively installed here. Speaking with de Lauretis, the text here foregrounds its own narrativity (Alice 206), its processuality in showing how the subject only ever emerges temporarily in the nexus of meaning and desire. In disturbing ontological certainties, Joseph fully enacts the otherwise more subtextually present notion of a ‘bastardised’ version of author(ship) and text and a rejection of the paternal function by frustrating all attempts at identifying an origin – he corresponds to the ‘other’ jouissance in the text which subverts the phallogocentric order: thus, he is “[un]sure of how old he was”, constantly outside the law in terms of “scrap[ing] with authority” and having “spent much time in borstals and police cells”, he proceeds non-linearly and anti-teleologically – “he had a way of rambling, never getting to the point” – and “lack[s] precision in everything, unable to remember a year, a name, an episode” (TI 65). The frequent inscription of Joseph as ‘mad’, ‘crazy’, or “strange and unrealistic” (TI 66) serves to marginalise and disavow this disturbing element, but likewise portrays him as mythical ‘mad genius’, and, concomitantly, he is also the centre of the narrator’s desire. Joseph’s art as “touched by genius” (TI 113) here renders the narrator’s epigonism as mediocre (TI 112), particularly through his association with an original potency of creation that breaks with the normative rules of the narrator as poeta doctus (Hoffmann & Langer 144).

As such, while fantasy serves to ward off the real and thus undifferentiation, the subject position of Joseph is never congruent with any such protective screen, but rendered as that element which collapses fantasy, i.e. the real. The foreshadowing of Joseph’s death illustrates this:

‘Look at me, […] what colour I am? […] right, you right, I black, no doubt about it, yes? […] It’s just that sometimes I wake up in the middle of night to drink water and when I catch sight in the mirror, is nothing I see. Just blank mirror. And when I look again making a special effort,

357 The proliferating isotopic associations of Joseph with ‘disturbance’ speak to this interpretation: he often “interrupt[s]”, or “[breaks] in” (TI 70), “retaliat[e]s” (TI 71), is “jumping up […] in a sudden agitation”, “shoving” (TI 73), or “pestering” the narrator (TI 74), to name but a few examples.
a black blob of face appear. Like a lump of coal. But how yellow and orange flame can come out of coal? And the coal turn white when it burn out to ash? How come I turn all different colours if you set light to me? (TI 74)

The move from the imaginary to the symbolic is here hindered: Joseph’s face will only transform from ‘nothing’ to a ‘blob’, and he cannot fully identify with the moniker ‘black’ (‘I turn all different colours’), speaking to a failure of becoming-subject in the dominant order of Britishness – both in the sense of assuming the role of the racial ‘other’, but also in seeking (artistic) subjecthood under a politicised blackness. Crucially, the narrator’s fantasy of literary mastery is thereby also interrupted: in this scene, both discuss Heart of Darkness, and the narrator is “for the first time unsure of what seemed an obvious answer”, “uncertain[…]”, unable to “guess” what Joseph means (TI 74). Joseph embodies a more contemporary artistic subjectivity, the scripteur, a conception that is related to the diffusion of subject positions, i.e. the end of the essential black subject as well as of ‘the author’, which is also cited via the overall trajectory of his development.

With Joseph, the ‘death of the Author’ (with a capital A) the birth of this new subjectivity entails is enacted literally: the ‘colourlessness’, in the sense of not being fixed into one colour, in this scene is also embodied in Joseph’s tragic death, where, “set[ting] light to the wick of himself”, all that remains of him is “mostly molten flesh, meat that could have been that of a white man, or an animal” (TI 140). In death, all differential categorisations are nullified, Joseph retreats from the fixed position the system has assigned him into absolute indeterminateness through a ‘becoming-animal’ and later returns as a quasi-spectre. Joseph is here a literal enactment of the disturbance of fantasy: as Mariana Schütt outlines with reference to Žižek, the suspension of the net of symbolic ideas is always related to the death drive (139), leading to the subject momentarily achieving a ‘pure desire’ which is not oriented towards a fantasmatic object, but “toward the lack in the symbolic register” (Wood 307).Earlier on, Joseph already embodies this ‘desire for that ‘other’ desire’ by collapsing the fantasy he has built up himself, thus indicating that the satisfaction of desire would result in the subject’s aphanisis: “What is more strange sometimes is when everything in order and you feeling contented, you will suddenly mess up everything yourself, as if you playing warden” (TI 75).

The entrance of the real then disturbs not only the mythical structuration of the text but, as de Lauretis explains, also potentially the primordial distinction on which all others depend, i.e. the distinction between the sexes (Alice 119). Joseph-as-real illustrates this, as his ‘interruption’ also unsettles the novel’s temporality and brings ‘the feminine’ to the present.

358 “When I was in borstal I was rumour. They look at me and see ape, trouble, fist. And all the time I nothing, I sleep and wake and eat like zombie. […] You can’t even see yourself, even if you stand in front of mirror, all you seeing is shape. But all the time they seeing you as animal, riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds” (TI 74).
After Joseph’s death, he ‘stalks’ the narrator in the hallowed halls of Oxford, his “cocoon” (II 141), which is associated with Joseph, who tries to spell ‘cocoon’ before (II 138–139). The narrative’s switch to Oxford also introduces an interesting temporal shift that underlines a reading of Joseph as a continuous interruption of authority and, concomitantly, a loss of male power. The scene is one of only three temporal shifts to the present, Joseph’s memory has also affected the temporal order of the novel as a whole. Lisa Ahrens has, in a different context, commented on the infrequent use of the present tense and its concomitant importance (219–221). Yet whereas she connects this shifting to the text’s conception of Oxford, it also proves insightful for the blurring of gendered identities and the interruption of the text’s inscription of a mythical subject. The scene in more detail reads as follows:

Joseph returns to haunt me, and I begin to glimpse some meaning to his outburst. […] As my mind stumbles over the difficult words in Sir Gawain, I see a little boy’s foot being trapped in the pits and cavities of hardened mud as he hurries after the sound of an old man’s stick; I see Joseph’s stick gouging letters in the mud. (II 139–140)

In a reverse-artistic journey, the narrator here is returned to his initiation to the ‘male order’ in Guyana, and the memory of Joseph disturbs the narrator’s supposed stability of his successful rite of passage and ‘becoming-man’ by illustrating how masculinity is constantly in formation, always in need of ritual performance and of a conscious dissociation from the feminine element and further threatened by ‘regression’: here, this is visible in the memory taking the narrator back to a state where the Oedipal stage was not yet mastered, evidenced by his stumbling in the dark and, unable to find his way, and finally in need of being hoisted on his grandfather’s shoulders (II 26). In a shift back to the narrator’s present, this fragility of masculine subjectivity is echoed by the focus on the narrator’s smearing his hands with oil, as a reminder of Joseph burning his own body and ‘melting’ all differential categories, and the reference to Janet and her shirt the narrator has smeared (II 140): 359 the shirt as a symbol of assimilation to white hegemonic masculinity and simultaneously exoticisation of the black and female body is in itself already ambivalent, the palimpsestic ‘writing over it’ with oil then symbolically wipes out attempts to fix racial and gendered identity.

It is then also telling that this temporal shift, which counters an Oedipal trajectory, engages most closely the narrator’s attempt to write, “in a fit of savagery, marking the page like stripes”, “ratll[ing] and shak[ing] my mind for expression” (II 141), and is thus figured as productive. Joseph as utopian element has effected this productivity, and the text thereby produced consequently – for readers – remains a ‘not-yet’, as we are, contrary to the poem

359 Janet gifts the narrator a white shirt for his departure to Oxford, a shirt “not for writing on” (II 172), which is associated with the domestication and brutalisation of the black – female – body in its resonating with the narrator’s feminisation through a reversal of the gaze: “She made me try it on […] She turned me round again and again, screwing up her eyes ad peering intently. I felt like one of Shaz’s whores, or a slave on an auction block” (II 171).
before, are not given a glimpse here. Afterwards, the chronology is – temporarily – restored, but the repeated disturbance of chronology emphasises the impossibility of retaining the textual ‘madness’ of Joseph. Joseph’s death is then not just reminiscent of the ‘death of the author’, but also entails his ‘coming back’ as spectre. Elisabeth Bronfen has outlined the diversification of meaning the ‘spectre’ introduces to a text: the return of a dead figure in form of a spectral doubling allows it to affect the textual world even after death, both as a temptation and as a warning (142). In this sense, Joseph-as-spectre signals both the caveats and ‘pleasures’ of the dissolution of identity categories.

Despite the narrator’s overt subscription to a fantasy of epigonism and becoming “definite” (TI 173), the text ends in a profoundly liminal stage, leaving both a yielding to the utopian desire embodied in Joseph or the culmination of the Bildungs narrative possible:

Three years, she said, but that amount of time is meaningless, I cannot conceive of it. The future is a space only in daydreams, as soon as I blink it shrinks to a dot the size of my pupils. I only know now, and what used to be. I watch the clouds being rinsed to their original colour and the darkness slowly unpeeling from the sky. I wait under the street lamp, wanting to be visible, but the light flames upon my head, flames upon my skin and I have to step back into the shade. Soon the black cab will come scuttling along the road like a beetle. Its bright eyes will pick me up like prey, and soon I’ll be gone, me and all my things. One last breath, then I’ll climb in and be gone. (TI 173)

It interrupts – and terminates – the author’s quest by prematurely surrendering to Thanatos, which here potentially transforms author into text. Sigmund’s discussion of the metaphor of the cocoon in the context of the écrivain désirant, which in The Intended semantically unites Joseph and the narrator, a connection that is here suggested through the flames that echo Joseph’s self-immolation, which in turn effected the blurring of differential categories and between human and animal, is insightful here: she describes the cocoon as a space of writerly desire which is neither public nor private but a space where the desired text is envisioned (200). Here, the desire to write manifests in the artist’s dreaming of becoming ‘another body’, and the emergence of the desired text hinges on the transformation of this imagined, utopian body into the text (200). The ending of The Intended suspends the narrator precisely in such an in-between state, suggesting at once the sustaining of writerly desire without the author, albeit uneasily, in envisioning the author subject’s aphanisis through a shifting of the gaze to the reader, but also implies a possible return to the symbolic. The temporality, which has accelerated from narrating the events mostly in past tense to a shift to the present and future here, as well as the ascending darkness firmly locates the narrator in a liminal stage, ‘trapping’ him in the middle stage of artistic formation. The author still sees (the clouds, the ascending darkness) but soon will only be seen, he transforms from agent to “prey”, from author to read subject, i.e. text.

This is strengthened through and intertwined with surrendering “the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject” (Alice 144) and a deconstruction of masculinity. While the
narrative attempts to sustain the mythical subject by positing a clearly identifiable ‘I’, it soon turns the narrator into the object of the gaze, in his imagining himself as being seen by the car’s “bright eyes” (*TI* 173) and in the resonance with becoming a photograph (‘wanting to be visible’, ‘the light flames upon my head’), suggesting he will be turned into an image. The reference to the car-as-beetle, which picks him up “like prey” (*TI* 173) contributes to the impression of a ‘reduction’ of masculinity through his imaginary identification with a very small animal. The ending thus suggests that it is the narrator who turns into a picture, or a text – in a metafictional reference to the *Künstlerroman* into a ‘portrait of the artist’ – which is here rendered as aporic. The temporal ambiguity of this passage further contributes to the dissolution of the mythical subject, as it emphasises the undermining of linearity and teleology.\(^{360}\)

As a meta-discursive reference and encapsulation of the novel’s overall poetological programme, that is, the subject’s misrecognition of authorial power, the infiltration by an awareness of its loss, and a reluctant ‘yielding’ to authorial death in favour of a ‘birth’ of the reader, the ending foregrounds the shift in conceptions of authorship and traces an arc within the paradigm of Caribbean literature and literary theory. It brings the novel’s mediation on two time frames full circle: an ‘older’ discourse of the novel’s setting, the 1970s, where demands centred on the representation of ‘the’ black subject and concomitantly entailed a reinstallation of the ‘mythical’ male subject, and its refraction through a poststructuralist rejection of the author. Both are negotiated anxiously here, as the passage is also indicative of the postcolonial writer’s mourning of a loss of authorial power through theoretical paradigm shifts, where “the author’s death denied authorship precisely to those who had recently been empowered to claim it” (Biriotti 6), a claim strengthened by the premature interruption of the narrator’s quest. Written at the brink of a new era in terms of political, societal, and cultural changes, characterised by both a spirit of optimism (Tew et al., “Recovering” 2) after the end of Thatcherism,\(^{361}\) the institutionalisation of a politics of multiculturalism, and a diversification of ‘Black British Literature’, it, however, takes a warning stance against this optimism. The imagined dissolution of certainties is rendered uneasily here and the subject-in-vanishing mourned through the narrator’s performance of a self-eulogy. In the anxious negotiation of a discursive shift in cultural politics that moved from fixed identities to a more differentiated conception of the ‘postcolonial subject’, abandons the ‘black subject’ as essential and male, and

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\(^{360}\) Lisa Ahrens points out that the shift to the present tense at the novel’s closure undermines the overall temporal orientation of the novel, which has suggested that the narrator writes his memories from a more distanced position where he has begun or even terminated his studies at Oxford.

\(^{361}\) As Phillip Tew, Leigh Wilson and Nick Hubble foreground in their introduction to *The 1990s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, “[t]he 1990s is often (mis)remembered as decade of relative peacefulness and optimism” (“Recovering” 2).
dismantles the category of ‘author’, Dabydeen breaks with the more promising, ironic, and even playful imaginations of the vanishing author subject of his predecessors.

7.5.5 Embarrassing Connections: The Ethics of Shaming the Reader

Dabydeen’s refraction of the *Künstlerroman* also appeals to the reader as regards meditations on the historicity of Caribbean or black British writing. Reader implication in Dabydeen’s novel has been discussed ambivalently so far. Lisa Ahrens has, in her analysis of heterotopic spaces in the novel, argued that the text, on the level of discourse, privileges and normalises a white, hegemonic reader position vis-à-vis which the narrator figures himself as inferior. She states that Dabydeen’s narrator attempts to create closeness with “an implied reader who represents everything he dreams of: privilege and belonging to the dominant social group” (212), and maintains that this is visible on the level of language, where the narrator resorts to Standard English, as well as through an expression of opinions which seem typical for this “white dominant-hegemonic” reader (213), which ultimately necessitates the reader to actively adopt a position of distance towards the narrator (217). While I am in agreement with the assertion that readers are urged to assume a position of critical distance to the narrator-cum-writer, I disagree with the assessment that the novel as a whole endorses a white, hegemonic reader position, as the emphasis on the narrator as anachronistic artistic subjectivity, as I have discussed it so far, illustrates, but rather argue that it is through the oscillation between desire and ‘shame’ that the text troubles a position of complacency within the dominant order and effects a traversal of readers’ fantasies. As such, I am more indebted to positions like McIntyre’s, who finds that the novel implicates the reader and critic “in the construction, as well as the deconstruction of the same kinds of power-knowledge formations that the text seeks liberation from” (151). Further, I take my cue from Elizabeth Jackson, who claims that in terms of gender, the novel causes an “uncomfortable reading, giving rise to a desire to gloss over its substance” (“Voyeurism” 427), which is best illustrated in the neglect in critical literature of the figures that destabilise the narrator’s hegemonic authorial aspirations.

To understand the workings and potential ethics of shame as affect, a brief look at how ‘shame’ relates us to the ‘other/Other’ and the gaze and potentially creates ‘bliss’ is first warranted. Sartre discusses shame as “a unitary apprehension with three dimensions: ‘I am ashamed of *myself* before the *Other*.’ If any one of these dimensions disappears, the shame disappears as well” (*Being* 289–290; original emphasis). Lacan, who emerges from Sartre, agrees with shame as connected to ‘being seen’, but relates this to the always present gaze of the Other (*Four* 84), rendering it closely intertwined with structures of desire. Shame is an

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362 Sartre gives the example of being caught while peeping through a keyhole (*Being* 260).
ontological structure – not an affect that emerges only when we do something which we then are ashamed for, such as breaking a rule or a taboo, but one that relates to the subject’s insertion into society, the symbolic order, and thus to who we are. Here, Sedgwick’s observation that reading, in fact, corresponds closely to what affect theorists identify as shame is intriguing: the dropping of one’s eyelids, head, and even upper body, and ceasing to look at another person while simultaneously averting that person’s gaze (Touching 144) that characterise both hint at the close connection of reading and being. In this sense, the narrator’s own constant reading is itself already a manifestation of ‘shame’, of trying to avert others eyes and, considering Sartre’s and Lacan’s ideas, readable as a feeling of having entered, in this case, another symbolic order and the order of – English – literature, where the gaze of others might reduce the subject to shame. This connection is especially manifest in The Intended, as reading is often posited as the narrator’s very attempt at an escape from the shame experienced in England – i.e. being the subject of the Other’s gaze. Becoming-writer, which for the narrator, more so than in the other novels, is connected to reading, is then always already foregrounded as emerging out of a shameful desire.

Most importantly for my analysis, shame, following Copjec’s comments on Lacan’s hontology, potentially unsettles readers’ sense of self, provoking “not an escape from the ontology per se, but an escape from ontology’s ‘pre-comprehension’ of the subject” and thus “the subject’s ethical relation towards being, his own and the other’s” (“May ‘68” 103). This puts us in the direction of questioning the ‘ethics of reading’ Dabydeen’s text enacts. Portrayals of shame are particularly affective here, not necessarily because they cause readers to experience shame as well, but because they can effect, as Jennifer Cooke argues, a “heightened sensitivity” in reading and an understanding of historical intricacies through observing ‘shame’ from a “respectful distance” (“Scenes” 50), which recalls Sommer’s idea of particularist books who prevent from overtaking ‘otherness’ through a sense of entitlement for a “conspiratorial intimacy” (ix). For an Anglo-Caribbean context, Cooke further argues, ‘shame’ is often present in a sexual context, due to the abuse of bodies under conditions of slavery (“Scenes” 39). While Cooke analyses women’s writing, the forming of ‘othered’ bodies in colonial discourse also applies to male bodies, and as such, ‘shame’ provides an apt concept to enquire into the novel’s ‘sexual undercurrent’. Instances of shame in the novel, I propose, fulfil a twofold function in readerly reorientation: they hold readers at a distance, while shame as a narrative structure also disturbs fantasies of teleology.

363 In fact, Lacan considers shame as the desired outcome of psychoanalytical treatment and of his own seminars, telling students, at the end of Seminar XVII that they come to the seminar “because I happen to make you ashamed, not too much, but just enough” (Other Side 192–193).
As regards the first point, in witnessing the narrator experiencing shame, which is always related to racial and sexual embarrassment, readers are discouraged to follow his perspective. Here, my descriptions above that have characterised the narrator’s subject position as an anachronistic one are key, as this disturbs readers’ imaginary identification with him because his position is incompatible with readers’ fantasy of a liberal multiculturalism. Accordingly, he functions as a disturbing element that ‘mirrors’ readers’ own implication in persisting racist structures. I have stated that the narrator has internalised the hierarchies of a postcolonial pigmentocracy and is, contrary to merely attempting to appeal to a white audience and reinforcing hegemonic structures, more productively read as a Fanonian split subject, whose desire to be ‘white’ is a result of lactification, i.e. the epidermalisation of inferiority (Fanon 80). Statements like “I long to be white” (TI 141) and the shame felt when confronted with the West Indian group discussed above represent more than a mere striving for assimilation but rather a symptom of the intricacies of subject formation under the differential factor of race; as, following Lacan, a “discordant statement, unknown in law, a statement pushed into the foreground by a traumatic event” which, here, refers to the fact that while the subject is unified by the law, the symbolic universe “is not the same for everyone” (Freud’s Papers 197–198).

Echoing the division of the ‘shamed’ subject as formulated by Sartre and Lacan – ‘I’ – ‘myself’ – ‘Other’ – and shame as related to the subject’s position in the symbolic, i.e. vis-à-vis the gaze of the Other, the narrator’s description of his friend Nasim being attacked by white youths illustrates how ‘shame’ is conditioned not by having done something, such as crossed a line, but by being seen by the Other:

He was a little, brown-skinned, beaten animal. His wounds were meant for all of us, he had suffered them for all of us, but he had no right to. It was Nasim’s impotence which was so maddening, the shamefulness of it. I knew immediately […] [we] could never be his friends again, because […] he reminded us of our own weakness, our own fear. […] I was embarrassed for all of us. (TI 15)

The shame the narrator feels uneasily resurfaces in violence, in “[a] strange desire to hurt him, to kick him” (TI 14). Both ‘shame’ and ‘violence’, in this scene, are indicative of a momentary eruption of the real, evident in the fact that both also end in silence, in the failure of language. Yet the move from the individual perception ‘He’ to the collective ‘us’ illustrates the racialised subject’s interpellation into this order and of the inevitability of these formations. As shame arises in instances where the narrator’s misrecognition as ‘universal’, white subject is disturbed, a position, we can assume, that characterises the novel’s imagined readership, readers are made aware that they occupy the position of the gaze of the Other which causes the subject’s shame: the ashamedness of the ‘I’ – congruent with the specular image of a universal Englishness – of ‘myself’ – i.e. of the actual racialised subject; in other words, that they cause the shame in the first place. The narrator’s ‘we’ already shows that shame is, indeed, depicted as a ‘collective
feeling’ uniting the immigrant population and the community of artists in Dabydeen’s text, and here, too, readers are implicated as part of the Other’s gaze. Next to the narrator’s wish to “escape from this dirt and shame called Balham” (TI 163), Joseph’s self-immolation also is rendered as “purifying himself of all the shame and desire by burning off his black skin” (TI 140), the formulation hinting at the fact that shame and desire, with Lacan, occupy the same plane. Nasim feels shame for failing his examinations (TI 13), and the public exposure to “Asian[s] […] dressed in a turban or sari” causes all the friends to “squirm with embarrassment, frozen in silence” (TI 15). These instances illustrate how shame is caused by the imagined gaze of the Other and related to the racialised subject’s interpellation into a white symbolic order, where it functions as a distancing mechanism to de-emphasise one’s ‘otherness’.

Next to its thematic dimension, shame functions as a narrative substructure and is here part of the ‘erotics of the text’ that troubles the narrative order and posits a heightened demand for response-ability on readers. Being itself intricately connected with the heterosexual narrative economy, it subverts the Oedipal narrative structure and interrupts both the artist’s journey and readers’ easy identification of past and present events and discourses. The precise moments when shame occurs in the novel most often relate to sexual behaviour or depictions which are rendered abject, either in terms of non-heteronormativity or of non-conformity to a hegemonic British masculinity that figures the ‘hypersexual’ Caribbean subject as ‘other’. Shame arises in the narrator’s present in a moment where he, after a drunken night of sex with Monica, feels sudden contempt for the books he studies and wonders whether he should abandon them for a life spent “in a haze of alcoholic sex” with Patel, note the homoerotic ambiguity here (TI 157). The narrator’s thoughts are interrupted by the sound of footsteps and a fear of being caught, echoing Sartre’s comments on shame when peeping through a keyhole (Being 260), i.e. the awareness of the being seen by the Other, of not conforming to the dominant order, which is particularly telling here, as this again implies that the desire to write is the desire of the Other, and its abandonment – in form of the narrator’s yielding his studies – through its association with shame potentially rendered as transgressive. The sense of being caught triggers a memory of Guyana. Here, he is reminded of him and his cousin frequent bathing and masturbating together and of the latter’s “penis fat and stretched and black as a donkey’s” (TI 157), resulting again in him feeling shame when they are caught by the narrator’s grandmother. This memory then triggers a memory of two donkeys mating (TI 157–158) and the donkey’s “monstrous black pole of flesh” (TI 157).

The reference ‘donkey’ here is crucial, as, similarly to Harris’s horse/hearse, it sets in motion a chain of associations and connects different memories which, all centred around the phallus and initiated by shame, take readers through the disavowed – phallic – history of Empire
that continues to structure the present and Caribbean aesthetics. As an “affect that sticks”, to use Sara Ahmed’s words, as “what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects” (Promise 230), and between narrator and reader, shame is narratively made visible in the metonymic shifting of images relating to the semantic field of ‘non-normative’ or ‘othered’ sexuality. The image of the donkey, then, connects the passage with Richilo, as emblem of a West Indian machismo and the phallicity of a peasant aesthetics, itself emerging in and interwoven with the colonial history of Guyana, as shown above, who is also figured on a donkey (TI 45; 46). Further, it associates the shame felt through ‘non-normative’ sexual behaviour with the stereotypical ‘African’ and ‘Oriental’ imagery at the Battersea Fun Fair, an amusement park where the narrator works: the Fair’s ‘World Cruise’, interpreted by Stein as the novel’s rewriting Heart of Darkness and “pok[ing] fun at the seriousness of Marlow’s metaphysical journey” (164), features an image of black men and women, one “with full breasts and gleaming thighs carried a pot on her head. Another sat on a donkey so oddly – her buttocks merged into its flank – that it seemed she was having some kind of bizarre sex with it” (TI 59). The men’s genitalia, in turn, had been “elongated or smudged, as if to erase them” (TI 59). These paintings, “re-arranged” through “Joseph’s artistry” later (TI 82) and also tied to shame, here through its absence, as the narrator is “relieved that there was no one to see me” (TI 59), expose the othering of the black subject through the ascription of an exaggerated, grotesque sexuality and likewise the fear of and desire for the black phallus: here, its status is crucially ambivalent – as either elongated, i.e. more powerful, or erased, and hence indicative of its functioning as an empty sign and mere mark of white jouissance (Wapeemukwa 87). All of these events or figures, as I have elaborated, are also to be read as poetologically significant in terms of their meaning for artistic subject formation, and the donkey as a symbol of an ‘aberrant’ form of sexuality connects these poetics. Yet more so, as associated with different forms of authorship ideals and desires within the literary field – with a phallic, crude peasant masculinity or ‘righting history’ – the donkey thus also figures as anamorphic, as a distorted sign of the phallus and concomitant notions of castration anxiety and reminds of the fact that the phallus cannot be possessed, just as the narrator – and ultimately author – is never in full control over memory and text, and the desires that form his literary desire.

Both instances of homoeroticism and hypermasculinity are then figured as moments where the phallus is conspicuous, i.e. textually foregrounded as a tool of power – either through an emphasis on the phallic discourse of colonialism or the phallic power presumed at the site of the racial ‘other’ – and inducing shame and desire alike. As Lacan states, the phallus “can play its role only when veiled […]. That is why the demon of […] shame springs forth at the very moment the phallus is unveiled in the ancient mysteries” (Écrits 581). This is not because
the phallus is itself a shameful object, but because it forfeits its status as privileged signifier once exposed. Shame in view of the phallus, then, reminds of the gaps in ideology, and the conceptual paralleling of an ‘othered’ sexuality and masculinity with ‘blindness’ in the novel attests to the fact that the phallus needs to be veiled for ideology to remain intact. As such, it is the foregrounding of the phallus as shameful object that takes readers to task in helping to ‘unmask’ its function. Through the metonymic chain of ‘shameful’ events that move back and forwards in time, the history of black Britain is visualised for readers and its galvanisation into a fantasy of continuous teleological progress towards a ‘better Britain’ hindered.

This last fact manifests again and culminates in the shame the narrator feels at the point of his imminent departure for Oxford. The temporality here, once more, is crucial. Before this statement, the narrator conjures up two further ‘shameful’ incidents (TI 163) that stand exemplary of his racial and sexual shame: a white doll he once found in his grandmother’s house and which stands in contrast to “how dark-sinned and ugly” he feels (TI 160) and the embarrassment he felt for his failure to sexually perform with Janet (TI 145–146). Right after, the narrative briefly switches to the present tense, where he states that “[a]ll I want is to escape from this dirt and shame called Balham” (TI 163). In connecting past, present, and imminent (narrated) future but disrupting its linear chronology, this affect serves to disinterpellate readers from the teleology and “closure system of the West” (Barthes, S/Z 7-8). The incongruencies in the novel’s rendering of sexual matters, seemingly conservative and thus firmly in line with the novel’s setting but not its time of writing, make for an inconvenient reading. Yet attesting to the narrator as ‘shamed subject’, the narrative function of the sexual subtext, and the connected affect of shame uncovers the novel’s ethical potential. In foregoing a false sense of intimacy but likewise affecting readers through the eruption of trauma into the narrative, this is in line with Dabydeen’s employment of the Künstlerroman mode to negotiate the history of Caribbean writing and authorship in Britain, which distances readers from notions of a fixed identity but attunes to the historicity of black Britain and the treacherous idea that, to cite Littler again, “we are just moving forward to a happier multicultural place” (97).

364 Exemplary here is the narrator’s memory of him and Peter “lying beside each other in the bushes behind my grandmother’s house, our pants loose around our ankles”, an image which he “immediately made fuzzy” (TI 131). Cf. also pages 85 or 125.
8 Conclusion and Perspectives: The Emergence of a Literary Mode

This study has set out to enquire into the conspicuous proliferation of artist figures in Caribbean-British literature and to explore the possibilities the Künstlerroman as intertext offers writers. It provided an insight into the socio-political, economic, cultural, and artistic discourses and the reflections upon these that find their expression in the artist theme in the Caribbean novel between 1954 and 1991 and highlighted the versatility of the Caribbean artist novel. I have demonstrated that not only is a turn to genre as a ‘space of possibles’ itself worthwhile, but also that the novels chosen for this study, while evidencing similarities, attest to the broad variety with which the legacy of this European tradition is taken up and its suitability to verbalise and critically engage questions of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. I argued that the Caribbean novel post-Windrush employs the Künstlerroman’s structural patterns, draws on literary-historical myths of the artist and creation, and thereby develops a unique mode that serves to negotiate questions and aporias of artistic production under the aspect of difference, of a position of ‘otherness’ in the literary field, to make sense of, criticise, and carve out subject positions in light of shifting discourses surrounding art, artists, and their perceived role in post-war Britain as well as the hopes and concerns invested in the formation of a Caribbean literary tradition and canon. As such, it is a highly productive mode, as the sheer number of artist novels mentioned in the introduction also illustrates.

In attesting to the novels’ specific engagement with the generic features and the literary history of the Künstlerroman, it became apparent that some novels envision a more rigorous deconstruction or rejection of myths and mythemes surrounding the artist, specifically as they pertain to masculinity, and refract its elements precisely to dismantle his sublimity and art’s transcendent claims. Others, by contrast, employ its patterns to reinstate or even deify the figure in an elevation of the Caribbean or postcolonial artist as visionary of a Blochian not-yet, as ‘new’ and most powerful agential voice in a changing socio-cultural sphere and de- or postcolonial world. As a first preliminary résumé, my analyses have elucidated that in this spectrum between radical demystification and apotheosis, Harris’s text emerges as the one that most emphatically remythologises the artist through refracting, but reinstalling creational myths, which is especially striking as his text is also the most experimental one. Selvon’s citing and depletion of the genre’s mythemes, on the other end, deny any belief in the author’s individual capacity and agency and, in demonstrating the artist as always already corrupted, renders claims for his functionalisation for societal purposes untenable. I wish to pinpoint and substantiate these tendencies by briefly highlighting the particular refractions of the genre’s mythemes as fantasies that distinguish the Anglo-Caribbean artist narrative, as chapter 5 has theorised, to illustrate the similarities and differences with which the Künstlerroman genre is
employed as well as the conclusions that can be drawn regarding notions of British- and ‘otherness’, masculinity, as well as the stance on the artist’s positionality in the literary field.

All novels draw on the mytheme of the artist’s dual nature, which should be overcome through the act of creation, but mobilise and reinstate it to different degrees and thereby cast differing glances at the artist’s positionality vis-à-vis autonomous creation and responsibility for ‘his’ community. Harris and Naipaul employ it as a conscious strategy to portray their respective central writer subject as torn between different ideals which he is ultimately able to synthesise, and thereby posit the author as emerging with a more profound vision. In Harris, the ‘split’, staged with the two artist figures N. and L—, serves to demarcate the desired universal and cross-cultural vision from realist modes of representation as they constitute the dominant regime of representation in the novel’s specific period through submitting these to an anti-phallogocentric refraction, which can be read as anticipating poststructuralist interventions. Naipaul’s text similarly believes in the artist as transcending contradictions, and his text enacts the artist’s split – between writer and man – as a mechanism to ultimately declaim its unification and thereby suggests artistic maturation and a completion of the Bildungs trajectory. Naipaul’s text is here ambivalently placed: the hysterical interrogations of forms of productivity visualise that he envisions the artist’s fashioning of a position of opposition to the dominant discourse as central object-cause of desire, but likewise emphasises the impossibility to fully satisfy it, and the mytheme of the artist’s dual nature here serves to circumvent a clear artistic position. As such, ‘flexibility’ is the subject position most foregrounded in the novel, which renders it close to hegemonic socio-political demands. The dominant artistic subjectivities that emerge in Lamming’s, Selvon’s, and Dabydeen’s texts are more fraught in this regard. In The Emigrants, the ‘split’ between life and art serves as a means to voice the anxieties surrounding the artist’s functionalisation under demands of representativeness founded on notions of ethnic difference and is most manifest on the narrative level, where the protagonist is ‘split’ between homodiegetic narrator and character in a heterodiegetic narration. The aspiring author is visible as a nexus of desires that dominate in the first decade after Windrush and here also indicates a discursive and socio-cultural ‘split’, predominantly centred around a still persistent, but increasingly disillusioned belief in the author as autonomous. Selvon’s protagonist Moses is arguably portrayed as ‘the’ split subject per se. Here, the manifestation of the Other’s desire via various – incommensurate – objets petit a and Moses’s shifting, opportunistic position in this regard, amalgamating discourses such as the homo economicus mytheme with Black Power or the detached artist with the ethnographer, exposes the artist as a mere vehicle of the Other’s desire, that is, as entirely heteronomous, and thereby denies the author as agent of change. Selvon’s novels thereby reject the functionalisation of art and, via Moses as split, even
schizophrenic subject, signals the dangers of perpetuating gendered and ethnic stereotypes and the preservation of ‘separate spheres of Britishness’ that inhere in art as social instrument. Dabydeen’s text cites the mytheme of the artist’s division between ‘life’ and ‘art’ in allocating artistic production to different characters, which embody different artistic discourses – rendered respectively at the site of ‘life’, embodied in Shaz and Patel, and ‘art’, of which the narrator is exemplary – and thereby illustrates the various desires that structure artistic subjectivity at the threshold of the new millennium. *The Intended* rejects the ideal of unification and, in exposing its narrator as ‘anachronistic subject’ who repudiates the incipient formation of a more confident black Britishness, yet whose ‘vanishing’ the text eulogises – to rephrase Sara Upstone, in recounting stories too inconvenient “to be revisioned for the benefit of contemporary resonance” (133) – seems to caution against contemporary discourses of a too uncritically celebrated ‘multicultural conviviality’ and progress as well as the commodification of ‘otherness’ that circumscribes artistic production and its functionalisation.

In line with the refraction of the myth of the artist’s dual nature, the analyses have also shown that these negotiations are centrally structured around factors of gender and sexuality and grounded in a textual erotics via which the desires and demands that arise within the literary field are made visible. Here, whether texts have tended to either de- or re-mythify the artist through the refraction of the *Künstlerroman* mythemes of male creation, literary begetting, and the artist as father has emerged as congruent with the degree to which they have embraced or rejected the intertwining of ‘art’ and ‘sex’. The texts that cling to the respective poles on a continuum between equating both and a complete rejection of the former’s implication in the latter have re-installed the artist as hero most emphatically. As such, while all novels engage the mytheme of the artist as begetter, either in affirmation or denial, and thereby express an awareness and partly anxiety of the artist’s continuing and contesting patrilineally structured literary field, it is again in Harris and Naipaul that we find the highest degree of salience of this mytheme. Both of their texts stage fantasies of self-begetting as productive via their narrators, as both ultimately fashion the very novel as product of their writer protagonists. Yet they do this with different strategies: where Harris envisions ‘becoming-other’, especially ‘woman’, through isotopies of birth and pregnancy as productive fantasy of self-begetting and ‘absorbs’ the feminine to envision the ‘unborn folk’, Naipaul’s text, together with its probing of different discourses of productivity, evokes the ‘feminine’ only as a means to contain its threat in the masculine-structured narrative. The other novels fall somewhat in between these poles, conceptually oscillating between the poles of ‘life’ and ‘art’, and relate more uneasily to the idea of the *logos spermatikos* as emblematic of the interconnection of artistic and sexual productivity. The texts that employ this mytheme less confidently than Harris and more overtly
than Naipaul express an agon of how to turn *gendered* privilege into *authorial* privilege under conditions of difference, that is, of fashioning a stable authorial ‘self’ on gendered certainties by reinscribing this trope. In resorting to it, they also more pronouncedly show an awareness of the Caribbean man’s interpellation as hypersexualised ‘other’, and it is crucial that the novels that most demonstrate a tendency to re-mythify the artist – *The Eye of the Scarecrow* and *The Enigma of Arrival* – are also those that least emphasise the artist as circumscribed by racial and ethnic ‘otherness’. In Lamming, this mytheme is more subdued and predominantly present in the text’s self-conscious engagement of the artist ‘begetting’ and becoming a ‘father’ of a new literary tradition and infusing the British canon. While the text here indicates an awareness of the danger of excluding or misrepresenting the gendered ‘other’, thereby anxiously evoking the Caribbean subject as ‘hypermasculine other’, it falls short of envisioning authorial power as delinked from the ‘phallus’, as the desired status of autonomy is here contrasted from heteronomy by associating the latter with the – precarious – situation of the female ‘other’. The idea of the *logos spermatikos* is as such engaged anxiously, but ultimately as inescapable fantasy for bringing forth the text of the ‘new’ nation and diaspora. *The Intended* is here similarly positioned ambivalently: on the one hand, fantasies of ‘sperm as form-creator’, to refer back to Eliot, and of being initiated into a male order are cited as potentially breaking writerly impasses, but the anachronisms such discourses constitute in the narrator’s – and the novel’s – present as well as the related failures to mystify the ‘native woman’ render them *a priori* fraught. As such, they are evoked as the writer subject’s imaginary misrecognitions that do not succeed in initiation as writer in the symbolic order. Selvon’s text shows the most pronounced anxiety of ‘becoming-father’ by drawing on but foreclosing mythemes of self-generation, emblematic in the text’s engagement of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, as well as by portraying Moses as ‘impure father’. Most crucially, the text rejects ideas of begetting through the enactment of an anxiety of influencing on the level of speech and through the challenge to the artist’s *logos* through the feminine.

Fantasies of Eros as inhibiting the destructive Thanatos, i.e. of sexual initiation and mastery as achieving artistic ‘wholeness’, constitute a further central thematic and structural pattern of the Caribbean artist narrative. With the exception of Naipaul’s text, all novels are profoundly ‘erotic’ and overtly draw on mythemes of sexual initiation and experience and related (Oedipal) journeys as prerequisites for the artist’s successful quest. Harris’s text most overtly intertwines artistic and sexual initiation. The appropriation, even confluence with the Amerindian muse and ‘the feminine’, rendered through tropes of sexual conquest, a libidinously mediated journey, and the attempts at ‘queering’ the heterosexual narrative structure figure the artist as Tiresian figure and quasi-omniscient seer and draw on and reinstate the archetype of
the artist as ‘special’ because of a unique fusion of masculine and feminine features. Through these negotiations, Harris envisions the author’s authority to lie in a conscious occupation of a position of alterity, in terms of gender and sexuality, and thereby also formally, as his experimentalist style runs counter to the preferred regime of realism. Lamming’s text also figures this mytheme overtly as a (phallically structured) artistic journey from the Caribbean to England on the *Golden Image* that mirrors its protagonist Collis’s quest for self-definition and intersperses it with erotic escapades between the English and West Indian characters. These narrative digressions mirror the sustaining Eros that halts the subject’s vanishing with the fulfilment of its desire but also its completion. As such, the text mobilises this mytheme mostly on the level of narrative and through spatial arrangements, where journeys into ‘manhood’ are often teased, but reversed by enacting flights from differentiation into metaphorical wombs. This indicates Lamming’s profound anxiety of installing a definite artistic identity, which the text envisions as inevitably circumscribed by gendered and ethnic essentialisms, and his writer-protagonist’s suspended position at the end of the narrative also indicates this. In Selvon’s text, such fantasies are always already presented as fantasies: the notion of the artistic journey in form of a *Bildungs* narrative is both manifest in and led ad absurdum in the structure that spans the trilogy as a whole and leads from teasing individuation in *Londoners* to the writer’s merging with the reproached author Selvon in the preface to *Moses Migrating* and a concomitant vanishing of the author subject in the text itself in an enactment of compliance with the Other’s desire to ‘abolish’ the problematic author. Selvon’s portrayal of the artistic journey, visible over the course of the three novels, already exposes the artist as only that which the Other desires, which is amplified in *Moses Ascending*. The concomitant quest to master the feminine is, likewise, pre-empted and the subject figured as ‘penetrated’ by his artistic rivals. As most liminal text, Dabydeen’s novel again evokes both the trope of the artist’s journey but forecloses it as teleological structure by having the narrator shift between past and present time frames and imaginatively return to moments that entailed male initiation in times of artistic crisis. Likewise, the text most overtly cites the muse trope in its clichéd form as nurturing ‘mother’ and potential ‘whore’, but illuminates fantasies of her mastery as only linguistic in nature, thereby exposing the phallo(go)centricity of the symbolic order. As in Selvon’s text, Dabydeen’s novel intertwines Eros with the intricacies of inter-racial and queer relations and fetishised notions of a racialised hypermasculinity. In Dabydeen’s text, the subject’s ultimate aphanisis, only insufficiently halted by the sexual undercurrent that structures the narrative, ultimately also attests to a persistent anxiety in the face of a diminishing of authorial and masculine authority that theoretical interventions in the subject and the author entail, but in dissolving the author into the text figures the Thanatic structure as a potential case of a new
textual beginning. As least overtly ‘erotic’ text, the incessant denial of desire in Naipaul’s *Enigma* and the overall ‘erotic inertia’, the absence of sexual experience, the evocation of the ‘feminine’ only as a means to contain its threat in the masculine-structured narrative, together with its probing of different discourses of (un)productivity, portrays the artist as above ‘baser needs’. Here, refraining from dissipating creative energy into life serves to fashion an oppositional stance to the heteronomous structure of the literary field. In this vein, it is telling that Naipaul’s narrator’s journey is most overtly foregrounded as Thanatic, taking him for once to a funeral at the novel’s end and highlighting his steadily corporeal decay, but also yielding the product, the very novel at hand, which ultimately reaffirms the male artist as objective, detached observer and legitimises his position outside of societal concerns.

Lastly, the mytheme of the artist as bearer of utopia and envisioning that which is ‘not yet’ constitutes a crucial theme in all novels and manifests specifically in negotiations of the artist’s gaze, the relationship of product and process, and, as Caribbean artist narratives often centre on the hindered artist, idea(l)s of failure. Here, negotiations reach from problematising the artist’s failure, presenting it as inevitable in the subject’s determination by the Other’s desire and circumscription by raced and gendered stereotypes, and a strategic positioning of the mytheme as a prerequisite for self-sublimation. Lamming’s text here falls into the first category and rather pre-empts utopian notions. In contrast to Harris’s, Naipaul’s, to some extent also Selvon’s and Dabydeen’s text, Lamming’s is the only one that withholds not just the product, but also the process of creation from readers, which emphasises the text’s portrayal of the artist as ‘reluctant pioneer’. Lamming mobilises blindness in narcissistic fashion as a possible counter-discourse to artistic demands, specifically those relating to responsibility, but refrains from re-mythologising his hindered artist as tragic-artist hero. Fantasies of a superior vision are constantly undermined by fragmenting the artist’s gaze, withdrawing characters from his gaze, or submitting him to the gaze of others, i.e. the narrative instance or of newer media technologies, thereby turning the artist’s potentially violent gaze around and withholding imaginary wholeness. In Lamming’s text, such ponderings relate not only to the question of how to fashion the ‘text’ of the new West Indian nation, but also to (inter-ethnic) class relations. Dabydeen’s text likewise casts a sceptical glance on the artist’s capacity to ameliorate ethnic relations and, almost forty years after Lamming, still questions the inclusiveness of Britishness. His text most overtly foregrounds the conditions that intervene in such desires, specifically in allowing a glimpse at the product and process through an inserted sketch of a poem. While the text culminates in yielding the author to the text, the dissolution of the ‘essential black subject’ is less envisioned as emancipatory but, in enacting a self-eulogy of the narrator, evidences a profound uncertainty as to the role the artist will have play in a changing British landscape,
especially after the end of Thatcherism. It stands thus counter to the optimism that characterised the 1990s and the ‘cheering fictions’ that dominated the preceding decades, but also uneasily engages the shift towards a diffusion of ‘the’ black experience. Selvon’s texts move from questioning to outright ridiculing the artist as bearer of utopia. The desired text, here, is mobilised as a fantasy of personal and economic advancement only, and while the texts even centre eponymously on the prophet, Moses is the tragic(comic) artist per se. Yet failure, in *Moses Ascending*, is not a mytheme that serves artistic self-sublimation, nor an aestheticisation of the artist’s suffering, but exposes the artist as always on the side of hegemony and constitutes a prerequisite for the text’s radical denial of the artist as referential and representative subject. Selvon’s ‘genius’ lies in the visualisation of the discursive and ideological foundations on which such beliefs rest and their inherent incongruencies; that is, he exposes the gaps in the cultural order itself. Naipaul’s text refracts the Romantic notion of the artist-seer and adapts him to contemporary demands. While the novel engages the idea of the artist as drawing authority from criticism of contemporary socio-political factors and constituting a strong voice of opposition, most manifest in the questioning of notions of productivity, artistic agency is envisioned in the subject’s flexibility to react to differing, seemingly incommensurate desires, which reinscribes hegemonic notions. Concomitantly, Naipaul’s text expresses the artist’s superior gaze in processes of re-vision and solipsistic self-interrogation and ultimately declares these processes as successful, speaking to the predominant ideology of self-realisation. Naipaul’s concept of the artist is thus neither one of the artist as bearer of utopia, nor of aestheticising failure, but rather pragmatic in its enactment – and exposure – of what subjectivities are possible under Thatcherism. Harris’s text, as indicated, most openly embraces the artist as prophet, and his superior ‘vision’ constitutes the novel’s central mytheme and is firmly within the bounds of utopia and of realising an as of yet unrealised speech, extending to both aspects of ethnicity, race, as well as gender and sexuality. While Harris also draws on the artist’s blindness and the need to relinquish the ‘male gaze’, *Scarecrow* more emphatically envisions this as inspiring and the artist’s failing, further emphasised through isotopies of crashing, as a prerequisite for the envisioning of the ‘unborn folk’. The dominant artistic subjectivity that emerges here is closely aligned with the narrative voice N., whose transformations in the novel ultimately remythologise the artist as agential in combining mythemes of the *poeta doctus* and the *poeta vates* myths. The former here hinges on the innumerable Amerindian and European intertextual and -mythical allusions and the almost private mythology it thereby reinstates, and the latter, as quasi-metaphysically inspired model of the artist able to unify differences and to mediate a ‘genuine truth’, is particularly visible in the elevation of N. to Idiot Nameless and writer of the manifesto, and ultimately the novel, and
L—’s reduction to a reader only, thereby staving off the artistic challenges to the fantasy of a ‘new’ transcultural universal vision.

In the refraction of artistic mythemes, the novels also illustrate the engagement with paradigm shifts in the context of a theory revolution after the 1960s. As I hope I have shown, Lamming’s and Harris’s works have anticipated some of the underlying premises, such as the poststructuralist interventions in the subject and the author as well as the ‘birth’ of the reader. While especially Lamming entertains the deconstruction of the author to voice concerns regarding the fixing and narrowing of (ethnically marked artistic) subject positions, the fragmentation of the subject and the play with dismantling the gaze in his novel also constitute a contribution to Caribbean literature that indicates the possibilities such (later) theoretical paradigms hold for Caribbean writers’ engagement with the agonistic relationship of ‘life’ versus ‘art’, where the former is often determined by demands for representativeness. Harris’s *Scarecrow* is similarly self-consciously engaged with fashioning the anti-(phal)logocentric text and not only takes its premises further, but also goes beyond a dismantling of the author and with ‘him’ colonial and Eurocentric epistemologies: contrary to Lamming, Harris’s experimentalism is not geared towards problematising the author as spokesman, but his destabilisation of the male, coherent authorial subject of humanism functions as a strategic prerequisite for the artist’s ultimate resurrection, resublimation, and remythologisation, by envisioning the (postcolonial) artist as centre that holds and instance that bridges divides.

It is interestingly the later artist novels by Naipaul and Dabydeen which are less enthusiastic in their embrace of these theoretical shifts, put simply, which are least openly ‘postmodern’. The narrator-writer’s attempts to revise, rewrite, and see again in Naipaul’s text still portray the author as central agent, albeit a ‘flexible’ one, and able to integrate threats to his idea of artistry into his subjectivity, with the challenge to his vision here particularly represented by Brenda, whereas the other novels often locate more agency at the site of their contenders than at that of the artist figure himself and thus more radically diffuse the portrayed artistic subjectivity. Dabydeen can be said to ultimately yield to poststructuralist concepts of authorship, but infers the aphanisis of the aspiring writer subject at the novel’s end as aporic rather than enabling, which speaks to the minority writer’s anxiety of being denied authorial agency just shortly after he had been able to claim it as well as the male subject’s uncertainty that arises from the destabilisation of identity categories. This is further illustrated by the fact that the text presents us with an adolescent narrator and aspiring writer and thus a liminal figure.

To different degrees, the texts – Selvon’s sequels to *Londoners* and Dabydeen’s in particular, but also already Lamming’s, speaking to the latter’s ‘pioneering function’ – also anticipate and mirror the ‘rise of the critic’ as co-creator of a text and authors’ increasing
incorporation of criticism into their work, which coincides with the ‘death of the author’ debate as “inseparable from a strong act of rewriting by [...] critics” (Burke 170) and results in a “new writerly category”, where the boundaries between author and critic are more than ever blurred (172). It also shows a growing awareness of the necessity to, as Brouillette states with regard to political appropriations of literary works, employ the “the trope of self-authorization” in demonstrating an awareness of paradigms of reception to “interact with various forms of politicized interpretation” (Postcolonial 74), which renders the acknowledgement of, even incorporation of the critic in the portrayed authorial subjectivities an act of reclaiming agency. Selvon’s trilogy here can be read as a ‘metadiscourse’: over the span of more than thirty years, it points out the spectrum of the ‘birth’, ‘death’, and ‘return’ of the author thematically and especially structurally, and the preface of his last novel also intricately interweaves these debates with newer tendencies of a spectacularisation of authorship and the author’s increasing awareness of the heteronomy of and necessity to curate his own ‘portrait’. More so, considering literary criticism from Lamming to Selvon, one cannot but realise a metonymic shift of signifiers in this regard. The implicit ‘master signifier’ of fashioning convenient postcolonial subjects here conditions diverging critical voices that are different in stance, but similar in aim: thus, both Lamming’s and Harris’ texts have been denounced as ‘too complicated’ due to their more modernist and experimental fashion, whereas Selvon’s work is deemed ‘too sexist’ or ‘too racist’, while using a mode more in tune with literary realism. Criticism, here, resorts to either the aesthetic dimension (Lamming, Harris), or content (Selvon) to criticise the novelist’s rejection of fashioning tangible identities.

The analyses have also demonstrated that the agon between ‘life’ and ‘art’, i.e. the Caribbean writer’s inevitable interpellation into demands of representativeness and the resulting difficulty to present ‘otherness’ within a hegemonic frame, is, concomitant with theoretical proclamations of a shift of authority from the author to the reader, often rerouted to the latter. As such, the novels make use of different reader addresses and strategies to imply readers in the meaning-making process and conceive of them as intricate part of the artist story. Naipaul’s and Dabydeen’s texts here engage the reader via specific affects in a narrative of desire – ennui and shame respectively – and envision an ethical reading in their preventing readers from an easy consumption of ‘otherness’. Lamming’s text likewise achieves this by foregrounding the body as site where readers’ desire for the ‘other’ is barred and a metaphorical incorporation of ‘otherness’ into ‘sameness’ hindered. They all thus envision readerly subjects that endure – shame, frustration, and the withholding of a definite portrayal of reality – and are thus in the vicinity of creating readerly jouissance. Selvon’s text is the most radical here and comes closest to Barthes’s notion of bliss and a temporary suspension of subjecthood. In teasing
pleasure, especially through structures of humour, and interrupting the same through accentuating readers’ implication in Moses’s racism and sexism, through a disavowed structure of racial and sexual stereotyping, and thereby stifling laughter, a relief of tension and the consolidation of a coherent ideological system, where readers could again assume a position of ‘moral righteousness’ through a clear demarcation of victim/perpetrator, is prevented and exposed as readers’ misconception. Harris’s text, formally making the greatest demands on readers and thus akin to the experimentalism both Barthes and Attridge see as predestined for an ethical reading, is surprisingly the least suited to reroute readers’ perception. Through the text’s private mythology and obscurity and, most crucially, the positioning of the author-figure as only anchor point in an otherwise ‘baseless’ narrative, it orients readers’ desire firmly towards the author figure and thus, arguably, performs the desire for the author so prevalent in postcolonial criticism.

To develop a method to conceive the artist figure, as most prominent indicator of the novels’ negotiation of the artist novel genre, as a nexus of differing discourses and desires and to conceptualise the space in which the staging of these desires and their intertwinement with cultural capital must be understood, I have drawn on psychoanalytic concepts of the subject that allowed me to transcend its conception as a coherent, stable individual and fathom the desire to create as a textual manifestation of the subject’s ontological lack. This framework has also enabled me to conceive masculinity, a further crucial aspect of my study, as tied to narrative structures and speech patterns and to take into account both its imaginary and symbolic dimensions. With regard to the former, masculinity here always only emerges in form of the subject’s misrecognition as masculine. As the symbolic dimension is the realm of language, this approach has further allowed me to look at how masculinity is (de)constructed context-specifically in speech and emerges only as a relation to the phallus, a fact that Lamming’s *Emigrants*, Harris’s *Scarecrow*, and Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* have exposed outrightly by making the underlying narrative and linguistic processes visible. As such, as, for instance, Joseph in Dabydeen’s *The Intended* has illustrated, the (subversive) ‘feminine’ is also not necessarily tied to the female body or gender, but constitutes a position that troubles the dominant hierarchical order. For artistic subject formation, as I sought to show, this implies that the ‘other’ is always already ‘self’, a fact that some novels, particularly Naipaul’s *Enigma*, disavow and others emphatically claim; Harris’s *Scarecrow* constitutes a prime example here.

Whether in affirmation or rejection, in attempting to dissolve gendered boundaries or in reinstalling them, the consistency with which creation is probed through gendered structures in the novels demonstrates that ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are without essence and that there is no ‘natural form’ of sexuality; in other words, that there exists no neutral signifier for gender
difference in the symbolic order (Horlacher 228), rendering ‘masculinity’ constantly subject to narcissistic introspection. The Künstlerroman, here, has emerged as apt for enquiring into how the appropriation of the phallus – signifying white, British masculinity – is staged via its mythemes, reflected on, and refracted in language. As I hope to have further demonstrated here, the symbolic dimension of culture is not just operating via sexed difference, but race is likewise structured around the binary of having/being the phallus.

While I have, in this thesis, opted for reading generic elements within a psychosemiotic framework, there are of course other pathways to address the artist theme in a Caribbean literary context. I briefly want to highlight one approach that, to me, seems especially worthwhile, albeit not immediately obvious, for addressing the fact that the artist novel in a Caribbean context often features hindered artists. While I have conceived of the salience of the artiste manqué as both connected to the interminability of desire and a strategic means of self-fashioning, this aspect lends itself to an approach from the perspective of Queer Theory. Jack Halberstam’s notion of a ‘queer art of failure’ here provides an apt framework to enquire into the prominent aspect of ‘failing’ without inscribing it into normative semantics. Halberstam identifies failure as a queer struggle in the context of non-compliance with a capitalist order, a “stalling [of] the business of the dominant”, and as “anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming” (88) and thus countering the future-orientation inherent to heteronormative and capitalist ideologies. These connections between unfinishedness, anti- or postcolonial struggles, and capitalist contexts of social productivity could deepen the understanding of the artist figure and the reason for its occurrence at particular points in time.

As is always the case, this study can only provide an incomplete picture of the emergence and development of the Künstlerroman in Caribbean-British writing, but in outlining its prevalence, versatility, and specifically its unique mode and function, it understands itself as an incentive to conduct more work in this area. As such, there are a few points my study necessarily had to omit but which would merit separate analysis. Needless to say, the expansion of research to a variety of other artist figures next to authors is a first crucial point here. Moreover, my concluding the study with Dabydeen’s 1991 novel is not to say that the artist theme in Anglo-Caribbean literature has vanished after this point. Novels like Shani Mootoo’s Cereus Blooms at Night (1996), Lawrence Scott’s Aelred’s Sin (1998), and, most recently, Paul Mendez’ Rainbow Milk (2020) as well as further second-generation Caribbean(-British) writers have paralleled artistic desires with sexual identification and also non-heteronormative sexual desires. Similar to Dabydeen’s The Intended, Rainbow Milk, for instance, parallels the protagonist’s – a descendant of the Windrush generation – coming-of-age and sexual identification with a ‘journey’ into art. The 2000s have also witnessed a differentiation of the
topic in terms of form: while Derek Walcott has taken up artistic formation as a theme in poetry in his epic poem *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000), which presents a doubling of becoming-artist in centring on the story of two painters, texts like Kei Miller’s *The Last Warner Woman* (2012) have reworked the novel by casting the artist theme in a new textual form, a blend of postmodern and ‘reggae aesthetic’.

A further aspect is, of course, the analysis of how ‘female artist novels’ engage these same mythemes and what conclusions regarding their perceived positionality within the literary field can be drawn from these. I have restricted my enquiries into masculinity on novels that are written by male authors and feature male writer protagonists, but novels like Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* (1990) or the aforementioned novels by Shani Mootoo and Kei Miller, for instance, which centre on female protagonists, would offer apt case studies for enquiring into these questions. Further, I hope to have provided an incentive to also extend this research beyond the specific British literary field and to enquire into artistic position-taking in a transnational framework. As some authors, particularly from the first generation of Caribbean authors in Britain, have later in their career again emigrated – Selvon, for instance, to Canada – and conditions of marketing and consuming Caribbean fiction have of course increasingly taken place on a global scale, a situated analysis in yet a different literary field would merit closer attention.

The prevalence of the artist novel in Anglo-Caribbean literature from *Windrush* until the present highlights the importance of a book-length study on this subject as well as the research that still needs to be conducted in this area. While some of the writers herein discussed have rejected the idea of becoming a ‘literary father’ in their fiction, their reformulation of the genre has nevertheless laid the foundation and provided a structure for how to engage and discuss artistry and literary authority in an Anglo-Caribbean tradition. As such, more work is warranted to attest particularly to the poetological and aesthetic intricacies of Caribbean fiction and to the variety and singularity of its ‘portraits of the artist’.
9 Bibliography

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Appendix: Zusammenfassung der Arbeit auf Deutsch


Konkret argumentiert die Arbeit, dass der anglo-karibische Roman die europäische Tradition und generischen Rahmenbedingungen des Künstlerromans sowie dessen Strukturen und Mythen inszeniert und reformuliert, darüber Fragen nach künstlerischer Subjektivität und literarischer Autorität im Lichte von Differenz verhandelt und so auch die diskursive Interpellation karibischer Künstler und deren Werke sichtbar macht. Darüber werden die

365 Da meine Arbeit sich mit den Werken männlicher Autoren sowie männlichen Künstlerprotagonisten auseinandersetzt, ist die männliche Form hier und im Folgenden bewusst gewählt.
Ideologien, die künstlerischer Produktion jeweils unterliegen, die sich verändernden Rahmenbedingungen im literarischen Feld sowie die Funktionalisierung von Literatur illuminiert. Die Künstlerfigur als Nexus von Autorschafts-, Männlichkeits- und Ethnizitätsdiskursen dient dabei dazu, Strategien der Selbstpositionierung und -autorisierung im diasporischen Kontext zu erproben, sich mit den Epistemologien dieser europäischen Literaturtradition auseinanderzusetzen und die Mythen, die Künstlerschaft und Autorität zugrunde liegen, zu exponieren, worüber sie auch Rückschlüsse auf die Rolle, die dem Autor und Kunst im de- und postkolonialen Zeitalter zugeschrieben wird, zulässt. Die möglichen Subjektpositionen im Spannungsfeld zwischen ästhetischen und sozio-kulturellen Voraussetzungen und Erwartungen, welche durch die ‚Bürde der Repräsentation‘ für den als ethnisch ‚anders‘ markierten Autor verkompliziert werden, werden dabei thematisch und narrativ oft über geschlechtliche Tropen und Strukturen verhandelt, welche als Strategien der Selbstpositionierung in einer Literaturtradition, die auf Ideen und Ideologien von Patrilinealität beruht, und einem paternalistisch strukturierten literarischen Feld gelesen werden können.


Die Arbeit stützt ihre Untersuchungen dabei auf Konzepte und Theorien der Psychoanalyse, auf poststrukturalistische Theorien von Autorschaft und das literatursoziologische Konzept des literarischen Feldes als symbolische Ordnung. Psychosemiotische Theorien erlauben hier einen Blick auf die psychischen und sprachlich-kulturellen Mechanismen, welche die Beziehung des Künstlersubjekts zu gesellschaftlichen Strukturen regulieren. Mit einem poststrukturalistischen Subjektbegriff sowie Konzepten wie

Konkret zeigt sich die Spaltung in *The Emigrants* auf der ErzählEbene, wo Collis, die Autorfigur, zwischen homodiegetischem Erzähler und Charakter in einer heterodiegetischen Erzählung ‚gespalten‘ ist. Der Text entzieht sich durchweg emanzipatorischen Forderungen und antizipiert den künstlerischen Agon, der durch eine ‚political blackness‘ entsteht und erst in den kommenden Jahrzehnten Beachtung findet.


des Subjekts wiederholt als imaginär exponiert wird. Vor allem dieser Aspekt erstreckt sich auch auf die Leser*innenschaft: Hier findet das Begehren der Lesenden oftmals am Körper ‚Einhalt‘, wodurch metaphorisch die Inkorporation des ‚Anderen‘ und dessen Assimilation verhindert wird. Durch die Frustration eindeutiger Subjektzuordnungen, der Verschleierung des Blicks auf die ‚Anderen‘ und deren Fragmentierung werden dem lesenden Subjekt selbst die problematischen Aspekte von Essenzialismen vor Augen geführt und ethische Reflexion angeregt.


Dies erstreckt sich auch auf die im Roman exzessiv inszenierten und hyperbolisierten geschlechtlichen Mythen der Künstlerwerdung und künstlerischer Schöpfung, wie die ödipal-strukturierte Queste, die Anklänge an mythische und literarische Questen wie El Dorado, als konquistadorisches, revisionistisches Leitmotiv in karibischer Literatur (Edwards, „Foundational“ 11), oder H. Rider Haggards *King Solomon’s Mines* aufweist und so Mythen von britischer Männlichkeit impliziert, die auf der Abgrenzung vom ‚wilden Anderen‘ gründen. Im Roman thematisch und narrativ erprobte Fantasien von Patrizid und der Vereinigung mit der Mutter werden als Versuche, den Phallogozentrismus einer patrilinear strukturierten

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366 Dieser Begriff wird in Anlehnung an Linda Hutcheon verwendet und ist nicht als pejorativ, sondern als textueller Modus der Selbstbeobachtung zu verstehen, welcher sich bei Hutcheon auf eine ironisch-allegorische Lesart des Narziss-Mythos gründet (Hutcheon 1).

Obwohl Harris’ Text formal den höchsten Grad an Komplexität und Experimentalismus aufweist und somit, nach Roland Barthes, prädestiniert für die Erzeugung von Wollust auf Leser*innenseite und die Erschütterung starrer Subjektpositionen scheint, erzeugen Passagen der Wiederholung und das Zurückgeworfen-werden der Leser*innen auf bereits Gelesenes weniger die Hinterfragung bestehender Ideologien und Neuorientierung des eigenen Wissens als dass sie das Begehren der Lesenden immer wieder hin zum Autor orientieren und ihn als einzig sinngebendes Element in einem obskuren Narrativ re- etablieren. Dadurch wird auch das Begehren nach dem Autor, wie es vor allem die postkoloniale Literaturkritik und ihren oftmals biographischen Zugang zu Fiktion kennzeichnet, parallelisiert, was so zu seiner Re-Mythologisierung und teilweise Affirmierung hegemonialer Strukturen beiträgt.


Durch die konstante Entleerung der zitierten Autorschaftsmythen werden auch Fragen von Männlichkeit für die Herausbildung einer karibischen Literaturtradition und eines Kanons

V.S. Naipauls Roman The Enigma of Arrival, welcher in der Forschung zumeist als nostalgische Verklärung vergangenen imperialen Ruhms und einer archaischen Form von 'Englishness' diskutiert und durchaus auch kritisiert wird, illustriert die spannungsvolle Situierung des Autors in einem kulturpolitischen Diskurs, der noch stark die Homogenität des Signifikanten 'black' für anglophone Literatur zentral setzt und die Artikulation und Sichtbarmachung diasporischer Identitäten bedingt und 'abweichende' Darstellungen sanktioniert. Hier bietet gerade der Blick auf die als krisenbehaftet dargestellte Autorfigur neue Einblicke, denn die imaginäre Identifikation mit Mythen, die Wachstum und Verfall gleichermaßen implizieren und konkret am Bild des Gärtners und des ‚verblühten' Dandys festgemacht sind, können als Befragung von zeitgenössischen Produktivitätsideologien – ökonomisch und künstlerisch – und als Erprobung der Annäherung an, mit Bloch, das utopische 'Noch-nicht-Gewordene' verstanden werden. Dabei wird über das im Roman dominante Mythen des gespaltenen Künstlers, das wiederholt als Trennung des ‚Manns‘ vom ‚Autor‘ auftritt und so die Basis für die inszenierte auktoriale Selbstbefragung bildet, das zentrale Objekt klein-a deutlich: Vor dem Hintergrund gesellschaftlicher und kultureller
Restrukturierungs- und Ökonomisierungsprozesse unter Thatcher und der zunehmenden Kommodifizierung und Instrumentalisierung von Marginalität, so die Hauptthese in diesem Kapitel, wird die künstlerische Unvollendetheit, die narrativ durch Prozesse der Wiederholung und Revision sichtbar wird, als auktoriale Strategie deutlich, mit welcher das Subjekt auf die Begehren im literarischen Feld reagieren kann, welche sich in den 1980er Jahren vor allem auf die Herausbildung einer kritischen künstlerischen Gegenposition zum Thatcherismus erstrecken. In teilweiser Übereinstimmung mit zeitgenössischen Ideologien wird so Versatilität und Flexibilität als zentrale auktoriale Subjektposition hervorgehoben. Über den im Roman performten Diskurs des Hysterischen, gekennzeichnet durch exzessive Hinterfragen der symbolischen Ordnung und phallischer Macht, hier in Form der literarischen Tradition und hegemonialer englischer Männlichkeit, werden die inszenierten Autorschafts- und Männlichkeitsphantasmen kontinuierlich zitiert und als ungenügend verworfen und dadurch hinterfragt, dies auch durch die Nähe von Hysterie zu Femininität.

und Kritiker zeitgenössischer Krisen und Identitätskonflikte – als legitimen ‚Erben‘ der englischen Literaturtradition ausweist.


etablierte poststrukturalistische Diskurse von Autorschaft, die die Auflösung des Autorsubjekts postulieren, kritisch.

